

SIX DAYS IN POLAND
BY JOHANN W WESTERHOFF

On the invitation of Mr. Vladimir RECZEK, member of the International Olympic Committee and President of the Polish Olympic Committee, I left for Varsovie on Thursday morning, 20th June.

The purpose of my visit was to settle all the arrangements for the 68th Session of the International Olympic Committee which will be held in Varsovie in 1969.

Mr. WIECZOREK, a member of the Executive Council of the Polish Olympic Committee, who at the moment is working in Rome, was kind enough to come and meet me in Zurich so that he could accompany me on my tour of his country.

The aeroplane landed at midday in Varsovie and we went straight to the Hotel Europeiski which, in the 19th century, was the most elegant hotel in Varsovie. It was completely rebuilt in 1962, and although the interior has been fully modernized it still retains its old facade. We then went on to the Brazil v. Poland football match, an event which attracted enormous crowds, and from there to a reception given by Mr. RECZEK in the offices of the Supreme Committee of Physical Education and Travel, of which he is the President. This position, moreover, gives Mr. RECZEK the rank of Secretary of State for Poland.

As a result of this visit I was able to understand exactly how the Polish Olympic Committee functions. It consists of nine permanent commissions, all working in different directions. In this way detailed studies can be made into all the various fields of sport. The following commissions, each having its own responsibility, have been set up:

Medical Commission
Financial Commission
Commission for sport in schools
Commission for art and sport
Commission for equipment etc.

The Polish Olympic Committee does not receive a subsidy from the government. At first it obtained funds from pools, but the government has now taken these over for its own profit. It was therefore necessary to find other means of support, and these are now raised from pools conducted throughout the whole of Poland

on Olympic Day. Here is how it works:

Each year competitions (for all kinds of games and sports) are organized for children and students and which appeal to all those aged between 6 and 25. For several months heats are held between districts, villages, towns, etc. The winners of these heats in the local, municipal and regional rounds will come together for the finals in Varsovie on Olympic Day. All the heats are, of course, covered by television and this brings in enough money to support the Polish Olympic Committee.

Furthermore, offices for Olympic travel have been set up in many towns. These bring in an average of more than seven million zlotys (about 270,000 dollars) a year. Part of this money has been used to build special sports hotels which can be found all over the country.

Later the same day, the Secretary General of the Polish Olympic Committee, Mr. Leonard GRZESKOWIAK, took me to see the Palace, along the bank of the Vistule, where the Session of the International Olympic Committee will be held next year, and also to see the nearby hotel where the members of the IOC will be staying.

In the evening I attended a dinner given by the President of the Polish Olympic Committee and early on the Friday morning I went to look round the offices of the Polish Olympic Committee. These have recently been established in the Sports Centre of Varsovie, which is recognized as being a proper school for physical education. Every kind of sport is practised here, formation classes are arranged, and appropriate training and practice are organized. About a hundred people, all at different levels, take charge of the administration of the whole organization.

After a quick look round the actual town of Varsovie we left for Cracovie, the place called the "town-museum" as it is the only one in Poland which survived the war undamaged.

On Saturday, having visited the famous 600 year-old University, we proceeded to the official luncheon given by the Mayor of Cracovie in one of the well-known restaurants in the Old Market. This was followed by coffee taken in one of the Gothic cellars where one can still feel the atmosphere of 'the old days' in Poland.

One should get to know all aspects of the life of the Polish people, and for this reason we drove through Auschwitz and Birkenau.

On Saturday evening we drove up into the mountainous part of Poland, towards the famous Tatras which look down on Zakopane, the winter capital. Higher up than Zakopane, at 2,200 metres, is the training camp (now a common sight in all countries participating in the Mexico Games). Complete with a sports hotel, a small stadium and a lake for water sports, here in this pure air athletes can really reach an excellent standard.

Above all, however, Zakopane is the site of winter sports. Four ski-jumps have been built, taking the utmost advantage of the geographical attributes of the country: 90 and 70 metres for champions, 40 metres for beginners and 15 metres for children.

In the evening, during a dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. RECZEK in Zakopane, I was nominated 'mountaineer of honour' and was presented with a cane, typical of the region, which can be used at the same time as a walking-stick, an ice-pick or a kind of axe.

We were then entertained by some of the famous Polish dancers: the men with their coarse, baggy trousers and embroidered doublets, and the girls with their multi-coloured, swirling skirts, which emphasize the vivacity of their steps and which added to our appreciation of their incomparable skill.

At 7.0 on Monday morning we left the mountains for Silesia and Katowice, where the mines and ironworks give the region the dark and forbidding look of all industrial districts. There is, however, a huge public playground where all kinds of sport can be played and where an artificial lake and river have been built for the enjoyment of everybody.

One thing particularly struck me and that was that every person who wants to get into a boat must either show a swimming certificate or must wear a life-jacket. This applies in every country and even to fishermen. In this way one sees an increasing number of new swimmers and less and less life-jackets.

In the evening we returned to Varsovie to receive the Press and Television people, and on Tuesday we visited Peock and the big stud farm where there are 160 stallions.

Late in the afternoon we arrived in Zelazowa-Wola, the house where Frédéric CHOPIN was born. Here we attended a concert of mazurkas and the most ardent and fiery Polish girls.

Then came the farewell dinner which took place in an inn in the native village of the great musician.

In thanking Mr. RECZEK and the Polish Olympic Committee for all their kindness, I mentioned how much I was impressed by all the contrasting aspects of their country. I had believed that once behind the notorious iron curtain I would feel terribly incarcerated. Instead I found a free Olympic Committee and I must say how pleased I was to see such friendly co-operation between the Olympic Committee and the Council of Physical Education and Travel.

While appreciating the results of contemporary advancement in such modern towns as Varsovie, I also realized how much the Polish people still cling to their history and their past. I came into contact with young people who are, at the same time, both studious and sporting and this is the best example that one can give to the youth of the world.

Finally I should like to mention the competition which has been put into action by the Polish Olympic Committee for young people and which will go on throughout the whole Olympiad.

After the closing of the Tokyo Games heats were organized for young men and women interested in sport. Each year they have to advance one stage further. At the end of the first year they are given a badge on which are marked the five Olympic rings, but only one ring is properly incised, the others being only lightly traced. The second year, when the heats become more difficult, the winners can have two rings. Thus, in the year of the Olympic Games the winners are entitled to four rings. Out of these victors the Polish Olympic team is chosen, whose members will wear the emblem with the five rings.

This is how modern sport should be conducted. We offer our congratulations to the Polish Olympic Committee and its leaders for their ingenuity and efficiency in having such a clear understanding of the Olympic ideals and for maintaining them so well.

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