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HISTORY OF SPORTS IN WIELICZKA BETWEEN 1892 AND 2015

Abstract

Past years have been marked by a dynamic development of sports infrastructure in the area of the city and municipality of Wieliczka. Currently, two excellently equipped sports facilities operate in Wieliczka: “Solne Miasto” Educational and Recreational Centre, commissioned in 2011 and the Małopolska Athletics Arena, located on the so-called “Psia Górka” (a mining pit from which sand was transported to fill voids in the Wieliczka Salt Mine); in the inter-war period, the venue was used as a place for shooting competitions and in the 1970s as an off-road motorcycle course. Both facilities allow for organising competitions in various sports disciplines. The city’s sports offer is supplemented by two “Orlik” sports complexes (football pitches where it is possible to play football, handball, volleyball and basketball, with gym equipment and back-up facilities in the form of a sanitary building and cloakroom), located in Mickiewicz Park and in the Krzyszkowice Housing Estate. It is also necessary to mention sports facilities of other Wieliczka sports clubs and school football pitches and gyms, where various sports and recreational activities can be conducted.

It is very interesting to compare the present-day picture with the beginnings of sports life which started to develop in Wieliczka in the 2nd half of the 19th century. Antoni Rink, the teacher of Wieliczka Departmental School, promoted the necessity of keeping proper physical condition among his pupils between 1886 and 1887 in “Przewodnik Gimnastyczny Sokół.” Later, in 1892, the Polish Gymnastic Association “Sokół” established its unit in the city and for several decades to come it was the most important sports institution in Wieliczka. In the inter-war period, two effectively operating sports club joined “Sokół”, i.e. the Cyclists and Motorists Club in Wieliczka (1924), promoting cycling and motorcycling, and “Wieliczanka” Railway Sports Club (1927), which promoted broadly understood sports activity (the leading discipline in the club was football). Young people from Wieliczka’s schools and university students who were members of the Academic Youth Circle were also active in the area of sports. In the 1920s, “Ari” Jewish Sports Association was also

established, which brought together Jewish youth in Wieliczka. Among several sports disciplines practiced in the Wieliczka sports clubs, football was the most popular; meetings of “Sokół” Sports Club and “Wieliczanka” football teams were the most important events of sports and social character in the city. In 1931, thanks to the efforts of Wieliczka authorities and members of all sports organisations, a municipal stadium was commissioned and its management was entrusted to “Wieliczanka.”

The activity of Wieliczka’s residents in the area of sports was halted by the outbreak of WWII. Operation of all associations and social organisations, including sports clubs, was banned. It was only after the end of military activities that the sports life in the city started to flourish once again. “Wieliczanka” and “Sokół” resumed their operation almost immediately after the war. The former was less lucky, as the communist authorities declined its official registration and liquidated it soon afterwards. In 1947, another important Wieliczka sports club was established by the Salt Mine: “Górnik” Wieliczka (“Miner”) Sports Club. In 1970, the activity of “Wieliczanka” was suspended (until the end of the 1980s), which resulted in the fact that “Górnik” came to be the leading club in the city for several years. The competitors practicing in individual club sections were successful in local, domestic and international competitions. The most outstanding footballer who played for “Górnik” and earlier also for “Wieliczanka” was Adam Musiał, later a player of Cracow’s “Wisła”, as well as other foreign clubs, representative of the country and silver medal winner during the World Cup in 1974. In the 20th and the 21st century, tennis players were also successful, along with the team of women’s basketball players and boxers from the boxing section. Artur Szpilka has been the most famous boxer in the recent years.

In the 1980s, there was a significant growth of sport activities among children and youth attending Wieliczka schools. A special role was played by the Inter-School Sports Centre established in Wieliczka in 1980 (MOS Wieliczka) and the Inter-School Sports Club operating next to it (MKS MOS Wieliczka). Facilities conducting sports classes for children and youth are equally important: UKS Regis Wieliczka, “Gimnazjon” Pupils’ Sports Club at Primary School with Integration Divisions No. 4 in Wieliczka or the Deacon’s Sports Club “Kinga.”

Combat sports have enjoyed great popularity in Wieliczka for a number of years; it is possible to practice them in several specialist clubs and schools operating in the city. In 1993, Choy Lee Fut started to operate in the city (since 2000 under the name “Kung Fu Lung” Combat Sports School) managed by Tomasz Chabowski, multiple champion of Poland and Europe, champion of the world and coach of the Polish Wushu team (2010 – 2013). In the 1990s, Jarosław Hebda started to teach karate in Wieliczka in Oyama Karate; at the present moment, he is the manager of OYAMA Wieliczka Sports Club. Since 2009, second karate centre has been operating in the city – Kiokushinkai Wieliczka Karate Club, established and managed by Robert Kopciowski.

Wieliczka is also the hotbed for chess talents. Outstanding post-war chess-players came from Wieliczka: Bogdan Śliwa (1922-2003) and Anna Jurczyńska (1926-2009). A worthy continuator of Wieliczka chess playing is MOS Wieliczka – its pupils were very successful in the country and abroad. Junior Grand Master Jan Krzysztof Duda, multiple champion of the world, Europe and Poland in chess, has greatest accomplishments in this noble discipline of sports.

After 1945, cycling and motorcycling traditions were also revived. In the 1950s, a cycling section operated in “Górnik.” Participants of various competitions raced along the streets of the city, e.g. amateur cycling rallies “Rowerem po wiosnę” and “Rowerem po złoty liść,” “Kolarska majówka” or the prestigious professional Tour de Pologne race. The most accomplished road cyclist from Wieliczka is Tomasz Marczyński, winner of many domestic and international trophies and a member of elite professional European clubs. Motorcycle and car races are also popular. In 1975, upon the initiative of the Wieliczka teacher, Edward Koziół, an off-road motorcycle race was organised under the name “Father and Son.” Best motorcycle riders and their offspring raced on “Psia Górka.” In the recent years, motorcycle riding in the area has been promoted by Tomasz Hajduk, the Champion of Poland (Seniors) between 2005 and 2013 in Motorcycle Trials and Piotr Serek, an award-winning sportsman in classic motorcycle racing. For a number of years, Wieliczka roads have been used as an arena for car races. In 1990s, an amateur rally event known as “Kręciołki Wielickie” (the drivers were competing for the Marian Bublewicz Trophy) was organised; since 2007, Automobilklub Krakowski, Wieliczka city and municipality, Wieliczka powiat and Association of Car Sports Lovers in Wieliczka have been organising the “Janusz Kulig and Marian Bublewicz Memorial Rally” which attracts throngs of fans from all over Poland. One of the best race drivers from Wieliczka is Mateusz Lisowski, a champion in domestic and foreign competitions, e.g. Škoda Octavia Cup (2009), Scirocco R-Cup (2011), Volkswagen Castrol Cup (2013). In car races, a team made of Rafał and Grzegorz Ślęczka represents the city and the municipality of Wieliczka and Solne Miasto Sp. z o.o.; the duo has won the first place in Class 9 in the Polish Rally Championship in 2012.

For a number of years, running has also enjoyed significant popularity in Wieliczka. Traditional amateur cross-country running took place in Mickiewicz Park. Since the 1980s, running in the city has been provided with a more organised form. On 20 October 1984, the 1st Mieczysław Cieśliński Athletic Memorial was organised, attended by over 400 participants – pupils from primary schools, middle schools and teachers. In 2000, the 1st “Solidarność” Wieliczka Race took place and, a year later, the “Race for St. Kinga’s Ring” was organised for the first time (the event is held annually during the city celebration days that take place in June each year). To celebrate the 85th anniversary of Polish independence, the 1st Wieliczka Independence Race was organised in the city (in 2015, its 13th edition was organised). In 2014, the 1st Half Marathon Wieliczka took place; its second edition a year later was prepared under a slightly different name: 4F Half Marathon Wieliczka.