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Odra Opole Jubilees in the “Trybuna Opolska” and “Nowa Trybuna Opolska” Daily Newspapers

Abstract

The 70th anniversary of forming Odra Opole has been a stimulus for the author to try to describe the relations between one of the most important sports clubs in Opole Silesia and the biggest newspaper in the region. It is worth emphasising that the relations are of a particular value, the beginning of which may be found in the 1950s.

Due to the extent of the subject, the author's topic was narrowed to Odra Opole jubilees, which the sports office of “Trybuna Opolska” and later “Nowa Trybuna Opolska” (“NTO”) celebrated differently, e.g. by dedicating separate columns, magazines, or ignoring widely.

The most important topic for the sports journalists working in the office in the 1960s and 1970s was the current results of the club, the success that was achieved back then. Anniversaries were not celebrated. In the times of the political transformation after 1989 and in the beginning of the 21st century, when the era of permanent troubles began for Odra Opole, there was an increasing nostalgia for the successful times. The jubilees of the club formation became natural opportunities for experiencing such nostalgia.

Keywords: Odra Opole, sport, media, press, Opole Silesia.

Preliminary remarks

The 70th anniversary of forming Odra Opole sports club has been a stimulus for the author to try to describe the relations between one of the most important sports clubs in Opole, Silesia, and the biggest newspaper in the region. It is worth emphasising that the relations are of a particular value, the beginning of which may be found in the 1950s. It was then that Eugeniusz Mróz, born in Limanowa and a close friend of Karol Wojtyła, began to create a sports section in the office of “Trybuna Opolska”.

Due to the extent of the subject, the author's topic was narrowed to Odra Opole jubilees, which the sports office of "Trybuna Opolska" and later "Nowa Trybuna Opolska" ("NTO") celebrated differently.

A qualitative analysis of the press content was used as a test method. This paper was based on news sources and studies concerning the history of sport in Opole. It should be emphasised that a comprehensive monograph of Odra Opole has not been published yet. In 2009, a former Odra Opole football player Sebastian Bergiel published *Odra Opole Antoniego Piechniczka w latach 1975–1979*. Due to the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the club, the same author published *Znani i zasłużeni niebiesko-czerwoni*, in which he presented 70 people connected with the club, such as football players, coaches and supporters. For many years, a brilliant Opole sports journalist Juliusz Stecki has collected data for an Odra Opole monograph.

Opole in 1945

Opole was announced a fortress in the autumn of 1944. The city played an important part in the German defence against the advancing Red Army due to the geographical location of the city and its military and transport importance. On the 24th of January the Soviet army captured the right-bank part of the city. The German army retained the left-bank part of Opole until 19 March 1945. Most of the city was destroyed and almost completely depopulated (only 300 inhabitants remained) during the hostilities¹. 25% of the city buildings were destroyed. The central part of the city suffered the most. Production facilities were devastated, destroyed, and raided. The technical infrastructure of the city became unusable².

The revitalisation of the city began once the hostilities ended. At the beginning of April 1945, the inhabitants who were evacuated before the approaching front started to return to Opole. In the second half of that month, transports with Poles removed from Kresy Wschodnie started to arrive. The influx of repatriates and newcomers was also gradually increasing. In October the population of Opole exceeded 30 thousand. It was comprised of a mixture of people from different regions and localities: 7 thousand Opole, Silesia, people, around 13 thousand Poles repatriated from Kresy Wschodnie, and 10 thousand people who arrived from different Polish regions³.

One of the most important groups who contributed to the reconstruction of Opole after the war was the group of cement plant workers. It was their activi-

¹ D. Tomczyk, *Wyzwolenie Opola*, [in:] W. Dziewulski, F. Hawranek (ed.), *Opole. Monografia miasta*, Opole 1975, pp. 402–412.

² Z. Bereszyński, *Polskie Opole (1945–2010)*, [in:] B. Linek, K. Tarka, U. Zajączkowska (ed.), *Opole. Dzieje i tradycja*, Opole 2011, p. 142.

³ Ibidem, pp. 141–142.

ties, and also the railwayman's, that led to the formation of first post-war sports clubs in the city.

In February 1945, Polish railwaymen from Katowice and Cracow began working in Opole. They were posted to the city in order to organise railways. Due to the Polish State Railways (PKP) employees, on April 25, 1945 the first sports club in Opole was formed: ZZK (Związek Zawodowy Kolejarzy) (Eng. Trade Union of Railwaymen, TUR). The first section formed by the club was a football section. After three years ZZK merged with a rival railwayman's club Leopolia. Since 1945, Leopolia operated next to the Railway Rolling Stock Repair Company. In the middle of 1945, other sports clubs were formed in Opole, such as the army's Trójka, the policemen's Gwardia, and Lwowianka⁴.

Odra Opole

The most important club in Opole is Odra, which was formed in 1945. Not only did the cement plant workers who were brought to Opole turn on the devastated production facilities, but also cleaned up the field of the city stadium. As a result of their work, football matches could be played as early as in May 1945. The team, called Cementownia, consisted of the workers who were rebuilding the city and played friendlies with Lwowianka, the Soviet soldiers and prisoners of war from the Łambinowice POW camp⁵.

A meeting was held on 16 June 1945 in the Opole Town Hall between the founders and members of Klub Sportowy Odra. Leonard Olejnik, a lawyer and an aficionado of the art of photography, became the first chairman of the club. He also coined the name for the club. It was modelled on Poznań's Warta, which he had supported during his studies⁶.

The programme of the newly-founded club involved the development of all sports disciplines. The first departments were: football, tennis, track and field, and team sports. Training took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the City Stadium. The first competition organised by the club was a 2 km "propaganda" street run. It took place on Sunday 8 July 1945 and the winner was Stefan Pruszkowski, who had been a famous middle-distance runner during the interwar period⁷.

In the 1950s, the club managed 16 sports departments. Nowadays, Odra is only a football club. From 1948 to 1958, as a result of a merger with Lwowianka Opole the club was called Budowlani. The strengthened team won promotion to

⁴ J. Stecki, K. Stecki, *Opolski Olimp*, [in:] B. Linek, K. Tarka, U. Zajączkowska (ed.), *Opole. Dzieje i tradycja*, Opole 2011, pp. 309–310.

⁵ S. Bergiel, *Odra Opole Antoniego Piechniczka w latach 1975–1979*, Kraków 2009, p. 19–20.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 21.

⁷ J. Stecki, *Kultura fizyczna i sport*, [in:] W. Dziewulski, F. Hawranek (ed.), *Opole. Monografia miasta*, Opole 1975, p. 645.

the Polish Premier League, where it debuted in the spring of 1953. The biggest success of the club was the third place at the end of the 1963–1964 season. Apart from that, Odra won the League Cup in 1977, beating Widzew Łódź 3–1. The years from 1975 until 1979 when the team was managed by the famous Polish coach, Antoni Piechniczek, are considered the best in the club’s history by many supporters. In the 1977–1978 season Odra played in the UEFA Cup, losing in the first round to the FC Magdeburg in a two-leg match⁸.

It is worth mentioning that the first post-war Olympians from Opole, Silesia, were Odra (Budowlani) Opole players. In 1952, ice-hockey players Zdzisław Trojanowski and Rudolf Czech played in the Winter Olympics in Oslo, where they took sixth place as part of the Polish national team⁹.

“Trybuna Opolska” and “Nowa Trybuna Opolska” newspapers

The most important newspaper in the region is “Trybuna Opolska” (now “Nowa Trybuna Opolska”, or “NTO”). It has been published since 1 January 1952. Sports news was published in “Trybuna Opolska” since the first issue, but it was not systematic and its volume was less than one column. Sports news began to be printed two times a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, when the Polish sport was very successful in the international arena in the 1970s. At that time, and also in the 1980s, the newspaper had a circulation of over 100,000 copies. Nowadays, the circulation is c. 18,000 copies.

On 1 April 1993, the “Nowa Trybuna Opolska” (“NTO”) newspaper was published. Since then the sports content of the newspaper has increased systematically. Currently, sports news is printed every day. Additionally, its content is doubled in the Monday edition. In 2000, it was decided that sports news on the Monday edition would be printed as a supplement¹⁰.

Regardless of the results, Odra Opole was held in great esteem by sports journalists. It was especially the case when Antoni Piechniczek was their coach, which were also the best times for the Opole journalistic community. Interestingly, the most important topic for “Trybuna Opolska” journalists in the 1960s and 1970s was the results of the team, the success that was achieved back then. Anniversaries were not celebrated too much, which would be the case only in the 21st century.

⁸ S. Bergiel, op. cit., pp. 255–258.

⁹ J. Stecki, *Opolski Olimp*, Opole 1995, p. 46.

¹⁰ T. Bohdan, *Opolskie dziennikarstwo sportowe*, Opole 2013, pp. 43–49, 69–79.

Jubilees in the times of the People's Republic of Poland

The 10th anniversary of Odra Opole took place in 1955 when Odra (then named Budowlani) won promotion to the top league after taking first place in the league division two. The 20th anniversary of Odra Opole, in 1965, coincided with the success of the team, which took third place in the league division one, the best in the history of the club. As a result of the above-mentioned jubilees, there were no separate articles about Odra in the "Trybuna Opolska" newspaper. Naturally, the news about the club was published in the sports columns of the newspaper. However, the topic of the news was the current results of the club. Historical references were avoided¹¹.

Only in 1970, during the celebration of the Odra Opole's 25th anniversary, the jubilee information was underlined in the last column, which, interestingly, was published in October and was linked to the text on the formation of police club Gwardia Opole. The article emphasised the activity of the club and its many sections. It mentions among others the athlete, Anna Wojtaszek, who took part in the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, as well as football and hockey players. Mariusz Gagola, the author of the article, emphasised the fact that the comprehensiveness of the club was curbed, but also reminds the readers that it had sections, such as: volleyball, basketball, tennis, table tennis, boxing, and also winter sports and day room games¹².

On the occasion of the silver jubilee, a ceremonial gala was held in the chamber of the Board of the People's Provincial Council with the Provincial Polish United Workers' Party authorities, city representatives and social organisations. Among 300 guests, there were also former and current players, officials, and supporters of the club. A slogan, typical in the times of the People's Republic of Poland, was put up in the chamber: "Sportsmen and officials of OKS Odra serve the region and Poland". Mieczysław Juszczak, the chairman of the club, delivered an obligatory speech in which he boasted about the extension of the sports and training facilities, the coaching and instructing staff, and the pastoral care of the club. That last activity of the club may seem grotesque nowadays, but at that time it included not only the recruitment of talented youth, but also the provision of patriotic values, the proper attitude to education and work, and friendliness¹³.

Another ceremonial event of the gala, described in "Trybuna Opolska", was the presentation of a banner to the club representatives, which had been funded by the Provincial Committee for Physical Culture and Tourism. The banner was adorned

¹¹ Conf. "Trybuna Opolska" 1955, No 142 (16.06.1955), No 145, (20.06.1955); "Trybuna Opolska" 1965, No 141 (16.06.1965), No 142 (17.06.1965).

¹² M. Gagola (mg), *Jak ten czas szybko leci. Odra, Gwardia Opole mają po 25 lat*, "Trybuna Opolska" 1970, No 271 (1.10.1970).

¹³ K. Sempruch, *Ćwierć wieku opolskiej Odry*, "Trybuna Opolska" 1970, No 275 (5.10.1970).

with awards given to Odra Opole: “Services to Opole Silesia” and “Services to the city of Opole”. Besides, awards and honours were presented to many Odra officials and players. The club received wishes of even bigger successful achievements in the following quarter-century, which would only partially come true¹⁴.

Jubilees after 1989

Odra Opole played the last match in the top league on 13 June 1981. It was a 1–1 draw against Legia Warszawa in Warsaw. A new reality for the history of the club began, the second and later even the third division. The 30th anniversary of the club was celebrated after the success of Antoni Piechniczek’s team. However, the 40th anniversary took place when Odra played in the third division. There was a deep sense of nostalgia among the supporters for the times when the club had been successful, while sports journalists quickly adapted to the expectations of their readers.

In June 1995, during the 50th anniversary of Odra Opole, Juliusz Stecki, the head of the “Nowa Trybuna Opolska” sports section, wrote in the article titled “We were present in the world” that, “the Opole football was not always like this, like now: third-tier, unattractive”, and moved on to recall the Opole Olympians and members of the national teams. He strongly emphasised the achievements of Engelbert Jarek and Zbigniew Gut. Jarek, as the first football Olympian from Odra Opole, took part in the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome. 12 years later, Gut won a gold medal in Munich. In Odra Gut was a player coached by Jarek, who changed his position from a striker to an offensive defender. Stecki stresses that Gut was only given 11 caps in the Kazimierz Górski’s team, and yet, he took the third place in the 1974 FIFA World Cup in West Germany¹⁵.

The author continues his football recollections in another Weekend Magazine a week later. He did this at the request of his readers, which he emphasises in the introduction to the article. Stecki presented 14 most famous Opole football players, all of whom had been connected with Odra and had been the members of the national team¹⁶.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, the club managed by an ambitious businessman Ryszard Niedziela was close to win promotion to the first division. Eventually, the ambition was not carried out and it later turned out that the chairman’s contact, Ryszard Forbrich, aka Fryzjer, introduced Odra to corruption. The club run into huge financial troubles and was relegated to the third division.

The lack of a sports success and the increasing financial troubles of the club surely contributed to the fact that the celebration of the Odra 60th anniversary turned out very successful in the “NTO” newspaper.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ J. Stecki, *Bywaliśmy w świecie*, “NTO” 1995, No 139 (17–18.06.1995).

¹⁶ Idem, *Czternastu wspomniałych*, “NTO” 1995, No 145 (24–25.06.1995).

For many weeks before the jubilee, the editorial office had printed a coupon in the newspaper on which the readers could write the best players' names of the 60 years. 1200 readers took part in this popularity contest. The football team of 60 years was chosen. It included: goalkeeper – Józef Młynarczyk; defenders – Henryk Szczepański, Roman Wójcicki, Henryk Brejza, Zbigniew Gut; midfielders – Antoni Kot, Bernard Blaut, Zbigniew Kwaśniewski; strikers – Wojciech Tyc, Engelbert Jarek, Norbert Gajda. Engelbert Jarek, the most prolific football player in the history of Odra Opole, was chosen as the captain of the jubilee team and received most of the votes, over 1000. According to the NTO readers, such a team could only be managed by Antoni Piechniczek, who received almost 700 votes more than Teodor Wieczorek¹⁷.

On the occasion of this jubilee, a four-page supplement titled "60 years of Odra Opole" was published. It included information such as the programme for the jubilee celebration, opinions and sports recollections of former club stars, presentations of the Olympians, and recollections of the most important football games.

There had been no tables of any kind containing figures in the jubilee articles published in the most popular Opole newspaper columns in previous years. This time the journalists recalled that Odra had played in the League One for 22 seasons. They played 564 matches, winning 182 times, drawing 159 times, and losing 223 times. In total, Odra scored 523 points, taking the nineteenth place in the all-time table of League One. Information was also published concerning the attendance in the stadium in Oleska street in the 1970s. Nowadays, the recollections of the attendance figures of several thousand are astonishing. However, they were considered standard in the best times of the club. Odra played against Ruch Chorzów in Opole on Sunday 19 November 1978. The leader played against a runner-up, so, understandably, the city was consumed by football fever. 25,000 people came to see the match, i.e. every fourth inhabitant. The stadium was filled to overflowing, and a group of the supporters sat on nearby trees, the others watched the game from a nearby railway embankment. Odra won 3-1 and became the autumn round champion¹⁸.

The history of Odra is not only the history of the Odra's football section. The editors of "NTO" kept that in mind and wrote about bridge players, chess players, gymnasts, figure skaters, speedway riders, and skiers. Among all sections, the weightlifters were distinguished, as well as the creator of their power, Ryszard Szewczyk, (later the founder of Budowlani Opole), who won the Polish Team Championships 17 times¹⁹.

In the next issue of the newspaper, the whole column of the weekly supplement "Sport" was dedicated to describing the old boy match, which had been one of the most important jubilee events. Two teams of Odra Opole football vet-

¹⁷ Ms, *Nasza drużyna marzeń*, "NTO" 2005, No 141 (18–19.06.2005).

¹⁸ Idem, *Największe mecze naszych piłkarzy*, "NTO" 2005, No 141 (18–19.06.2005).

¹⁹ *Najlepsi byli sztangiści*, "NTO" 2005, No 141 (18–19.06.2005).

erans played against each other. The first team included the players who lived in Poland, while the other the players who lived abroad. Some of the players said in interviews that they had not played football for many years. Roman Wójcicki, who lived in Germany, was surprised by a low attendance at the match. Despite giving hundreds of autographs, he was nostalgic about the times where the stands had been completely full²⁰.

70-year-old Engelbert Jarek showed excellent build and physical condition in the old boy match. The best striker in the history of Odra (456 goals, including 92 in League One) was interviewed by Marcin Sagan. They talked about the times when sport had been totally different. Jarek had been working as an agronomist until 12 a.m. in Chrościna. After work, he would return to Opole, often on foot, where the training session started at 3 pm. Therefore, he had never had any problems with his physical condition. Besides, he had also played different sports apart from football: volleyball, basketball, handball, tennis, and table tennis²¹.

Considering the previous jubilees, an extensive coverage, also from a historical standpoint, was enriched by the Opole journalists with an article by Roman Stęporowski concerning the current times. However, it was filled with the same emotions as the recollections. The author argued that the main partner of the club, Dutch company OTTO, would not withdraw from financing the club. Moreover, the Odra Opole board planned thorough changes in the club. Their outcome was to be promotion to the second tier within 2 years, which came true in the end²².

Final remarks

Year 2015 was supposed to be special for Odra Opole. The jubilee of the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the club was supposed to be connected with the promotion to the second tier (the third level). Unfortunately, Odra lost its first place three rounds before the end of the season as well as the opportunity for the promotion. Not being aware that the 70th anniversary celebration would take place in a gloomy atmosphere, the "NTO" journalists had begun writing about the celebration already in May. This time, however, more attention was devoted to the players who were the supporters' favourites in the second and third division reality. Hugo Enyinnaya was recalled, for example. The Nigerian had already played in Serie A as a teenager, but his career had not taken off there. In 2006 he had joined Odra Opole, where his performances had been found extraordinary by the local supporters, who had been craving for success²³.

²⁰ B. Kasprzysiak, *Wspomnień czar*, "NTO" 2005, No 142 (20.06.2005).

²¹ M. Sagan, „Betel” bombardier, "NTO" 2005, No 142 (20.06.2005).

²² R. Stęporowski, *Powiew optymizmu*, "NTO" 2005, No 140 (17.06.2005).

²³ M. Sagan, *Na "Ugo" był sposób*, "NTO" 2005, No 121 (26.05.2015).

As far as the popularity contest was concerned, there were considerable changes in the 70 years' between the team and the team of a decade ago. Except for Engelbert Jarek, two strikers from the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s made the team: Andrzej Gadżała and Dariusz Wolny, and also their peer, the defender Krzysztof Chęłpa. Besides, Tomasz Jagieniak and Piotr Plewnia, both close to 40 years of age, made the team, as well as Sebastian Deja, the youngest player in the team and the longest-playing member of the current Odra Opole team. This time, however, it was possible to vote on the "NTO" website and the app of one of the social networking sites, which in some way explains such dramatic changes in the all-time team²⁴.

The major disproportion between the description of the jubilees in the "Trybuna Opolska" ("NTO") newspaper in the times of the People's Republic of Poland and the beginning of the 21st century, which was observed during the analysis of the newspaper contents, may have two reasons.

The first one, conventionally called qualitative, is concerned with the sports success of the club. When Odra sent their players to the Olympics and the football players played in the top league and on European football stadiums, the newspaper covered their current results. They were not focused on describing anniversaries. At the time of the political transformation and in the beginning of the 21st century, when the era of permanent trouble began, there was an increasing nostalgia for the successful times. The jubilees of the club formation became natural opportunities for expressing such nostalgia.

The other reason may be called quantitative. In the times of the People's Republic of Poland, the sports content was not higher than two "Trybuna Opolska" columns. Since the middle of the 1990s, the volume of "NTO" sports content had been gradually increasing until it began to be published as a supplement in the spring of 2000. Consequently, the space was created that could be filled in a more diverse way, e.g. by placing extensive content concerning the club's jubilees.

The above-mentioned relationships between Odra Opole and "Trybuna Opolska" ("NTO"), narrowed to the jubilees out of necessity, were not only limited to the press. The best example is a book titled *Mafia Fryzjera*. It was published in 2007 and revealed the pathological mechanisms ruling the Polish football. The corruption was described by both Odra Opole chairman Ryszard Niedziela and the head of "NTO" sports section Roman Stęporowski.

²⁴ Idem, *Ich pamiętacie i cenicie*, "NTO" 2005, No 128 (3–4.06.2015).

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