

# 70 YEARS OF POLISH SPORT

MEMORIES FROM  
THE SPORTS PAPER  
*PRZEGLAD SPORTOWY*



Poland's "Przeгляд Sportowy" (The Sporting Review) celebrated its 70th birthday last year. The paper was launched on May 21 1921 in the southern Polish city of Krakow and boasts several illustrious editors, one of whom, Kazimierz Wierzyński, was a famous avant-garde poet during the 1930s and also a winner of an Olympic gold medal himself for a book of Olympic laureates. A special anniversary magazine reviewed the historic moments in seven decades of Polish sport. Below we print fragments :

## THE VICTORIOUS BERET

By Maciej Petruczenko

**I**t was July 31 1928. A historic day for Polish sport. Discus thrower Halina Konopacka wins the first ever Olympic gold medal for her country and takes the title "Queen of Sport" at the same time, impressing the world not only with her athletic abilities but clearly also with her unusually good looks.

She had launched her training programme for Amsterdam the previous winter- by going skiing in Krynice and spending her evenings in the dance-hall. Hair was coming out by the handful in the Polish Athletics Association : the winner of "Przegląd Sportowy's" Athlete of the Year Award for 1927 had broken a ban on skiing. Lucky it was only the ban - despite fears, she managed to avoid breaking a leg. By summer she was in fine form and travelled with the Olympic team to Amsterdam. In the Marco Polo pension she experienced the concept of "hi-tech" courtesy of the Dutch firm Phillips, who had installed special radio sets so that the athletes could listen to what was happening back home in Warsaw.

In training Konopacka threw a distance of forty metres, breaking her own world record of 39.18 metres.

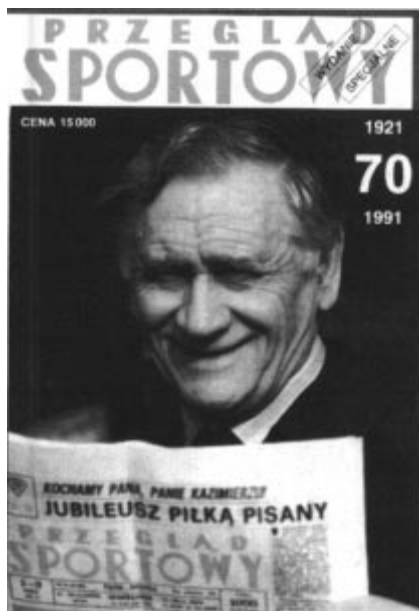
On the day, however, she was terribly tense: eyewitnesses recall how she sent a plate of scrambled eggs flying to the floor because there was too much salt in them. The nervous energy which caused the beautiful Halina to lose her cool found its proper outlet in the stadium. She found herself in the lead right from the start, after setting a new world record of 39.62 metres (a distance which remained unbeaten for four years until it was broken by Jadwiga Wajsowna in Pabianice in 1932). Our champion outstripped as many as twenty other rivals in the competition, including another Polish woman - Genoweta Kobielska (later Cejzikowa). She gained her greatest satisfaction from the defeat of the

*Halina Konopacka*



## NATIONAL COMMITTEES

*The cover page of Przegląd Sportowy's special magazine for its 70th anniversary in 1991.*



American Lillian Copeland (second place with a throw of 37.08 metres) and the famous German Emilie Reuter, who had deprived her of an earlier world record title with a throw which was later to become the subject of an international controversy.

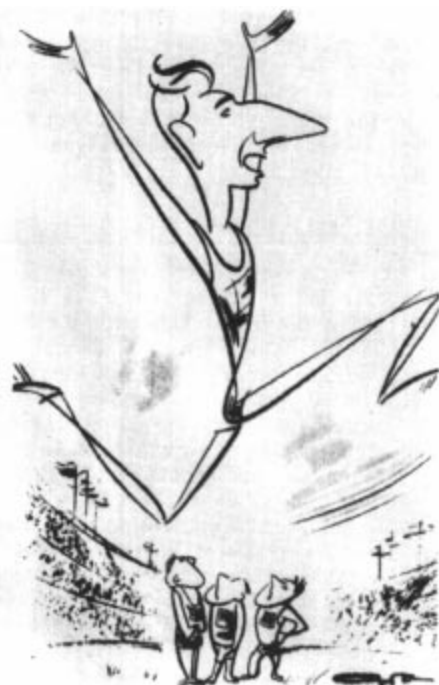
The winning of the gold medal resulted in a lot of excellent publicity for the country at large. Along with photographs and portraits of our sporting queen, the Dutch media published pictures of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski and president Ignacy Moscicki.

In the beret from which she would not be separated, the tall (180.5 cms), slim girl listened with evident emotion to the Dabrowski Mazurka, which the Dutch orchestra were playing for the first time. A nice, extra bonus for the attractive and elegant Polish athlete was being awarded the unofficial title of Miss Olympia ex aequo along with the Candian High Diving Team.

Without much exaggeration, one can say that the world record holder's triumph in Amsterdam was one of the clearest signals yet that, after the years of partition, Poland had returned as an important member of the international sporting community. As the Olympic team returned from Amsterdam, she was literally hi-jacked off the train as it crossed the border by a certain aristocrat, and invited to dinner. His motive turned out to be pure: simply to pay homage to the champion - Halina Konopacka.

## POLISH KANGEROO'S "LEAP TO FAME"

*By Petro*



In the history of track and field athletics there are ten world records which experts rank as the most important: important because they established new landmarks and, as the cliché goes, pushed back the barriers of the humanly possible. One of these ten records (ranked number seven) is Jozef Szmidt's 17.03 metres triple jump record, set in 1960. His achievement is on a par with Bob Beamon's famous "quantum leap" in the long jump (Mexico 1968) and the astonishing 104.80 metres thrown by East German athlete Uwe John in the javelin in 1984.

Szmidt made the jump on August 5 1960 at 18.12 in the Lesny Stadium in the Polish city of Olsztyn. The record was set on his first attempt, with a light, favourable wind of one metre a second behind him. The day was a fine one, though not an easy one for the Polish championships as a

whole since an overnight downpour had softened both the track and field, making it difficult to break records. It was being said even before the championships that Szmids had a good chance of bettering the current world record held by the Soviet Union's Oleg Fiedosieiev. Szmids himself was hoping for a result of between 16.80 - 16.85m. For Olsztyn he tried out a new American landing technique which involved sharply twisting the torso at the moment the legs hit the sand. By this means the athlete avoided falling backwards. The technique allowed the athlete to land at a very sharp angle, with his legs stretched out in front of him. The spectators, of whom there were about ten thousand that day, were convinced that Szmids had botched the jump when he landed and that had he not twisted to one side he would have achieved a better result. It was, however, a deliberate move introduced by his excellent coach Tadeusz Starzynski. Its effectiveness can be gauged by comparing the distances covered by the individual 'jumps': 5.99 metres-5.02 metres-6.02 metres.

Before his performance in Olsztyn the brilliant triple-jumper had competed in several fiercely contested 100 metre sprints, on several occasions achieving a time of 10.4 seconds, which was pretty remarkable by the standards of the time. The idea, developed by Starzynski for the "Polish School" of triple jump, was to exploit to the maximum the speed of the athlete in the run-up. In contrast to the technique employed by the "Soviet School", the Polish athletes, and above all Szmids, tried to keep their "hop, step and jump" as low off the ground as possible, so as not to lose momentum by rising unnecessarily high in the air. The same principle was later adopted by Tom Tellez, coach to the best triple jumper of the last decade, the brilliant Carl Lewis. The championships in Olsztyn took place under strict adherence to the normal rules and regulations. Foul jumps were signalled by electric bell. After setting his new record, Szmids was immediately greeted by an explosion of excitement and mobbed by delighted teammates, coaches and journalists. A crowd of spectators surged onto the track to congratulate him, including a previous record holder

for the triple-jump, Stanislaw Sosnicki. For a long time the judges were unable to re-start the competition on account of the happy confusion. The world record holder later completed a second jump of 16.20 metres, two jumps which were deemed foul, and simply resigned from the last two. His record remained unbeaten until the Olympic Games in Mexico, in other words eight years later, when it was broken by an Italian, Guiseppe Gentile (17.10 metres). There was a flurry of further records in the same Games immediately afterwards, before the title went to Viktor Sanieiev with a jump of 17.39 metres from the white treading board.

*Josef Szmids in mid jump.*

