

# THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLISH EQUESTRIANISM IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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**Abstract** Although the traditions of equestrianism in Poland goes back a long way, it was not until 1880 that the first equestrian competitions were organized in Warsaw. In the following years, the interest of the Polish society in equestrian competition had been growing and led to the creation of equestrian-breeding associations, which actively conducted sports activities. However, it was Poland regaining independence in 1918 that enabled the dynamic development of Polish equestrianism, especially in military circles among cavalry and horse artillery officers.

The creation of the Polish Equestrian Association in 1928 had an undoubted impact on the popularization of equestrian sport among civilians. The Association became the organizer of many sports competitions for both military and civilian riders. Moreover, it undertook a number of initiatives aimed at the development and popularization of equestrianism in Polish society. Polish riders participated in the most important sports competitions organized in the interwar period, both in the country and internationally. They took part in the Olympic Games three times (1924, 1928 and 1936), in which they won four medals. Furthermore, they achieved success in equestrian competition around the world (the United States, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and others).

**Key words** equestrianism, show jumping, eventing, dressage, the Olympic Games

## Introduction

After the war ended, equestrian sport quickly revived, especially in military circles such as cavalry and horse artillery, and aroused great interest among civilians. Associations that existed before the war resumed their activities, and numerous new organizations were also created. They had a regional character and dealt with the organization of equestrian competitions and hunting races, thus popularizing equestrian sport in society. Local associations conducted the competitions according to their own rules. The method of assessing competitors limited the ability to compare the skills of individual riders and the selection of the most talented of them, and, above all, hindered the selection of the national team from among competitors for competitions organized abroad in which Poles had participated since 1923 (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Panczernej*, 1978a).

## Establishment and activity of the Polish Equestrian Association

In order to further properly develop equestrian sport and its representation on the international arena, it was necessary to establish an organization that would bring together all equestrian associations and clubs existing in the country. On February 18, 1928, an organizational meeting was convened in Warsaw, during which representatives of 18 sports clubs adopted the statute and formed the Polish Equestrian Association (PZJ) (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1929). Col. Zbigniew Brochwicz-Lewiński was appointed the president and held this position throughout the interwar period (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1929).

The main objectives of the PZJ were: a) agreeing on the activities of all associations promoting equestrian sport in its various forms, with the exception of horse racing; b) unifying the classification and conditions of competitions; c) representing Polish equestrianism abroad; d) preparing and organizing equestrian teams for the Olympic Games; e) joining the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (Fédération Equestre Internationale – FEI) (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1929).

At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, Polish equestrianism was going through a crisis. At that time, the PZJ focused mainly on interesting the greatest number of citizens in equestrian sport, as well as to inspire young people and encourage them to learn to ride a horse. The Management Board undertook a number of initiatives aimed at achieving this goal, while accepting the help of other institutions, such as: the State Office of Physical Education and Military Training, the Supreme Association of Horse-Breeders Union and military authorities (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1938d).

The issue of stagnation and even a certain underdevelopment of civilian equestrian sport in Poland were raised many times in the national press. A growing number of horse riding enthusiasts pointed out that with the passive attitude of government spheres, civil equestrianism would cease to exist. Poles, about whom the old Slavic proverb said: *Lach without a horse is like a body without a soul*, when compared to any European nation, performed very badly in terms of popularizing civilian equestrianism (Urban, 2002).

It was not until the early 1930s, when a profound crisis affected not only civilian, but also military representative equestrian sport, the Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs and the Polish Equestrian Association took decisive action to rectify the situation. On the initiative of the president of the PZJ, Col. Zbigniew Brochwicz-Lewiński, the Polish Equestrian Championships were organized in 1931. The aim of the championships was to stimulate riders to greater efforts in equestrian sport by awarding the best with the title of "Champion" and to arouse interest among the public (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1932). The Polish Equestrian Association continued its efforts to find the right method to promote equestrian sport among the widest social classes (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1933). A positive effect of the meeting of club presidents was the decision to organize the so-called "Popular Meetings", whose goal was primarily to make it easier for civil riders and schoolchildren to participate in competitions that required lower technical skills.

In agreement with school authorities, inexpensive horse riding lessons for youths were organized in 1934. Initially, the courses were conducted only in Warsaw, but later also in other cities. Lessons in Warsaw were organized not only for schoolchildren, but also for officials and students, as well as older amateurs of horse riding (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1938d). Over time, this type of inexpensive horse riding lessons was also introduced in the "Sokół" Mounted Troops in Lviv and Sosnowiec (Urban, Płaczek, 2000).

It should be emphasized that while male youths were initially reluctant to participate in equestrian sport, females had always shown a great interest in horse riding. The amazons outnumbered men at not only horse riding

courses and lessons organized by the PZJ, but also were a majority in equestrian clubs. While in 1930 there were only 30 competitors regularly participating in the competitions, by the end of the 1930s there were almost 200, including 124 amazons and 69 riders. The increase in the number of active civilian riders was proportional to the increase in interest in mass equestrian sport (*Koń Polski*, 1977).

After 1937, the Polish Equestrian Association strengthened its position not only in Poland, but also internationally. It was often the case that Polish initiatives gave cause to a change in the FEI regulations, establishing new and more modern regulations of international equestrian sport, and adapting them to changing conditions. As a token of appreciation for the contribution and merits of Poles in the development of international equestrian sport and active participation in the FEI sessions, Lt. Col. Tadeusz Machalski, was elected to the board of this organization in 1936 as the first and only Pole until the outbreak of the Second World War (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1939).

The prestige that Polish equestrianism enjoyed in the international arena and the importance of the activities of Polish representatives in the International Federation for Equestrian Sports were also evidenced by the fact that Warsaw was chosen as the organizer of the next FEI Congress in 1938. The meeting took place during the international equestrian competition from 1 to 7 June that year (*Koń Polski*, 1978). The Congress focused mainly on the detailed elaboration of the text of the new international regulations, according to which equestrian competitions were to be held at the 1940 Olympic Games. Olympic issues were an important topic during the FEI meeting. The Japanese delegate, General Kaba, who was present at the Congress, officially gave the President of the Republic of Poland an invitation to participate in the 1940 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

## Polish Equestrian Badge

Despite the noticeable positive effects in popularizing equestrianism in society, the PZJ did not stop working on its further development. At the beginning of 1934, an initiative to establish the Polish Equestrian Badge (PEB) for the best riders and the most distinguished activists for the development of horse riding was started (*Konie i Rumaki*, 1995). The aim of the badge was, above all, to promote equestrianism far and wide among the society, maintain efficiency of a wide range of riders and amazons in riding skills and to encourage young people to horse ride. The PEB was established in seven categories: Badge of Honour, Great Gold, Gold, Great Silver, Silver, Great Bronze and Bronze. Its regulations included all branches of equestrian sport: show jumping competitions, off-road competitions, as well as par force hunting and horse races (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1935).

The first badges were awarded in May 1935. Honorary Equestrian Badges were awarded to the Polish Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the President of the Republic of Poland Ignacy Mościcki – for outstanding service to the development of equestrian sport, and Lt. Col. Karol Rómmel, Maj. Michał Antoniewicz, Maj. Adam Królikiewicz, Maj. Józef Trenkwald, Rittmeister Kazimierz Szosland and Lt. Kazimierz Gzowski – for winning Olympic medals (in 1924 and 1928). Honorary Badges were also awarded to an amazon and riders who contributed to the development of equestrianism and represented it in the international arena even before Poland regained independence, namely: Maria Zandbangowa and Tadeusz Dachowski, Rittmeister Bronisław Peretiatkowicz, Paweł Popiel and BEng Zdzisław Sznuć (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1936). Whereas, for participation and completion of Olympic competitions, the Golden Badge was awarded to: Col. Tadeusz Komorowski, Maj. Zdzisław Dziadulski and Maj. Kazimierz Rostwo-Suski (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Panczernej*, 1977).

In the interwar period, the PZJ awarded 19 Honorary Polish Equestrian Badges. In addition to the above-mentioned ones, Honorary Badges were also given to Count Andrzej Morstin and Count Andrzej Żółtowski, as well

as medallists of the Olympic Games (9) (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1938c and d). The Polish Equestrian Badge was one of the few that soldiers of the Polish Army could wear on a military uniform (*Konie i Rumaki*, 1995).

### Horse-Riding Championships of the Polish Army – Militari

The most important equestrian event in the Polish cavalry of the interwar period was the Horse-Riding Championships for the Polish Army, also called the Army Championships or, colloquially, Militari. The goal of the Militari competition was to maintain a high level of riding skills among cavalry officers and their ability to use bladed weapons and firearms when riding a horse. Therefore, the Polish Army Championships served a training function for the participating riders; and were also an attempt at breeding selection of a military horse (Central Military Archive (CAW), Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs, ref. no. I 300.30.187).

Lt. Tadeusz Daszewski was the initiator of introducing these competitions to the training program of the cavalry, which gained the approval of the then head of the Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs, Gen. Eugeniusz Ślaski, who permanently introduced them as compulsory for all horseback weapons (*Konie i Rumaki*, 1994). The first Horse-Riding Championship for the Polish Army was held in 1923 in Warsaw. Initially, it was held only in the capital, and from 1929, each year the event was organized by another large cavalry unit (*Koń Polski*, 1974), who chose the city in its territory as the place of competition. In 1929, the Militari competition took place in Poznań, in 1930 – again in Warsaw, and in the following years – in Vilnius (1931), Kraków (1932), Baranowicze (1933), Hrubieszów (1934), Suwałki (1935), Łuck (1936), Białystok (1937) and Lviv (1938), and just before the outbreak of the Second World War – in Bydgoszcz (1939).

Both the preliminary and central competitions for the Army Championships consisted of four separate tests: dressage in a quadrangle, proficiency in bladed weapons and firearms use, cross-country riding, and show jumping, preceded by an inspection of horses. Detailed conditions of individual test were specified in instructions issued each year by the head of the Cavalry Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs. During 17 years, the rules of organizing these competitions had changed many times with the main goal – to achieve high riding efficiency of the rider and the horse in combat conditions – remaining the same (Central Military Archive (CAW), Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs, ref. no. I 300.30.187).

Out of 40 cavalry regiments, 11 mounted artillery divisions and the representation of the Border Protection Corps' cavalry, only nine cavalry regiments and the team of the Border Protection Corps managed to win the title of team army champion. The teams of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Uhlan Regiments won the titles three times, and the teams of the 17<sup>th</sup> Uhlan Regiments and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mounted Rifle Regiment and the Border Protection Corps – twice. In the individual classification, the best results were achieved by representatives of the 15<sup>th</sup> Uhlan Regiment, who won the individual army championship four times, and the 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Uhlan Regiments who obtained this title twice. From 1923 to 1939, when the Militari Competition was organized, only two officers managed to win the titles of individual army champion more than once. They were representatives of the 15<sup>th</sup> Poznań Uhlan Regiment – Lt. Władysław Zgorzelski in 1924 and 1929 and Lt. Jan Brodzki in 1930 and (already as Rittmeister) in 1937. Moreover, Lt. Zgorzelski also won the title of vice-champion in the Polish Army and thanks to this, he came first in the classification for the best participant in this competition. He was also the head of the equestrian team of the 15<sup>th</sup> Uhlan Regiment for many years and was responsible for preparing the representation of the regiment for the Militari (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancerniej*, 1971b).

## The Polish Equestrian Championships

The Polish Equestrian Championships were held for the first time in 1931. It was a world-class event, as Poland proved to be the precursor in organizing championships in this discipline. Championships, popular in other sports, were not known at the time in equestrian sport. The initiator of the Polish Equestrian Championships was the president of the Polish Equestrian Association, Col. Zbigniew Brochwicz-Lewiński. The main goal of the championships was to motivate riders to maximum effort and work systematically on themselves and the horse, as well as to promote equestrian sport far and wide among the Polish society. The championships were also the preliminary qualification of competitors and horses to the national team who attended international competitions and the Olympic Games (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1932).

At the beginning, the Polish Equestrian Championships comprised two competitions: show jumping and horse championship, from 1933 called Eventing. The dressage competition was not included, as it was not popular among Polish riders. It was only the opinions and statements of Maj. Leon Kon, an expert on equestrian art (*Koń Polski*, 1978), that changed the situation. In 1932, the dressage competition was also introduced to the Polish Equestrian Championships programme, which from that year was held regularly until the end of the interwar period.

Initially, in the years 1931–1935, the Polish Equestrian Championships were organized only in Warsaw (*Konie i Rumaki*, 1996a). In 1936, the Polish Equestrian Championships were held outside the capital for the first time. Eventing was traditionally held in Warsaw during the Official International Equestrian Competitions (28.05–8.06), but the Championships in show jumping and dressage took place in Lublin from 28 September to 4 October. In 1937, the PZJ decided to conduct all three equestrian competitions in the country in one place and at the same time. The first organizer of the comprehensively planned Polish Equestrian Championships was Gniezno. Whereas in 1938, the championships were organized in Bydgoszcz on October 6–11. They were the last Equestrian Polish Championships before the outbreak of the Second World War (*Konie i Rumaki*, 1996b, c, d).

The Polish Equestrian Championships were an elite event and only top national champions could take part in it. The championship regulations for 1936 were supplemented with a new provision to establish the title of the Polish Equestrian Champion, which was awarded to a competitor who in one year won the 1<sup>st</sup> place in all three equestrian competitions during the organized Polish Equestrian Championships. The title of Polish Equestrian Champion belonged to the rider until another competitor won the triple championship. In the interwar period, no rider succeeded in doing.

In the interwar period, the Polish Equestrian Championships were organized 8 times (1931–1938). Among the holders of championship titles were 31 competitors, with fourteen of them winning titles several times. Maj. Wilhelm Lewicki won the most Polish Champion titles – 4 (3 in dressage and 1 in show jumping). 3 titles were won by Rittmeister Seweryn Kulesza (2 in eventing and 1 in dressage), Rittmeister Jan Mossakowski (2 in dressage and 1 in eventing) and Lt. Col. Karol Römmel – 2 (both in show jumping). The title of vice-champion was won 6 times by Rittmeister Henryk Roycewicz (3× in dressage, 2× in eventing, 1× in show jumping). Twice was the title won by Capt. Wojciech Biliński (in show jumping) and Rittmeister Tadeusz Sokółowski (1× in show jumping and 1× in dressage). Whereas the titles of the second vice-champion went to Maj. Wilhelm Lewicki – three times (2× in show jumping, 1× in eventing) and twice to Rittmasters: Seweryn Kulesza (1× in eventing, 1× in dressage), Henryk Roycewicz (1× in eventing and 1× in dressage) and Józef Trenkwald (1× in eventing and 1× in show jumping). The most versatile riders who won championships or vice-champion titles in all equestrian events were Rittmeister Henryk Roycewicz, who won a total of 9 titles and Maj. Wilhelm Lewicki – 7 titles (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1971a).

## Participation and successes of Polish officers in international equestrian competitions

The official debut of Polish riders took place in April 1923 during international equestrian competitions in Nice. From this year until the outbreak of the Second World War, Polish representatives regularly participated in the most important equestrian events in Europe and North America. At the beginning, they competed only in equestrian competitions, whereas in the second half of the 1930s (1936), they also took part in the Eventing Competition. Such a late participation of Poles in the eventing was due to the fact that no international contest (except for the Olympic Games) of championship or cup ranks were organized in this competition. However, Poles did not participate in international dressage competition at all. Although in Europe there were organized such competitions with the participation of foreign teams, Poles did not take part in them in the interwar period (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1938a, b).

During the competition organized by national equestrian organizations in individual cities, various types of equestrian competitions were held: ordinary, accuracy, speed, power of the jump, hunting and others. The most important international equestrian competition was the Nations Cup competition, organized as the climax of the competition programme. The name "Nations Cup" was in force until 1933, when the regulations of the International Federation for Equestrian Sports reserved it only for competitions held during the Olympic Games. In view of this situation, the individual cities which organized this competition named it the Cup of the State in which the competition took place. In Warsaw, it was a competition for the "Polish Award" of the President of the Republic of Poland, in Riga – "Latvian Cup", in Tallinn – "Estonia Cup", in Berlin – "German Award" for the Cup of the Reich Chancellor, in Nice – "France Award" for the Cup of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Prix du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères), in Rome – "Mussolini Cup" (Coppa Mussolini), in London – "the Prince of Wales Award", in New York – "the International Military Trophy" (Pruski, 1980).

In the interwar period (1923–1939), the Polish national team participated 54 times in the Nations Cup. Most often the team fought for this trophy: in Nice – 14 times, Warsaw – 12, Riga – 7, Rome – 6, New York – 4, in Berlin, Bucharest and London – 2 times, and in Aachen, Brussels, Budapest, Lucerne and Spa – one time. Polish riders won the top awards in the Nations Cup competitions many times. Out of 54 competitions, they won medals 38 times, including: 17 times – 1<sup>st</sup> place, 13 times – 2<sup>nd</sup> place, 8 times – 3<sup>rd</sup> place and 18 times further places. In the classification of all countries (17) which in the years 1920–1939 participated in the Nations Cups, Poles with seventeen victories came in 5<sup>th</sup> place when taking into account the first places. Italians proved to be more effective – 41 wins, Germany – 39, French – 26 and Irish – 23. Given the fact that Poles joined the competition three years later than most countries and the difficult political situation as well as socio-economic problems of the first years after regaining independence after 123 years of partitions, taking 5<sup>th</sup> place in this classification was undoubtedly a great achievement (*Koń Polski*, 1982).

In the discussed period, a total of 36 officers represented Poland in the Nations Cup competitions, of which a dozen or so participated in the competition many times. The record holder was Kazimierz Szosland, who participated in this competition up to 28 times. Frequent participants of the Nations Cup were also: Janusz Komorowski – 19 times, Adam Królikiewicz – 17, Karol Römmel – 13, Zygmunt Ruciński – 12, Roman Pohorecki – 11, Wilhelm Lewicki – 10, Stefan Starnawski, Stanisław Czerniawski and Bronisław Skulicz – 9 times each, Aleksander Rylke, Michał Gutowski and Henryk Roycewicz – 7 times each, Michał Toczek and Henryk Kulesza – 6 times each, Zdzisław Dziadulski, Kazimierz Gzowski and Władysław Zgorzelski – 5 times each. The Polish National Team also included also Antoniewicz and Jerzy Bilwin – 4 times each, Wojciech Biliński, Henryk Dobrzański, Jan Mossakowski and Józef Trenkwald – 3 times each, Włodzimierz Korytkowski, Franciszek Mrowec, Paweł Nerlich-Dąbski, Jan

Salęga, J. Skupiński, Tadeusz Sokołowski, Stanisław Wołoszowski and Sergiusz Zahorski – 2 times each, as well as Leon Burniewicz, Janusz Kapuściński, Jan Strzałkowski and Antoni Żelewski – 1 time each (Urban, 2003).

In addition to participating in competitions for the Nations Cup, Polish riders also competed in many others, achieving very good results. Since Poles participated most often in equestrian events organized in Nice (within 17 years up to 14 times), naturally they were the most successful in this city. Nice provided perfect competition conditions not only in terms of sports level, but also in the variety of competitions held there. The Polish riders achieved very good results especially in the competition for the City of Nice Award (Grand Prix de la Ville de Nice) and for the Monaco Award (Prix de Monaco) by winning cups in each of these competitions six times (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1974b).

Polish officers also participated four times in riding competitions overseas. The contests organized in Madison Square Garden in New York were an extraordinary event for Polish American community. The Polish riders in a uniform and impeccable riding style and the successes achieved in the parcours aroused widespread admiration and recognition, and the American audience with unflagging enthusiasm admired the sports achievements of Poles. "Poles' victory can only be explained by the extraordinary talent and efficiency of riders (...). Thousands of thoughts arise when you see our guests riding horses of a much lower category than those our enthusiasts used to admire at international competitions" (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1927) – commented American William Morris on the performance of the Polish riders in New York.

The national team won the Nations Cup three times out of four it participated in the New York competitions in 1926–1929, thus becoming the Cup's permanent holder in 1929. Furthermore, the team won awards in other competitions many times. In total, it stood on the podium 26 times: it took the 1<sup>st</sup> place 8 times, 10 times – the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 8 times – the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The team won the greatest number of prizes in 1927, when the riders won 10 medals: 4 gold, 4 silver and 2 bronze. Poland was represented in New York by: Maj. Michał Toczek, Rittmeister Adam Królikiewicz and Lt. Kazimierz Szosland (in 1926), Lt. Col. Karol Rómmel and Rittmeister Michał Antoniewicz (in 1927 and 1928), Lt. Stefan Starnawski (in 1927), Lt. Władysław Zgorzelski (in 1928 and 1929) and Lt. Kazimierz Gzowski and Lt. Stefan Starnawski (in 1929) (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1974a).

In 1936, Polish riders participated for the first time in the International Eventing competition, held during the winter horse competition in Berlin. Due to weather conditions, dressage in a quadrangle test and two jumping shows were held, however cross-country riding was cancelled. The debut was not successful. Out of fourteen running horses, the only Polish representative, i.e. Maj. Wilhelm Lewicki riding Dunkan, took the 10<sup>th</sup> place (Central Military Archive (CAW), the Cavalry Training Center, ref. No. I 340.40/8). After a one-year break, the Poles took part in the eventing competition during the International Equestrian Contest in Insterburg in East Prussia, where Lt. Jerzy Bilwin riding Arlekin III won the final classification and took the 2<sup>nd</sup> place. The last International Equestrian Competition before the outbreak of the Second World took place in June 1939 in Turin and was a preparation for the Olympic Games in Helsinki. Six national teams participated in the competition, including Poland under the leadership of Capt. Jan Mickunas. Only two teams were classified: on the 1<sup>st</sup> place – Germany, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> – Switzerland, the remaining teams were rejected after the cross-country riding test (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancерnej*, 1978b).

## Poles' Olympic achievements in equestrian sport

Polish riders performed for the first time at the 5<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games in Stockholm. However, unable to represent their own country, which was at that time under occupation, they competed in the Russian team. Two Polish officers appeared in a team of seven: Second Lieutenant Karol Rómmel and First Lieutenant Sergiusz Zahorski. The highest place in the national team in jumping show – 7<sup>th</sup>, was taken by Prince Pawłowicz. Second Lieutenant K. Rómmel riding the Cossack horse Ziablik, after an unfortunate fall, took the 9<sup>th</sup> place, and Lt. S. Zahorski on the Polish Bandura – the 11<sup>th</sup>. The injury deprived Lt. Rómmel of an opportunity to win a gold medal. However, in recognition of a very good performance, King Gustaf V personally gave the Polish athlete a copy of the Olympic gold medal (Urban, 1998).

In 1920, shortly after Poland regained independence, the 7<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games in Antwerp were held. The Olympic competition became an excellent opportunity to present the reborn state on the international stage. The Polish Olympic Committee, established in 1919, in response to the invitation of the International Olympic Committee, notified the Polish national team to participate in the Olympic Games. Pursuant to the order of the Inspector General of the Cavalry, 14 riders and Maj. Karol Rómmel, as the group's manager, were appointed to participate in the 7<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games. However, the Polish riders did not attend the Olympic competition, as in mid-June 1920, the officers were directed to the Eastern Front and took part in the Polish-Soviet war (Central Military Archive (CAW), the Inspector General of the Cavalry (GIJ), ref. no. I 300.25.9).

Immediately after the war, activities aimed at developing Polish equestrian sport began, in particular improving the skills of the equestrian leaders of that time. The Equestrian Preparation Group at the Central Riding School (later the Cavalry Training Center) in Grudziądz (*Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancernej*, 1969), which was set up in 1922–1929, made an enormous contribution in training the competitors.

Polish riders made their debut at the Olympic Games in Paris. Equestrian competitions began on July 21, 1924, in which participants from 15 countries took part. The competition comprised three disciplines: individual dressage competition, eventing and show jumping for the Nations Cup. Poles did not take part in the dressage competition, but they represented Poland in the other two competitions (Central Military Archive (CAW), Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs, ref. no. I 300.30.192).

46 competitors from 13 countries competed in the Horse Championship (eventing), including 10 teams representing the national teams. It consisted of three tests: dressage in a quadrangle, cross-country riding and show jumping tests. The Poles, as a team debuting at the Olympic Games, failed to succeed. As a team, they were classified at the 7<sup>th</sup> place (the 1<sup>st</sup> place – the Netherlands, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place – Sweden, the 3<sup>rd</sup> place – Italy). Individually, the best of Poles turned out to be Lt. Col. K. Rómmel riding Krechowiak who won the 10<sup>th</sup> place and farther Lt. K. Szosland riding Helusia – the 23<sup>rd</sup> place, Rittmeister K. Rostwo-Suski riding Lady – the 24<sup>th</sup> place, Maj. T. Komorowski riding Amon – the 26<sup>th</sup> place (Łysakowska, 2000).

On July 27, the Nations Cup competition was held, which brought together 43 competitors from 15 countries. In the difficult international competition, the contestants took the 6<sup>th</sup> place as a team, whereas in the individual classification Prix des Nations, a success was achieved by the young lieutenant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment – Adam Królikiewicz, who finished 3<sup>rd</sup> and won the bronze Olympic medal, the first in the history of Polish equestrianism. Other competitors took lower places: Lt. Col. K. Rómmel – the 11<sup>th</sup> place, Rittmeister Z. Dziadulski – the 28<sup>th</sup> place and Lt. K. Szosland – the 32<sup>nd</sup> place (Królikiewicz, nd).

The equestrian sport in Poland had been developing systematically over the next four years and until the Olympic Games in Amsterdam. The riders gained increasing recognition in the country and abroad, and over time joined the group of the best not only in Europe, but also in the world. Medals and awards won by Poles at European and American hippodromes testified to their good instructor preparation and the chances for success during the Olympic Games in the Netherlands.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games in Amsterdam were held July 28 – August 12, 1928. The event was attended by representatives of 17 countries and several individual contestants. Poland was represented in this competition by: Rittmeister M. Antoniewicz riding on Moja Miła, Lt. Col. K. Rómmel on Donneuse, Rittmeister J. Trenkwald on Lwi Pazur (substitute rider was Maj. H. Dobrzański on Fucase). On August 8–9, the first part of the championship was organized, i.e. dressage in a quadrangle. Poles did not do well in this test. The cross-country riding test was held on August 10. In this test, it was very important to keep the team together (three contestants). Incomplete team meant losing the right to team classification. On August 11, the last test was organized – a show jumping competition. The experience of the riders and the excellent preparation of animals resulted in the whole Polish team completing the test. Out of 17 teams that competed, only three finished the contest, and out of 46 horses, only 28 got to the finals. Poles won the bronze Olympic medal and took the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, right after the Netherlands and Norway (*Jeździec i Hodowca*, 1928).

A competition for the Nations Cup was organized on the last day of the event, i.e. August 12, in which 16 teams of 3 contestants and 6 individual participants took part. The following riders were prepared for the show jumping competition: Rittmeister M. Antoniewicz with Readgledt, Lt. K. Gzowski with Mylord, Lt. K. Szosland with Alli and as a substitute Rittmeister Z. Dziadulski with the Lad. The Poles won the silver Olympic medal as a team, second only to the Spanish. Individually, the best Polish rider turned out to be Lt. K. Gzowski, taking the 4<sup>th</sup> place together with a Spaniard; Lt. K. Szosland took the 13<sup>th</sup> place, and Rittmeister M. Antoniewicz the 20<sup>th</sup> (Central Military Archive (CAW), Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs, ref. no. I 300.30.192).

After the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, the Equestrian Sports Group at the Cavalry Training Center in Grudziądz was dissolved. The military authorities recognized that among the cavalry and horse artillery officers there is a sufficiently large number of competitors whose riding skills would allow Poland to be represented internationally. The lack of a full-time training unit negatively affected the performances of riders in sports competitions, where Poles began to suffer many defeats since 1929 (Urban, 1998).

In 1932, the Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles. The military authorities and the PZJ faced a dilemma regarding sending the Polish equestrian team to the United States, collecting appropriate funds and preparing it to participate in the competition. However, the financial issue was not the president's only problem, as many equestrian activists, as well as riders themselves doubted the possibility of achieving, a success in America. Ultimately, in order "not to jeopardize the honour of Polish equestrianism at such a sports ceremony", the PZJ decided that Polish equestrianism would not be represented at the Los Angeles Olympic Games (Pruski, 1980).

In view of the upcoming 11<sup>th</sup> Berlin Olympic Games organized in the summer of 1936, the Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs decided to establish a special Olympic group in the Cavalry Training Center in Grudziądz (Urban, 2013). By order of the Department of Cavalry of the Ministry of Military Affairs no. 2422-99/36 of July 20, 1936, the Polish equestrian team was sent to the 11th Berlin Olympic Games. Traditionally, Poles had reported their participation in two equestrian competitions: Eventing and show jumping competition for the Nations Cup (Central Military Archive (CAW), Journal of Orders, ref. no. I 340.40/8).

Eventing started on August 13, with 53 contestants from 19 countries, including 17 teams of three, participating. On the first day, dressage in a quadrangle competition was held, in which the Poles took the 5<sup>th</sup> place. The riders considered the second test of the eventing the most exhausting and dangerous among the international field trials carried out thus far. The Poles won the 3<sup>rd</sup> place in this competition and were placed just behind Germans and Bulgarians. The last competition was a jumping show that also proved to be difficult. In the end, after the disqualification of a Bulgarian rider, the Polish team took the 2<sup>nd</sup> place and won a silver Olympic medal. In the individual contest, the Poles took the 15<sup>th</sup> place – Rittmeister H. Roycewicz, the 18<sup>th</sup> place – Rittmeister Z. Kawecki, and the 21<sup>st</sup> place – Rittmeister S. Kulesza (Wryk, 2015).

At the end of the Olympic equestrian competition, i.e. on August 16, the Nations Cup competition was held, with 18 teams taking part in it (3 competitors each). There were 20 obstacles on a small square, as a result of which they were extremely focused, and the rider was forced to overcome them from a very short take-off site. Poles did very poorly. Lt. M. Gutowski and Rittmeister T. Sokołowski did not finish the competition, and Lt. J. Komorowski individually took the distant 36<sup>th</sup> place (Gaj, 2002).

The medal achievements of the Polish equestrianism in the Olympic Games of the interwar period were 4 medals: 2 silver and 2 bronze, including 3 won in team competitions and 1 individually. Starting from the Olympic Games in Berlin, Polish equestrianism entered a new successful period of development, and the crisis of 1929–1934 had definitely passed. Furthermore, Polish riders had won many significant victories in top-ranking competitions abroad. In 1937, the organization of a full-time Equestrian Sports Group at the Cavalry Training Center in Grudziądz was completed, whose main task was continuous improvement in competitive riding and representing Poland at international competitions. The Polish Equestrian Association had taken successful activities that resulted in increased interest in horse riding among civil society. The outbreak of the Second World War overshadowed the considerable achievements of Polish equestrianism gained in the interwar years.

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