

THE ORGANIZATION FOR GYMNASTICS AND SPORT IN KUTNO

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translated from the Hebrew by Sara Mages

The Jewish Organization for Physical Education in Kutno was nonpartisan and this fact enabled all young people, from all walks of life and all parties, to join it. This organization took care of the physical education and, to a certain extent, also the spiritual education of the Jewish youth in our city. The organization established two orchestras – one for strings and the other for wind instruments, a choir, a sports club, and gymnastics and sports groups for children, youth, women and also men. There were teams for soccer, handball, basketball, etc. The athletic equipment for all groups was acquired thanks to the volunteer work of its members.



"Maccabi" athletes (1918)

The organization had active members and supporters. The latter, of course, were the elderly and the adults who supported us with various financial donations, provided assistance to the management etc., but they

rarely practiced sports. The younger ones, the youth and the children, were very active in the various groups and in gymnastics.

In order to finance all sporting activities, as well as the payment of the salary of the gymnastics and sports instructor, the conductor of the orchestra and choir, and in order to cover the current expenses of the administration and the teams (the income from membership dues was quite limited and insufficient to cover all expenses), we were forced, from time to time, to rent the hall to various bodies who almost covered our expenses. In addition, we also organized evening meetings "on a cup of tea," and dances accompanied by our orchestra. The meetings and dance evenings were attended by youth from all walks of life. However, all these activities were not enough to finance our expenses, so we also served as agents and brought stage bands, organized concerts, lectures, etc.

The organization held gymnastics and sports evenings twice a year: on the intermediate days of Passover and *Sukkot*. These sports evenings were very successful because they were performed with great precision and grace. They left deep impression on all those present and served, for a long time, as a topic of conversation among all the sports fans in our city. However, apart from the success and the athletic value of these operations, they also served as a source of financial income that we needed so much.

We also organized sports competitions between our teams and other teams, Jewish and Christians, local and non-local. In 1931, we were also privileged to host an

Israeli group that came to us from Tel-Aviv. I don't remember if it was a group of "Maccabi" or "Hapoel." The appearance of the group from Israel made a huge impression in our city and in all the surrounding towns.

On *Lag BaOmer* our organization appeared in an impressive procession through the city. We walked in perfect order, our uniforms glistened in their purity, the orchestra played and our blue and white national flag was carried at the head of the procession. Our performances on *Lag BaOmer* left a deep and pleasant impression on all the spectators – Jews and Christians alike. The Poles were not

used to seeing Jewish youth marching with confidence and pride, youth who aspire to "straighten their back" and no longer be ridiculed by the gentiles. It was a youth prepared for every effort and sacrifice in order to raise the respect of the Jews in their eyes and the eyes of the gentiles alike.

May these few lines be a memorial to the members of the "Jewish Organization for Gymnastics and Sport" in Kutno, a memorial to a healthy and vibrant Jewish youth who was cut off in his youth by the Nazi murderers and was not given the right to live his life.

May their souls be bound in the bond of eternal life.



"Maccabi" association (1916)