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A report to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of Josef Rössler-Ořovský, founding father of sport in the Czech lands

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Nota z okazji 150. rocznicy urodzin Josefa Rösslera-Ořovskiego, założyciela sportu na ziemiach czeskich

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono sylwetkę Josefa Rösslera-Ořovskiego, założyciela sportu na ziemiach czeskich, który od lat 80. XIX wieku do końca lat 20. ubiegłego wieku miał ogromny wpływ na kształtowanie i rozwój sportu na ziemiach czeskich i w Czechosłowacji. J. Rössler-Ořovský był sportowcem ciałem i duszą. Poza własną karierą sportową, był znany ze swojej działalności założycielskiej, powołał do życia wiele klubów i stowarzyszeń sportowych z siedzibą w Czechach oraz zarejestrował je w międzynarodowych federacjach sportowych. Odegrał także znaczącą rolę w Czeskim Komitecie Olimpijskim. Josef Rössler-Ořovský, który w 2019 roku obchodziłby swoje 150. urodziny, był bez wątpienia jedną z największych osobistości czeskiego sportu.

Słowa kluczowe: Josef Rössler-Ořovský; klub sportowy; stowarzyszenie sportowe; działalność założycielska.

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Abstract

This paper looks at Josef Rössler-Ořovský, the founding father of sport in the Czech lands, who was instrumental in the development of sports in the Czech lands and in Czechoslovakia from the 1880s until the end of the 1920s. J. Rössler-Ořovský was a sportsman in his body and soul. In addition to his own sporting career, he was known for his efforts to get a large number of sports clubs and associations established in the Czech lands and have them registered in international sports federations. He also played a significant role in the Czech Olympic Committee. Josef Rössler-Ořovský, who would have celebrated his 150th birthday in 2019, is indisputably one of the greatest names in Czech sport.

Keywords: Josef Rössler-Ořovský; sports club; sports association; establisher.

Introduction

Josef Rössler was the first of six children born into a Prague burgher's family on 29th June 1869¹. The family had a high standard of living. His father owned a house in Jindřišská Street and earned his living as the owner of a prospering company called Wenzel's Babka Nachfolger².

Josef Rössler was born into a period of groundbreaking political events. In 1866, Austria lost the war against Prussia, losing its position of power in the German area of Central Europe. A year later, the Czech ambition to build a federation completely faded after the Austro-Hungarian compromise³.

J. Rössler attended the elementary school in Panská Street in Prague. In his first ever physical exercise lessons, a teacher named Descatello was to make a huge impression on the young J. Rössler. In 1879 J. Rössler began to study at a type of grammar school known as Real-gymnasium. However, he was not very keen on the tough grammar school curriculum. His interest was in sport and this took off during his secondary school years⁴.

Josef Rössler-Ořovský – active sportsman and establisher

While studying at grammar school, J. Rössler joined the Sokol gymnastics organization, where he was trained by Jan Malypetr, one of the founding fathers and promoters of Czech physical education (who had also taught Miroslav Tyrš, founder of Czech organized physical education). He was introduced to fencing

¹ Archives of the History of physical education and sports of the National Museum in Prague, fund J. Rössler-Ořovský, sign. 16-d.

² Prague City Archives, Adresář živností král. města Prahy 1884, p. 384.

³ J. Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy*, Prague 2005, pp. 208–216.

⁴ Archives of the History of physical education and sports of the National Museum in Prague, fund J. Rössler-Ořovský, sign. 15-b-1.

and achieved a high standard in swimming⁵. As early as 1881, at the age of twelve, J. Rössler and his classmates set up their own “Skating Club”⁶. In the winter season, he regularly participated in speed skating races. He spent summers in Brandýs-nad-Orlicí with his family, where he learned not only to fish. He and his brother Karel also spent time building an unsophisticated vessel similar to a canoe from three planks of wood. They used the vessel to go canoeing down Czech rivers, steering it with double-bladed paddles⁷.

The Rössler brothers’ enthusiasm for sports was initially welcomed by their father. He provided them with the means to purchase expensive sports equipment from abroad. Their skates came from Germany, the Netherlands or Norway. In fact, ordering skates from Scandinavia actually resulted in the first skis arriving in the Czech lands in 1887. The company supplying the brothers’ skates offered them the chance to buy skis, which young Josef Rössler accepted⁸. He became the first ever Czech to ski in the Czech lands, surprisingly not in the mountains but in a yard in Prague⁹. Having imported skis to the Czech lands, J. Rössler set up a Ski Club affiliated with the Skating Club in Prague in 1887. This later became a club in its own right – the Czech Ski Club¹⁰. Despite its statutes not being officially recognized until 1896, it became the very first ski club in Europe outside of Scandinavia¹¹.

J. Rössler’s academic achievement was not particularly outstanding, perhaps being neglected due to his involvement in the family business, and his father began to have regrets¹². He soon lost patience and transferred his son from the Realgymnasium to the Academy of Commerce. Ironically, though, the easier curriculum enabled young J. Rössler to spend more time on sport. But he had to train in secret due to disfavor in his family and at school, where the vast majority of teachers considered sport a distraction to students. He even shifted his rowing practice to five o’clock in the morning.

Just before his final exams, J. Rössler began to use a pseudonym. He wanted to prevent his name appearing so often in the press because of his teachers and father, who had led him off the ice in 1888 just as the speed skating races were about to start. J. Rössler translated his surname from German to Czech and used the pseudonym Ořovský after as his name until his death¹³.

⁵ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 8.

⁶ However, its statutes, which the enthusiastic youngsters developed, were never officially recognized. V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, p. 90.

⁷ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, p. 15.

⁸ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 8.

⁹ V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, p. 95.

¹⁰ O. Kulhánek, *Zlatá kniha lyžování (Z dějin československého a světového lyžařství)*, Prague 1989, p. 8.

¹¹ J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Vybrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 142.

¹² M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, p. 99.

¹³ V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, pp. 88–89.

Josef Rössler-Ořovský also became interested in track and field at that time. In 1887, he won his first ever 400 meters race, later becoming a successful cross-country runner. He won his next victory when he came in first in Letná – Královskáobora cross-country run. He was also a feared speed skating opponent. His biggest speed skating achievements came between 1890 and 1893, when he became Prague Champion, Czech Champion, and Lake Wörth Champion. He also took part in the European Championships in Vienna, where he twice came fourth. He did not completely lose interest in skating in the following years but became more involved as a skating starter, timekeeper or referee.

Josef Rössler-Ořovský gradually began to spend literally all of his free time either as a sportsman or as a sports organizer. In 1888, he became a member of the Blesk Praha Rowing Club. He rowed for them in senior single scull-races. A year later he initiated the establishment of an ice hockey club. However, his life changed dramatically in 1890 when he joined the army. This civil obligation led him to Trieste, where he became acquainted with yachting.

He participated in rowing races in 1890 and 1891 in Trieste (the first place in senior single scull – 1890), Piran, Klagenfurt, Venice (the Crown Prince award in coxed pair, 1st and 2nd price in single scull – 1890), Vienna (first place in junior single scull – 1890) and other venues, winning prizes everywhere¹⁴. While Trieste offered a favorable environment for summer sports, it had its drawbacks for skating, so J. Rössler-Ořovský found refuge in the Karst Plateau, situated in today's Slovenia. He and several other enthusiasts founded the “Karst Skating Club” there in 1890, which soon held its first public races, probably another of J. Rössler-Ořovský's initiatives¹⁵. It probably took place at Bled lake on the 6th day of January 1891 and J.R. Ořovský won the 2 km race. One month later he won another 2 km race at Wörther lake, as has already been mentioned.

After returning from Trieste, where he worked as a billing clerk and a correspondent (especially in foreign countries) of the K.E. Hoffmann-Stettner company, in 1891 and after spending some time in Prague, his father sent him to Frankfurt am Main to work for Mattenheimer und Simon. He was unable to forget his beloved sport there either. A year later, he was sent on work experience to Paris, where he began to devote his time to football. In addition to that, he became acquainted with sports that were completely unknown in the Czech lands, including ice polo, tennis on ice or bandy hockey played with a small ball¹⁶.

In 1893 he traveled to London on business. In the cradle of sports, he learnt to play football, rugby, tennis, and hockey. He also perfected his rowing (joining a training session that the renowned Oxford and Cambridge eights had together in 1893)¹⁷

¹⁴ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, p. 15. “Národní listy” 1933, no. 21, p. 5.

¹⁵ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 26.

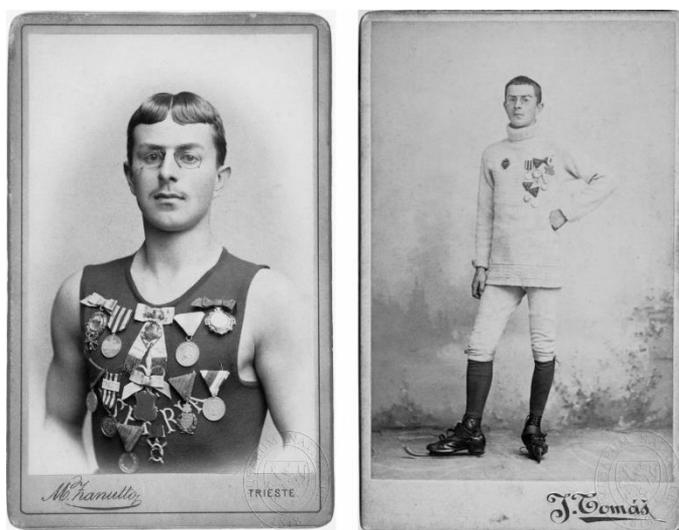
¹⁶ K. Vlk, K. Gut, *Zlatá kniha ledního hokeje*, Prague 1978, p. 12.

¹⁷ V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, p. 110.

and yachting there. In addition, he acquired a great deal of organizational experience there, which was of utmost importance¹⁸.

Wherever J. Rössler-Ořovský worked, he developed personal relations with many top European sportsmen and officials. Later, these contacts greatly helped him in his struggle to have Czech sport internationally recognized.

After his final return home in 1893, he and several other enthusiasts founded the First Czech Lawn Tennis Club in Prague¹⁹, which became the most significant Czech tennis club over time. His experience from Trieste encouraged him to establish the Czech Yacht Club in Prague in 1893²⁰, which had previously been part of the Blesk Praha Rowing Club.²¹ In 1893 and 1894 J.R. Ořovský became the Czech single scull champion²².



Josef Rössler-Ořovský as a young sportsman²³

In 1894, J. Rössler-Ořovský was behind the establishment of the Czech Sculling Cercle, which served to bring together wealthy sports lovers and patrons who would support sporting events and young, talented sportsmen. Football, hockey,

¹⁸ K. Vlk, K. Gut, *Zlatá kniha ledního hokeje*, Prague 1978, p. 12.

¹⁹ "Národní listy" 1929, no. 172, p. 15.

²⁰ For quite a long time, the club had only one river boat, which was called Forward. In the 1920s members could also use the yacht Maryša. "Český svět: illustrovaný čtrnáctidenník" 1905, no. 13, p. 20. "Pestrý týden" 1927, no. 30, p. 7.

²¹ P. Bureš, J. Plichta, *Sport a tělesná kultura v Čsl. republice a cizině*, Prague 1931, pp. 306–307.

²² J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Výbrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 95.

²³ <http://www.esbirky.cz/hledat/rychle/vysledky?key-words=o%C5%99ovsk%C3%BD&order=relevance> [access 10.11.2018].

tennis and other sports clubs were formed within the Czech Sculling Circle²⁴. In 1895 the Czech Sculling Circle attempted to organize the first ever football tournament in the Czech lands, but their efforts failed and they applied again in the following year. The opening match of the first ever organized football competition in the Czech lands was played on 22nd March 1896. J. Rössler-Ořovský acted as tournament referee and went down in football history for having refereed the first ever match between the two great Prague rivals – Sparta and Slavia²⁵. Before the tournament even began, J. Rössler-Ořovský had made efforts to develop an initiative to have the Czech Football Association established, but he was defeated in the end²⁶.

On the basis of his experience in England, J. Rössler-Ořovský was able to translate football and bandy hockey rules into Czech (both in 1897)²⁷. He was also a co-founder of and a leading official in the Czech Hockey Association, established in 1908, and the Canoeing Association of the Kingdom of the Czech Lands founded in 1913²⁸.

J. Rössler-Ořovský also went down in history as a co-founder of the first Czech sports association – The Czech Amateur Athletics Union. In doing so, he clearly used his experience of sport gained abroad. Shortly after returning to his native land in 1893, J. Rössler-Ořovský had begun to think about establishing a central sports association that would unite all sports that did not have their own associations. He first presented his proposal to establish such a union at a meeting of football leaders in 1896, but it was actually formed a year later. J. Rössler-Ořovský initially acted as its first vice-president. He was voted president in 1898 and remained in that position until 1901²⁹. This union was of enormous significance to the development of Czech sports. Fostering Olympic ideas, the Czech Olympic Committee emerged from it in 1899³⁰. In order to avoid being abolished by Austrian authorities, though, it worked without officially recognized statutes until the independence of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed³¹. Jiří Guth (from 1919 Jiří Stanislav Guth-Jarkovský) – a member of the International Olympic Committee – was named the first president of the Czech Amateur Athletics Union.

In the mid to late 1890's, J. Rössler-Ořovský spent most of his winter seasons skiing, although he was nowhere near as successful as in skating or rowing. De-

²⁴ V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, p. 116.

²⁵ O. Žurman, *Zlatá kniha kopané*, Prague 1975, p. 419.

²⁶ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, pp. 62–63.

²⁷ K. Vaněk, *Malá encyklopedie fotbalu*, Prague 1984, p. 298.

²⁸ M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, p. 100.

²⁹ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 17.

³⁰ J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Vybrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 211.

³¹ *Dokumentace k dějinám čes. olympismu, I. díl (1891–1918)*, Prague 1998, p. 146.

spite that, skiing became his passion³². In 1897 he and the Czech Ski Club, where he acted as the president for many years, helped organize the first major ski races in the Czech lands, held in Dolní Štěpanice near Jilemnice. On the other hand, he broke his ties with the rowers because internal discord and a lack of finance led the Czech Rowing Association to refuse to hold the European Championships in Prague in 1897. Thanks to J. Rössler-Ořovský's efforts, these had been promised to the city of Prague by the European Rowing Federation. J. Rössler-Ořovský's disappointment was all the greater, because he had been the one who had actually arranged for the Czech Rowing Association to enter into negotiations with the World Rowing Federation (FISA). In fact, J. Rössler-Ořovský had significantly contributed to the national Czech Rowing Association being admitted³³ into the International Rowing Federation's ranks at its first international conference in 1893, obviously attended by J. Rössler-Ořovský. This allowed Czech rowers to compete in international races from 1896³⁴, although Josef Rössler-Ořovský would be more likely to observe Czech rowing affairs from a distance.

J. Rössler-Ořovský's efforts to develop Czech tennis were all the greater, despite his average ability as a player. In 1900, he introduced table tennis in the First Czech Lawn Tennis Club, and began to organize its first tournaments. He was also behind the establishment of a national tennis association – the Czech Lawn Tennis Association. In 1898 he enrolled the Czech Lawn Tennis Association, which was not officially recognized until 1906³⁵, in the English Lawn Tennis Association, which was two years before Austria took such a step. This move also enabled Czech tennis players to participate separately at the Inter-Olympic Games in Athens in 1906 and at the Olympic Games in London in 1908. However, due to opposition from the Germans and Austrians, Czech sports leaders were unable to assure membership in the newly established International Tennis Federation (1913)³⁶.

In 1899 J. Rössler-Ořovský arranged for a group of Oxford students – football players – to travel to Prague, where they took on the local team Slavia. This was

³² For example, he competed in a 500-meter run that took place in Královská Obora in Prague on 5th January 1896. Only six runners from two Czech clubs attended this race, which was won by J.R. Ořovský – the Prague Czech Ski Club and the Czech Ski Association. Another example is that he won the fourth place in the competition of seniors (over 35 years) in Vysokénad Jizerou on 3rd February 1910. "Národní listy" 1896, no. 121, p. 3. "Světozor: světová kronika současná slovem i obrazem: časopis pro zábavu i poučení" 1910, no. 20, p. 478.

³³ This led to a dispute between J. Rössler-Ořovský, who was of the opinion that even a nation without a state has the right to be represented in international organizations, and the Österreichischer Ruderverband, which held the opposite opinion. J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 35.

³⁴ J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Výbrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 96.

³⁵ I. Lichner, *Malá encyklopedie tenisu*, Prague 1985, p. 47.

³⁶ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 54.

one of the most sensational sporting events in the Czech lands³⁷, as the Oxford team was one of the best European football clubs of the time.

Four years later, J. Rössler-Ořovský succeeded in establishing the Czech Ski Club, before ski clubs were established even in Alpine countries. J. Rössler-Ořovský was one of the advocates of the idea of the Winter Olympic Games. He actually suggested Pierre de Coubertin to hold the 1900 Winter Games of the II Olympiad in the Krkonoše mountains³⁸. From 1906, he also strived to have an international ski federation established. J.R. Ořovský also suggested organizing the so-called Nordic games in Krkonoše mountains in 1908. Unfortunately, they were never organized³⁹. Because of the presence of Czech delegates at the first international skiing congress in 1910, which J. Rössler-Ořovský did not attend, the Austrians and Germans boycotted the central feature of the event, which was to have the International Ski Federation established. They only succeeded in establishing a lower-level organization – the ISC (International Ski Commission)⁴⁰, in which J. Rössler-Ořovský also represented the Czech Ski Club⁴¹. However, at the Ski Congress held in March 1911, he had to fight off Austrian efforts to have the Czechs expelled from the ISC. He also represented the Czechs at the Ski Congresses held in 1912 and 1913⁴².

In 1910, he imported the first original Canadian canoes to Bohemia and, on competing against other types of boat, proved their suitability for Czech rivers. Between 1908 and 1914, he rowed all the most renowned Czech rivers, firstly on different types of boat but later strictly on canoes. He was also one of the first people in Bohemia to bivouac and camp. It goes without saying that when A.B. Svojsík began to organize scouting in Bohemia in 1911, J. Rössler-Ořovský became one of the very first people to back this idea. An example of such support took place in 1912 when a group of sea scouts was established within the Czech Yacht Club Prague, which had become completely independent of the Blesk

³⁷ However, on his own responsibility, J.R. Ořovský had to borrow money from the Občanskázáložnamalostranská. He used this money to pay part of the bonus for the English footballers. They were welcome with great fame in Prague, even at the town hall by mayor Podlipný. The Gottwald company subsequently lent 500 chairs, 2 large gazebos and the head of the company Pištor also a large English flag for the game. Another helping hand was offered by J. L. R. company. This company donated the game by several thousand meters of wire to ensure order, which was used to border the playground at Letná. “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, p. 15.

³⁸ M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, p. 100.

³⁹ “Národní listy” 1907, č. no, p. 5.

⁴⁰ E. John, B. Allen, *Historical Dictionary of Skiing*, Plymouth 2012, p. 98. J. Klapáč, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 46.

⁴¹ J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Vybrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 142. *Dokumentace k dějinám čes. olympismu, I. díl (1891–1918)*, Prague 1998, p. 26.

⁴² “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, s. 15.

Praha Rowing Club in 1898⁴³. He made canoeing trips in summer and skiing trips in winter⁴⁴.

In May 1911, J. Rössler-Ořovský led the Czech football team to Roubaix, where the first amateur European Championships took place, held by the UIAFA (Union Internationale Amateur de Football Association). The Czechs came first of three teams after defeating the home team of France 4:1 on the 27th of May, as well as England 2:1 one day later⁴⁵. He also represented the Czechs as a delegate at the International Football Congress which took place on the 28th of May 1911⁴⁶.

He also held a very important position in the Czech Olympic Committee. He could not miss exploiting the huge significance of the reinstated Olympic Games for the Czech nation. He became an advocate for convincing the Czech people of the need to participate in this international sports event⁴⁷. The Czech Olympic Committee was established in 1900 and J. Rössler-Ořovský became the first correspondent, which was not a particularly important position, but he was soon promoted to a higher position in the organization⁴⁸.

J. Rössler-Ořovský accompanied Czech sportsmen to the 1906 Intercalated Games in Athens, held from the 22nd April to the 2nd May⁴⁹. During the crossing on the “Thalia” steamboat, he shared his idea to establish an international ski federation with Swedish and Norwegian delegates⁵⁰. J. Rössler-Ořovský traveled to the next 1908 London Olympic Games as the head of the Czech team and the co-secretary of the Czech Olympic Committee. A year later, Josef Rössler-Ořovský became the general secretary of the Czech Olympic Committee⁵¹. This position made him a top official alongside Jiří Guth⁵². He went on to accompany Czech athletes to Stockholm in 1912. Working for the Czech Olympic Committee was far from easy in those days. Top sports leaders were persecuted by Austrian authorities, who obviously opposed separate Czech participation in the Olympic Games.

At the beginning of 1914, he arranged for the London-based Winter Sports Club to visit the Krkonoše and Šumava mountains. However, this activity led to him being accused of espionage after the outbreak of the First World War, later causing him further trouble. However, the Austrian authorities never got to know

⁴³ “Junák: časopis pro dospívající mládež: list Junáků-skautů Republiky československé” 1937, no. 7–8, pp. 102–103.

⁴⁴ M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, pp. 100–102.

⁴⁵ M. Jenšík, J. Macků, *Kronika českého fotbalu (Do roku 1945)*, Prague 1997, pp. 168–170.

⁴⁶ “Čech: politický týdeník katolický” 1911, č. 148, s. 5.

⁴⁷ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, s. 15.

⁴⁸ Archives of the History of physical education and sports of the National Museum in Prague, fund J. Rössler-Ořovský, Úvod.

⁴⁹ P. Bureš, J. Plichta, *Sport a tělesná kultura v Čsl. republice a cizině*, Prague 1931, p. 183.

⁵⁰ O. Kulháněk, *Zlatá kniha lyžování (Z dějin československého a světového lyžařství)*, Prague 1989, p. 82.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵² J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, pp. 91–94.

about him assisting four French reserve officers to drive through the Šumava mountains and Bavaria into Switzerland and that he had saved deposits of several French companies in the Austrian Postal Savings Bank⁵³.

He was everywhere – always responsive, elegant, sparkling with wit. His adversaries were in despair. When drinking and smoking was the thing to do, he drank and smoked, he was the last to leave negotiation table and always fit, and the morning after he was prepared and simply glowed. His charm and diplomacy disarmed enemies and stunned friends⁵⁴.

Not even during the First World War did J. Rössler-Ořovský stop doing sport, despite the Czech Olympic Committee being abolished. The distribution of sports equipment was very complicated though. The railways prohibited the carriage of skis, for example. However, J. Rössler-Ořovský had these supplies distributed as military wares so members of sports clubs could carry on using them.

The First World War having ended. J. Rössler-Ořovský picked up the archives of several sports clubs and associations, which had been buried in the Krkonoše mountains because as a politically untrustworthy person he had been unable to keep hold of them, and took them unimpaired to Prague. At the beginning of January 1918, he accepted the request of the founder of Czech scouting, A.B. Svojsík, and became Commissioner of the Czech Scouting Organization “Junák” – (becoming the Association of “Junák” Scout Clubs of the Czechoslovak Republic after 1919). He held the position of Assistant Commissioner throughout the 1920s, during which he accompanied A.B. Svojsík to the International Scout Congress in Paris (1922) and in Kandersteg, Switzerland (1926).

In the spring of 1919, he left for Paris, where he made efforts to secure health supplies badly needed by the Czechoslovak Red Cross. One of the many people he visited in Paris was J.J. Pershing, the American General who was to become the man behind the great sports events arranged for military personnel who had served in the armed forces of the states that had won World War One. This event is known as the Inter-Allied Games and J. Rössler-Ořovský was able to negotiate participation of Czechoslovak military sportsmen, who went on to achieve relative success⁵⁵.

A year later, he led the Czechoslovak Olympic Team to Antwerp. In 1921 J. Rössler-Ořovský was still taking extensive canoeing trips. In 1922 he set up the well-known long-distance race from České Budějovice to Prague (around 190 km)⁵⁶, finishing at the above-mentioned Czech Yacht Club Prague’s boathouse⁵⁷. In 1923 he organized and, as president, managed the 7th International Ski Con-

⁵³ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, s. 15.

⁵⁴ M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, p. 100.

⁵⁵ T. Tlustý, *Českoslovenští sportovci a jejich účast na Pershingově olympiádě*, “Studia Sportiva” 2017, no. 1, pp. 68–79.

⁵⁶ P. Bureš, J. Plichta, *Sport a tělesná kultura v Čsl. republice a cizině*, Prague 1931, p. 269.

⁵⁷ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 79.

gress in Prague, coinciding with big ski races in the Krkonoše mountains. These were enriched by the presence of Norwegians, Swedes, Romanians, Germans, Yugoslavians, the English, and Czechoslovaks⁵⁸. He again gave impetus to the idea of establishing the International Ski Federation (FIS), which was formed a year later. J. Rössler-Ořovský became a member of its committee but he broke ties with the Czech Ski Club Praha towards the end of 1924 due to prevailing disagreements⁵⁹. At its 1925 General Assembly, he announced his resignation as president once and for all⁶⁰, having held the post uninterruptedly for 38 years⁶¹.

In the post-war years, J. Rössler-Ořovský was again an invaluable asset to the revitalized Czech (later Czechoslovak) Olympic Committee. He dealt with almost all international correspondence and traveled to each international event, his ability to speak nine languages fluently being of great benefit to him. In 1924, he led the Czechoslovak Olympic team to Paris⁶². In 1925 he attended the 8th Olympic Congress in Prague, where he proposed that the so-called “Winter Sports Week in Chamonix”⁶³ be recognized as the 1st Winter Olympic Games. The Congress had been held a year earlier, and he attended the Games in person as the manager of the Czechoslovak team, ISC member and ski race referee⁶⁴.



Josef Rössler-Ořovský as a sports official at a later age⁶⁵

⁵⁸ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, s. 15.

⁵⁹ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, p. 50.

⁶⁰ O. Kulhánek, *Zlatá kniha lyžování (Z dějin československého a světového lyžařství)*, Prague 1989, p. 8.

⁶¹ O. Kulhánek, *Malá encyklopedie lyžování*, Prague 1987, p. 332.

⁶² M. Waic, J. Kössl, *Český tramping (1918–1945)*, Prague 1992, p. 100.

⁶³ *Olympijský věstník* 1925, no. 6–7, p. 96.

⁶⁴ O. Kulhánek, *Zlatá kniha lyžování (Z dějin československého a světového lyžařství)*, Prague 1989, p. 122.

⁶⁵ J. Štumbauer, T. Tlustý, R. Malátová, *Vybrané kapitoly z historie tělesné výchovy, sportu a turistiky v českých zemích do roku 1918*, České Budějovice 2015, p. 93.

In 1927 J. Rössler-Ořovský was still an active canoeist. A year later he led the Czechoslovak Olympic team both to Saint Moritz and to Amsterdam⁶⁶.

In March 1929, he lost the post of General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee, which initially devastated him but he came to terms with it in the end. In the same year, however, he gave up his membership in the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee due to health problems.

In the course of time, he received a number of honorary awards, such as the Swedish, Belgian and French Olympic Honor Medals. He was named *Officier d'Académie* and Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honor. He was also named Member of Honor by the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee.

In 1929, due to deteriorating health, he also gave up his long-standing presidency of the Czech Yacht Club Prague. However, he was named its Life President of Honor. His last great yachting accomplishment was the establishment of the Czechoslovak Yachting Association in 1929⁶⁷.

His last post in sports and free-time associations was that of Assistant Commissioner for the Scout Association. In 1929, he became an advisor of the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education for sports and scouting⁶⁸. That year he also participated as one of the Czechoslovak delegates at the 3rd World Jamboree in England. He resigned from his last post in 1931⁶⁹.

During his life, J. Rössler-Ořovský published several articles in *Národní Listy* newspaper. These were articles about sports, concerning for example skiing or the Olympic games. At the very end, he was also interested in golf. He wrote an article in *Národní Listy* where he supported its introduction in Poděbrady. Nevertheless, this was his last contribution to this newspaper⁷⁰.

At the end of 1932, his health began to deteriorate rapidly (gout and liver disease). At the beginning of January, he was hospitalized in the Podolí Sanatorium in Prague. He spent the last days of his life looking out of the window down at his beloved Czech Yacht Club Prague and the River Vltava, where he had skated, rowed and played hockey⁷¹. Josef Rössler-Ořovský, one of the greatest names in Czech sport, died in Prague on the 17th day of January 1933⁷². His remains were buried at Vyšehrad Cemetery alongside the greatest Czechs in history.

⁶⁶ “Národní listy” 1929, no. 172, s. 15.

⁶⁷ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, pp. 75–76.

⁶⁸ “Věstník sokolský: list Svazu československého sokolstva” 1929, no. 44, p. 864.

⁶⁹ J. Klapač, *Josef Rössler-Ořovský (Olympijská knihovnička – 25. svazek)*, Prague 2001, pp. 113–114.

⁷⁰ “Národní listy (II. sportovní příloha Národních listů)” 1911, no. 106, p. 3. “Národní listy” 1927, no. 212, p. 5. “Národní listy” 1933, no. 17, p. 15.

⁷¹ V. Pacina, *Sport v Království českém*, Prague 1986, p. 129.

⁷² Archives of the History of physical education and sports of the National Museum in Prague, fund J. Rössler-Ořovský, Úvod.

Conclusion

Josef Rössler-Ořovský was born in Prague on the 29th day of June 1869. He was an enthusiastic, active and successful sportsman from a very young age. He was awarded and decorated with many trophies and medals during his life. He won over 130 different first awards⁷³. He was responsible for importing the first skis and Canadian canoes to the Czech lands. To begin with, his father provided him the means to purchase expensive sports equipment which he used every day. However, he later sent him abroad to acquire his own business experience.

On his travels, he became familiar with the organization of sport and also with a number of sports unknown in the Czech lands. He had established several sports clubs before traveling abroad. After returning, he followed up on his previous activity and, despite being hindered by Austrian authorities, he strove to get the clubs and associations he was involved in, often having formed them himself, affiliated to international sports federations.

J. Rössler-Ořovský was also an active member of the Czech Olympic Committee and in the course of time he became one of its major figures. On several occasions, he himself led the Czech Olympic Team to both the summer and winter Olympic Games. He was the one to instigate the 1900 Winter Games of the 2nd Olympiad and who was behind the idea in 1925 to have the “Winter Sports Week in Chamonix”, recognized as the first Winter Olympic Games.

During his life, he also published articles about sports in the *Národní Listy* newspaper. However, towards the end of the 1920s, his health began to deteriorate. Consequently, he began to resign from his posts in clubs and associations. J. Rössler-Ořovský, who did an almost unbelievable amount of work in his lifetime for the development of Czech sport and who was wrongfully forgotten due to the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, passed away on the 17th day of January 1933.

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