

## THE SPORTS-CLUB "HAKOACH" IN ŁĘCZYCA

*by Zalman BORNSZTAJN, Australia*

One of the bright spots in town was the sports-club "*HaKoach*". It was not easy to build this non-partisan sports organization, which was very popular and beloved by everyone. An organization where anyone, regardless of party affiliation, could enter. The color of her banner was also impartial: purple-white.

After the First World War, attempts were made to create the "*HaKoach*". However, there were obstacles among the religious Jews. They held that a Jewish boy should only study in *cheder*.

After years of efforts and efforts by a group of dedicated workers, such as: Yosef Kotek, Aharon Rabinowicz, Ber Beatus, Henech Ampulinski, Moshe-Leib Bornsztajn, Mordechai Bzrezinski (the first manager), in 1928, they managed to open the sports-association on the Ozorków Street, in the house of Abraham-Nissen Bloch, who was later rejected by the chassidim for giving the premises. He was not allowed to pray until he had to promise that boys and girls would not be together during the exercises...

The slogan of "*HaKoach*" was: "A healthy body – a healthy spirit"! People really went to the physical exercises with great enthusiasm. Boys and girls deliciously learned the laws of gymnastics, under the guidance of instructor Abraham Metalena, a native of Kutno. The results of the work did not wait long: beautiful and impressive were the sporting celebrations, which took place from time to time, in the open air or on the stage. "*HaKoach*" has produced a number of good athletes, such as: Leibel Kenig, Yerachmiel Kilbert, Yosef Cielski, Arie Lifszyc, Moshe Glicensztajn, A. Opoczinski, Benie Jastrzębski and others. The girls also excelled in sports celebrations.

In order to maintain the interest of the youth and the parents, the "*HaKoach*" from time to time invited lecturers to speak about the important importance of sports for the Jewish youth. I especially remember a paper by Dr. Lesser from Kraków, who was a member of the Central Committee of the "*Maccabi*" Union in Poland. It was an interesting lecture, which left a strong impression.

Apart from the sports celebrations, in the summer people used to make trips to other cities and places, even as far as Ciechocinek, where the Jewish musicians Gold and Petersburski played. Very often people used to drive or walk in Sierpow's forest, which was not far from Łęczyca and Ozorków. The youth of both cities used to meet there and spend the day comfortably.

It is especially worth mentioning the Sunday entertainment in Meilech's garden, with its own orchestra, buffet, various attractions. The Jewish clubs of the surrounding towns are also invited to join us and we often go to them for celebrations and entertainment.

Like everywhere else, soccer had become a popular sport for us. When playing with non-Jewish clubs, the atmosphere was tense. Mostly we play with Jewish clubs from Kutno, Ozorków, Zgierz etc.

One time, I remember, we played with the 37<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Kutno. We had invited three guest-players from Łódź "*Maccabi*": Frenkel, Bumets and Sinaderko. (Efraim Rogożyński, who played with me on this match, is also in Melbourne, as well as the player Abraham Benedik).

Not many Jewish clubs in Poland have their own orchestra. Therefore, the creation of such an orchestra by Łęczycer "*HaKoach*" was a great event. First and foremost, we owe it to the fact that we had the musician Shimon Brodzicki, a man with a lot of enthusiasm and patience. The musicians themselves paid a significant portion of what the instruments costed. The rest of the Jewish population was pleased. One can imagine the festive mood when the orchestra is out on the street for the first time. Young and old, small and large, came to see and hear this great miracle – their own Jewish orchestra!...

The well-known antisemite Szymański in the city closed his attic, when the Jewish orchestra marched and played on the streets of Łęczyca.

The Łęczycer "*HaKoach*" and his orchestra soon became known in the surrounding province as well. We

were often invited to their celebrations and concerts.

An episode of such trips in the towns, I remember:



Staff of gymnastics-club "*HaKoach*" in Łęczyca.  
From left: Binem Herman, Zalman Bornsztajn, Berel Szkolnik, Yosef Katek. Sitting: Zalman Neuhaus, Moshe Jakubowicz, Mordechai Brzezinski

In Łask, near Pabianice, when the orchestra was playing an overture called "The Polish Queen", the representative of the Łask club approached us and gave us a bottle of beer for the beautiful march we were playing.

On my way to Australia, in July 1938, I wished people to experience good, although the thought of the dark clouds looming over the European horizon, which came much faster than expected, came to my mind. But we, Łęczycers, the small group of survivors who are scattered all over the world, those who have lived and worked together in the "*HaKoach*" will never forget the wonderful years of Jewish activity, of an enthusiastic Jewish youth so prematurely cut off, along with our closest and dearest.

Honor their memory!