

"MORGENSZTERN-JUTRZNIA", ITS CHAIRMAN AND COACH

by Chaim GRINBAUM, Holon

As a close associate and close friend of Kopel Kirszbaum z"l, I would like to share a few memories and descriptions of this personality, in light of his blessed activity at the "*Morgensztern*" sports club and other social activities.

In the Jewish-social arena in Kutno, Kopel appeared in 1924. And the story was as follows:

The popular gymnastics and sports association "*Maccabi*", which was founded in Kutno in 1915/16 and conducted its activities until 1920, under the leadership of the instructors Mazik (a German), Zajde, Markewicz and others – forgotten loyal supporters of sports. After the failure of "*Maccabi*" they have set up several sports clubs in Kutno, such as: "*HaKoach*", "*HaShmona*", "*Bar-Kochba*", "*Jutrzenka*", "*Jardenia*", "*HaGvura*", "*Hammer-and-Serp*", "*Gwiazda-Stern*". But most of the clubs had no longevity.

From the disbanded "*Jutrzenka*" and "*Jordania*" a club was formed, which engaged only in football, marching out of the city, gymnastics (mainly – pyramids) and drills, in a military manner. All was led by Yusek Kirszbaum, a non-commissioned officer in the Polish army. The founders of the new "*Jutrzenka*" were: Needle-Worker Feivish Fuks (today in Brazil), Mordechai Mendel Litewski (United



Kopel Kirszbaum z"l

States), Moszkowicz Nathan (Israel), Grinbaum Leibish, Chabus Henech and others. Their exercises and marches attracted a large crowd of young people, especially as society also began to play football with a ball made from bladders covered with leather, or sewn together from many rags... Yusek lost such a large number of members and asked his brother Kopel to help him out. A number of

players joined "Jutrzenka", such as: Moszkowicz Moshe, Blum Chana, Teplicki Noah, Marcus Pinchas, Krajer Yehuda. *Jardenia's* captain Herman Celemenski refused to agree with *Jutrzenka*, although he was consulted in the negotiations.

Kopel, a former active member of "*Maccabi*", had the proper teaching and organizational skills to fulfill the new tasks, which the brother and the conditions imposed on him. In "his" club now came youths from the working-class streets. He neglected his private business, forgot about his family life – and managed the various sports sections with a great deal of knowledge. He created new, improved systems of exercises and competition. The Kutner Jewish youth found considerable interest and satisfaction in the ranks of sports clubs.

The smaller premises did not allow to show what he was capable of. Kopel intervened at the Cultural League and at the Perec Library, with the unions' representatives and socialist artisans, about handing over to the club the premises in Królewska and Senatorska Streets, at least twice a week. Only when the Michalewicz house was set up in Kutno did the "*Morgensztern*" receive the appropriate premises for his activity. Everyone knows that this was made possible by the tireless intervention and demands of Kopel Kirszbaum.

In his teaching career, he rejected the Swedish system and used Prof. Buk's system. This alone has been a major breakthrough in the athletic system for athletes. Kopel also had an instructor board, which included: Asz Zaken z"l, Rosenberg Moshe, Kowalski Shlomo z"l, Grinbaum Chaim (Bolek, today in Israel), Goldberg Yosel (Canada), Ogurek Y. z"l.

If "*Morgensztern*" had in such a short time created a model group of rhythmic for girls, which had received appreciation from the chief instructor of the Warsaw "*Morgensztern*", H. Godfajl – 2 groups of women, 3 groups of teenagers, 2 groups of adults, 6 groups of children (4 girls and 2 boys) for gymnastics, 3 football teams, sections for handball, basketball, volleyball, chess, orchestra, athletics – it is without a doubt due to the merit of the tireless and energetic Kopel Kirszbaum.

On this regard – a few words about the orchestra: it was founded by a group of members of the Cultural League with Mr. Buki Yosef at its head. In 1930, the orchestra joined "*Morgensztern*" – but there had no instruments, Buki discovered a few musical instruments in a carpenter's warehouse. After thinking for a short time, he took out all the instruments in a sawdust bag and handed them over to the orchestra. They used to belong to the old concert association of "*Maccabi*" club.

At the Olympics of the Workers' Sports Clubs in Vienna, held in July 1931, with the participation of some thirty countries, only two Jewish clubs were represented: "*HaPoel*" from *Eretz Israel* and "*Morgensztern*" from Poland. Kopel Kirszbaum was strongly interested in

combining representatives of these last two in order to have "his" Kutner club represented. He set the four conditions for those who wanted to take part in the international competition in Vienna: do not drink any alcohol, do not smoke, eat well – but not too much, do not spend time with "beautiful sex". The members were ready to respect all the limitations, every night practiced for 5-6 hours in rhythmic, gymnastics, acrobatics. And Kopel himself was involved up to the head in the preparations.



German certificate for K. Kirszbaum
of September 21st, 1939

The playoffs took place in Łódź. Kopel beamed joy when he saw the Kutners go to the finals with some success. We reached the fourth place. Our rival was the "*Morgensztern*" of Cracow. It had the same number of points. Both teams competed again – we achieved to win by six points. After Warsaw and Łódź, the Kutners occupy the third place. Kopel embraced our athletes. Such a success! Kutno got three places for Vienna: Zaken Asz, Grinbaum Chaim and Kopel Kirszbaum.

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To conclude the Olympics, there was a big performance at the Vienna Opera. Speeches by recognized socialist leaders, competitions of athletes. I sat with Kirszbaum in one lodge and remind him of yesterday's event: during the final march and appeal to the sports field, the athletes were required to march under their national or state flag. We, the colleagues of "*Morgensztern*", have been confused: whom should we follow – the blue-and-white flag of the Israeli "*HaPoel*" or the red-and-white flag of the Polish delegation? The end result was that we were left like a herd of sheep without a shepherd... following none. Kopel was saddened by the reminder, it could be seen that he had strongly experienced last night's event... At the same time, he told me that something similar had happened to me. As I was not a member of the "*Bund*", the party committee in Kutno blocked my trip to Vienna. It was only thanks to the intervention of Kopel in Warsaw that the decree was repealed.

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After returning from Vienna, the work grew even more. This also led to a revival and renewal in the activity of "*Maccabi*", headed by Holcman. The non-Kutner instructor Miller showed a lot of skills and he drew the audience to "*Maccabi*". Youth workers, students and people from the left circles were entering the club and had influence there. Particularly impressive was their uncommon Lag BaOmer celebration, with a march along the streets of Kutno, to the sound of their thunderous orchestra. Only the differences between Holcman and the opposition – Pinchas Krol, Ozhel (Nesher), Fajber, Klingbajl and others about green-and-white, or blue-and-white¹, as well as the personal ambitions and squabbles of the board members Frankenjajn, Goldman, Holcman, Korn, Rojer, led to a split. Frankenjajn was supported by all non-Zionist elements. "*Maccabi*" changed its name to "Jewish Society for Gymnastics and Sports" (Polish acronym: Z.T.G.S.). As the Zionist-affiliated board members did not support the union, Frankenjajn was later dismissed by the staroste, with the motive that he was a leftist. There was a suspicion that he had probably been reported to the authorities...

The newly formed "*Maccabi*" in 1932/33 was already purely Zionist, did not include any left-wing elements. In its sporting activities, it tried to reconcile with the "*Morgensztern*".

Even in "*Morgensztern*" the integrity and unity were not preserved. The Bundist board removed the athletes who did not want to declare themselves party members. Kopel opposed such actions by the party. In 1932, negotiations were resumed with Kopel to re-enter the "*Morgensztern*". Kopel was pleased with the changes, he proposed three places on the board: Moritz Szapszewicz as secretary, Grinbaum – cashier and Sztift Abraham – responsible for orchestra. In addition to this: Freund Anshel – conductor of orchestras, Bricman Abraham – leader of the chess section, Tymienko – instruments, Klingbajl and Edrza Fuks – table tennis section. The party committee of the "*Bund*" did not agree with Kopel – and the latter stepped out of party committee as a sign of protest, and was even angry against his brother Herman... Kopel was first and foremost interested by *athletes* and not by party members. That explains why he was pardoned. We re-entered "*Morgensztern*" as a team – and a new spirit had enlivened the different sections. The fellow Freund and Sztift have shown a great deal of knowledge and initiative in renewing the orchestra.

In sports life on the Jewish street, just as in political-partisan life, there was competition and struggle for influence. The renewed "*Maccabi*" really wanted to rival with "*Morgensztern*". Perhaps they would have succeeded if the head of their organization had been such a dynamic and loyal person, as Kopel. The coach of "*Maccabi*", Albert Kain, was a good footballer, devoted to his work and with

the help of his substitute Yukush Grajder, did a lot for the club, only when a football competition came, Saturday afternoon, when most of the youth and seniors came to watch the victory, or defeat of "his" club, depending on the sympathies they had – the "*Morgensztern*" usually got out winning. No one considered it was a victory of Bundism over Zionism...

The coach of the "*Morgensztern*" football player was Moshe Moszkowicz (now in the United States). He did not always succeed with Kopel in sports matters, but his instructive abilities were not denied by anyone. He has prepared good ball players, such as Chana Blum, Noah Teplicki, Pinchas Markus, Moshe Blank, Wolf Manczik. And about goalkeeper Mendel Żurawski (in Haifa), legends are literally circulating because of his extraordinary talent to capture the ball. He was called "Gypsy" and the antisemitic players came out of the field grinding teeth when Mendel was goalkeeping...

The chess section under the leadership of Abraham Bricman and Shimon Płocker also received considerable recognition. It had some 40 chess-players.

Speaking of the activity of "*Morgensztern*" – the ripe fruit of Kopel's efforts, it is worth mentioning the exemplary group of men, to which belonged Zaken Asz, Grinbaum, Yosel Goldberg, Shlomo Kowalski, Yurek Ogurek, Noah Teplicki.

Kopel gave the rhythmic group of 16 girls (aged 15-16), headed by Bine Kozak, a lot of his time and energy. He traveled to Warsaw to watch the best rhythmic master, in order to pass it on to the section to his club. The young girls' public appearances aroused general enthusiasm. Even the chief instructor of the Warsaw "*Morgensztern*", who once attended such performances in Kutno, did not have enough words of praise for the grace and dedication of the young athletes. And Kopel shone with joy, feeling happy that his work was giving such results.

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While poverty prevailed in the homes, bitterness reigned there – Jewish youths found joy and encouragement in the various sports sections and exercises of "*Morgensztern*". Kopel knew about it. His joy was even stronger, his pride even greater, that sport managed to distract the youth from the great reality. He exerted himself superhumanly at every public outing of the club, caring for the smallest detail, "breaking his head" for the costumes, tools and above all – the care for the person. His superiority was seen on a Saturday afternoon in July, when 500-600 athletes marched to the sports field through the streets of the city. Even the pious fathers and mothers were aroused by their children, as they marched to the beat of the music. Everything was noisy, joyful, bold – and Kopel shone with happiness...

Honor his memory!

¹ TN: Zionists.