

The Olympians from Iwonicz-Zdrój

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Summary

Iwonicz-Zdrój – a small health resort located in south-eastern Poland is also an important ski centre with a long, rich tradition and significant achievements. Thanks to practising skiing in families and passing on of a sporty lifestyle from generation to generation, this small town can boast Olympians who have represented Poland at the most important sporting event in the world for twenty years.

Keywords: Iwonicz-Zdrój, IKN "Górnik" Iwonicz-Zdrój, Paweł Zygmunt, Łukasz Szczurek, Mariusz Jakiela, Olympic Games

Introduction

Iwonicz-Zdrój is located in south-eastern Poland, in the northern part of Beskid Niski (Low Beskid), in the range of External West Carpathians. The town lies in a V-shaped, narrow valley of Iwonicki Potok (Iwonicz Stream) that springs from the southern slopes of Wólca Góra (Wólca Mountain) and Przymiarki. The upper part of the valley is approximately twenty five metres wide, reaching one hundred metres at the centre of the resort. Dolina Iwonickiego Potoku (Iwonicz Stream Valley), in which the resort is located, is surrounded by hills not exceeding six hundred fifty metres above sea level. [Walter-Croneck 1984].

The climate of Iwonicz-Zdrój (considering the above sea level height) falls within the submontane zone, which includes areas from three hundred to five hundred metres above sea level. The average annual temperature is about 7.1°C. Snow cover in Iwonicz-Zdrój lasts more than three months, with average annual duration of one hundred and one point three days [Walter-Croneck 1984].

Therefore, one can say that the mountainous terrain and the climate facilitate the development of winter sports.

The first mention of Iwonicz comes from the first half of the fifteenth century, although the traces of human settlement date back to the Neolithic ages. In the second part of the fifteenth century, Iwonicz was already a rich and densely populated settlement. The reason for that was the fact that two important trade routes, the Hungarian and Subcarpathian ones, crossed in the vicinity of the town. It is quite possible that the development of Iwonicz in that period was influenced by medicinal

mineral springs located in the town. The year fifteen seventy-eight should be treated as the symbolic date of the foundation of the Iwonicz health resort. It was then that the court physician of Stefan Batory, Wojciech Oczko, mentioned Iwonicz in his scientific thesis as one of the spa regions in the country where medicinal springs were located [Michalak 1984, Michalak 1995].

At the end of the eighteenth century, when the resort was falling into ruin because of a difficult political and economic situation, Teofil Załuski decided to buy it. The researchers of Iwonicz history agree that during the rule of the Załuskis, Iwonicz became an important Carpathian health resort. In eighteen twenty-five, Iwonicz becomes the property of Teofil's son, Karol Załuski, who began to renovate the facilities with the help of his wife, Amelia, and brother, Józef. Józef ordered a chemical analysis of the Iwonicz springs. After Karol died, Amelia continued her husband's work and further developed the town with the help of Józef Załuski. She sent her sons: the eldest Michał, and then Karol, Stanisław and Iwo, to the Theresian Academy in Vienna, where they were taught foreign languages and physical culture. The Academy had its own swimming pools, riding halls and gymnasiums. It also hired the best professors and prefects. In the second half of the nineteenth century, during his visit to the town, Józef Dietl gave indications as to the further modernisation of the resort. Amelia Załuska died in eighteen fifty-eight and her son, Michał Załuski, took over the management of the resort, continuing its development until he died in eighteen ninety-three [Kwilecki 1993, Michalak 1984, *Ilustrowany informator przewodnik Iwonicza-Zdroju i okolicy* 1939].

The dynamic growth of the town was interrupted by the outbreak of the Great War, during which part of the spa facilities were destroyed. Therefore, the first years of independence were devoted to restoring Iwonicz from the war damages. During the entire interwar period new mansions, guest houses and therapeutic institutions were built. The quality of services offered in Iwonicz can be proved by the fact that from the twenty-fourth October to the twenty November nineteen thirty-four, Janusz Kusociński, who was struggling with a knee injury at that time, underwent a treatment at the resort [Michalak 1995, Aleksiewicz 1999].

The Second World War brought destruction to the resort and death of many of its inhabitants. In June nineteen forty-four, based on a decree of PKWN (Polish Committee of National Liberation) on the agricultural reform, the title to the property of the Załuski family – the owners of the resort – was transferred to the State Treasury [Michalak 1984].

Immediately after the war, renovation of the resort facilities started. The removal and reparation of war damages lasted until nineteen forty-seven. The next steps included extension of the transport infrastructure and construction of new medical facilities. Opening of the scientific and research centres of the Medical Academy of Lublin at “Excelsior” in nineteen fifty-six and of an institute of natural medicine in nineteen eighty-two had a significant importance for further development of the health resort facilities. These have been recognised as one of the most modern facilities of the kind in the country and could compare to similar ones abroad. Political changes introduced in ninety eighty-nine caused a significant decrease in the number of foreign guests and in the middle of ninety nineties, the number of visitors reached thirty thousand. Nowadays approximately fifty thousand people visit the town annually for treatment and leisure purposes [Michalak 1984, Michalak 1995].

The Development of Ski Sports

The Załuskis, who renovated the resort, were also huge advocates of physical culture on Iwonicz land. The passion for physical exercise was inculcated in the members of the Załuski family from the earliest age. In order to safeguard her children’s health, Amelia applied methods used in England, consisting in physical activity outdoors, exercise, horseback riding and baths. During their education at schools in England or Austria, members of the Załuski family participated in school sports competitions or watched various sporting events and tried to introduce them also in Iwonicz, for the purpose of making the visitors’ stay more enjoyable [Włodarczyk 1999].

Iwonicz-Zdrój was the main ski centre, apart from Ustrzyki Dolne in Subcarpathia and the development of ski sports at the resort had a predominant influence

on the development of these disciplines in the region of Subcarpathia and Middle Carpathians [Bartuch 1995, Bartuch 1984, Michalak 1975, Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995].

The people of Iwonicz had their first contact with skis before the First World War. It was due to the fact that a few locals used to serve at the Austro-Hungarian army in the far Tirol. One of them happened to be Ludwik Murman, who served at the special formations of the Austro-Hungarian army in the Alps in nineteen and five to nineteen and seven. His ability to ski also proved useful in Siberia, where he was sent as a war prisoner after the capitulation of the Fortress of Przemyśl during the First World War. After he came back from the war in nineteen nineteen, Murman decided to carve a pair of small skis for his son, Kazimierz, and teach him to “make his first steps using them”. Therefore, one can say that skiing was not only the necessity of war time [Michalak 1985].

The first pair of skis was brought to the resort from Zakopane in nineteen twenty-one by Antoni Kenar, a student of Stanisław Barabasz from the Lumber Industry School in Zakopane. He and three brothers, Szymon, Walenty and Bronisław Turek from Lubatowa, who also were students of Barabasz, are considered to be the first skiers of Iwonicz. Their skiing feats on the hills of Iwonicz aroused a great interest among the local youth. It is also worth mentioning that Antoni Kellar participated two times at the Olympic Art Contest in the sculpture section, in nineteen thirty-two, when he received an honourable mention, and in nineteen forty-eight. In nineteen twenty-two, Kazimierz and Stanisław Murman, went to Zakopane together with Antoni Zychiewicz, where they watched some skiers, and returned home with a second pair of skis. Those two pairs of genuine skis from Zakopane were used by the local skiers to produce similar ones. Skis were manufactured by the local carpenters: Stanisław Tomkiewicz and Kazimierz Boczar, as well as by Szymon and Walenty Turek from the neighbouring village of Lubatowa. However, those skis were relatively expensive for the times, which is why many young skiing enthusiasts took up making skis by themselves. They used to be made of young ash tree wood and mill bars served as ski sticks. Instead of ski bindings, leather straps laced through holes in the skis or torn shoes nailed to the skis were used. As there were no special boots, everyone used whatever shoes they had, including casual shoes and calves. The manufacture of ski boots was initiated by Edward Zygmunt and Jan Deręg, also using boots brought from Zakopane as a model. In the winter of nineteen twenty-four, the first ski jump hill was built close to the village of Wólka, near Przymiarki, and a slalom slope was developed on the northern slope of the Glorieta Mountain [Michalak 1975, Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995].

At the turn of nineteen twenty-four and nineteen twenty-five, upon the initiative of Kazimierz Murman, Antoni Zychiewicz and Antoni Rygiel, a skiing section of Polskie Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie (Polish Tatra Society), with a branch in Iwonicz-Zdrój was brought to life. Bogdan Załuski, co-proprietor of the resort, was elected the first chairman of the newly founded club. Young skiers needed a rich patron and that is why Załuski was chosen. The first years of the club's existence were devoted mainly to sporting and recreational activities, including teaching skiing and organising competitions for the local community (those events were more of showcases of cross-country skiing, ski jumping, slalom and skijoring), as well as to the promotion of skiing and tourism through the organisation of road trips and crosses [Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995].

With time, the ambition of young skiers was to compete with skiers representing other clubs. Convinced of their own abilities and strength, they were determined to confront their results with those of skiers representing advanced ski clubs. Such was the context for the foundation of Iwonicz Klub Narciarski (Iwonicz Ski Club) in nineteen twenty-eight, however it still retained its relation to the skiing section of Polskie Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie, thanks to which the members were granted discounted rail tickets. That is why IKN athletes competed in the SN PTT team colours until nineteen thirty-nine. The first chairman of the newly founded club was the above-mentioned Bogdan Załuski, and a paramilitary and sports organisation, "Związek Strzelecki" (Shooting Association), assumed the patronage of the club. IKN's relation with "Związek Strzelecki" has opened wide opportunities to participate in many skiing events to its members. Combining skiing and shooting can be considered as the foundation for the core discipline of Iwonicz Klub Narciarski of today, i.e. biathlon [Michalak 1975, Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995].

At the beginning of nineteen thirties, the number of skiers in Iwonicz increased significantly. Young people from neighbouring locations, such as Lubatowa, started joining the club. Closer contacts with other ski clubs and with the members of national team, such as Bronisław Czech, the Marusarz brothers, Jan Kula and Stanisław Roj, were initiated. The above-mentioned athletes took part in the competitions organised at the resort and trained the local sportspeople, while Bronisław Czech designated places for the new ski jump hill and slalom slope on Góra Przedziwna (Przedziwna Mountain). Both facilities were erected in nineteen thirty-one and the ski jump hill was named after Bronisław Czech. Before the war, skiers from Iwonicz had successful performances in competitions held in the Lviv voivodship and Zakopane, often being ranked among the first ten [Michalak 1975, Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995].

The Second World War did not prevent the skiers from practising their preferred disciplines in Iwonicz,

even though a large part of the sports facilities have been destroyed and the club suspended its activity. Immediately after the war was over in nineteen forty-five, Iwonicz Klub Narciarski was reactivated. At first, it was called "Związkowiec", later "Nafta" and "Unia", to eventually take the name "Górnik" in nineteen fifty-one, which survived to this day [Michalak 1975].

Starting from the nineteen thirties until the present day, the skiers of Iwonicz keep ranking high, participating in sporting events on the national, as well as the international level. Since the establishment of the biathlon section in nineteen seventy-eight till twenty thirteen inclusive, the biathletes of Iwonicz have won fifty seven medals during national competitions: nine at the Polish Senior Championships (five gold, one silver and three bronze), seventeen at the Polish Junior Championships (four gold, six silver and seven bronze) and thirty one at the National Youth Spartakiad (later renamed Olympics) (ten gold, thirteen silver and eight bronze). Furthermore, biathletes of Iwonicz were also placed at the World Senior Championships, starting from the second ten. The skiers from Iwonicz have also been successful in Nordic and Alpine skiing, winning an array of medals during local, regional and national competitions between nineteen twenties and nineteen nineties. Among the most important of them are silver and gold medals, as well as seventh and ninth places at the World Student Championships (nineteen fifties), a bronze medal at giant slalom at the Polish Junior Championships, fourth place at downhill at the World Junior Championships, bronze medals at ten kilometres during the Polish Senior Championships (nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies). In the nineteen eighties, the skiers from Iwonicz won two medals (gold and bronze) at the Polish Junior Championships and two bronze medals at the National Youth Spartakiad. At the beginning of the nineteen nineties, Grzegorz Zygmunt won a silver medal at Nordic combined during the National Youth Spartakiad and also was placed fifth and sixth at the Polish Junior Championships. A many years' tradition, often cultivated in families, significant domestic and international achievements, and a terrain that facilitates the development of winter sports resulted in the small Subcarpathian health resort having participants of the Winter Olympic Games among its inhabitants [Michalak 1985, Michalak 1995, *Echo gminy Iwonicz-Zdrój* 2007, issue 1, p. 30; 2007, issue 5, p. 29; 2008, issue 12, p. 30; 2008, issue 17, p. 30; 2009, issue 25, p. 30; 2010, issue 36, p. 30; 2010, issue 37, p. 30; 2010, issue 42, p. 29; 2011, issue 47, p. 29; 2011, issue 51, p. 29; 2012, issue 59, p. 20; 2012, issue 60, p. 18; 2012, issue 63, p. 16; 2013, issue 70, p. 16; 2013, issue 71, p. 23; 2013, issue 75, p. 22; 2013, issue 77, p. 21, materials from M. Jakięła, an interview with Łukasz Szczurek from 18.05. and 24.05. 2014].

Paweł Zygmunt

Born on fifteenth July nineteen seventy-two in Krosno. He has been involved in sports since his youngest years, as his parents and grandfather used to practice winter sports, too. His father, Tadeusz (classic duathlon) was the leading competitor in the region, winning medals at the national level. He was even nominated to represent Poland at the Olympic Games in Grenoble in nineteen sixty-eight, but was fourth in the qualifying round and eventually did not make it to France (Włodarczyk, 2006, <http://www.olimpijski.pl/pl/bio/2366,zygmunt-pawel-jan.html>).

At the age of three, Paweł was given his first skis, and as a five year-old, he would ski down the landing area of the ski jump hill in Iwonicz-Zdrój. His adventure with sports started under the guidance of his father, who also was his first trainer. The first club in his career was IKN "Górnik", where he initially practiced Nordic combined, but after suffering an injury at a ski jump hill, he switched to cross-country skiing (Włodarczyk, 2006, <http://www.olimpijski.pl/pl/bio/2366,zygmunt-pawel-jan.html>).

Having graduated from the elementary school, Paweł Zygmunt tried to enrol at the School of Sports Championship in Zakopane, where he wanted to continue his skiing career. However, he stressed that partly due to a misunderstanding, he was given an Unsatisfactory mark in performance tests, which resulted in an immediate disqualification, but he did not pick up his papers from the school and, during the enrolment phase for a camp in Wałcz, the Olympian-to-be was notified that he could participate in that camp. He did not hesitate, went to Wałcz and in this way, he became a student at the School of Sports Championship in Zakopane, initially specialising in cross-country skiing (*Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VII).

A turning point in his career was the introduction of the skating style to cross-country skiing by a Finnish skier, Pauli Siitonen. Skating trainer Marek Stanuch first noticed Zygmunt when he made a bet with his friends that he would swim four kilometres in a pool filled with freezing cold water. He won the bet, fell ill, but as mentioned above, Stanuch noticed him, remembering his stubbornness and persistence. During one of the joint trainings for skiers and skaters, trainer Stanuch suggested that Paweł should try his hand at the rink, to which he eagerly consented and achieved the second best result in a group of boys who had practised skating for a few years then. And that is how Paweł Zygmunt's skating adventure started (Włodarczyk, 2006, *Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

In the nineteen eighty-eight/eighty-nine season, Paweł – already as a speed skater, – competed in decathlon, where he won the second place in the general standing. One year later, during the same event, he took the

first place. In the nineteen ninety/ninety-one season, Zygmunt was second at the Polish Junior Championships in decathlon, made his debut in the World Cup, and during the European Junior Championships, he won both the individual and the team competition in decathlon. Another season brought victories at the Polish Junior Championships at all distances, as well as the fifth place at the World Junior Championships. The skater from Iwonicz was also offered a place in the broad team for the Olympic Games in Albertville (Włodarczyk, 2006, *Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

Throughout his career, Paweł Zygmunt made continuous appearances at the Polish Senior Championships from nineteen ninety one/ninety two till twenty oh-five/oh-six. He won a total number of sixty seven medals, including forty three gold, nineteen silver and five bronze ones [Włodarczyk 2006].

Despite the many achievements on the national level, international success only came in twenty oh-two and twenty oh-three. It was then that he won a bronze medal at the distance of ten thousand metres at the World Championships, as well as silver and bronze medals, at ten thousand and five thousand metres, respectively, at the European Championships. He explained that this discipline required a great deal of patience, and success did not come after a month or even a year, and every injury that lasted a few weeks ruined the whole season. He also does not hide the fact that his wife, Katarzyna, significantly contributed to his success in that season, making him believe in himself and see things from a more offensive perspective, so that his competitors would respect him, as it was them who had more to lose (*Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

Paweł Zygmunt represented Poland four times at the Olympics. In his debut in Lillehammer, he ranked fortieth at fifteen hundred metres and eighteenth at five thousand metres. Four years later in Nagano, he achieved a better result compared to the previous Olympics, finishing at the thirty fourth place, and took the eighteenth place again at five thousand metres. In Salt Lake City in twenty oh two, he was fourteenth both at five thousand and ten thousand metres, those being his best results at the Olympics. In twenty oh six, in Torino, Zygmunt finished eighteenth at five thousand metres [Włodarczyk 2006].

Zygmunt himself is reluctant to recall his participation at the Olympics. Not having managed to win an Olympic medal is like a thorn in his flesh.

He admits that he went to Lillehammer to learn, he even does not remember the five thousand metres run, while during the second run, he fell down a few dozens of metres before the finish, thus losing his chances to be placed among the first ten. Zygmunt's unsuccessful appearance in Norway had nothing to do with his perky announcements before the Games. At that time,

Paweł believed that ambition, stubbornness and a fighting mood could work miracles. But they did not. According to the journalists, the fall at the fifteen hundred metres distance was symbolic in nature, given the context of the entire Polish Olympic team's performance. The Olympian from Iwonicz could not accept the opinions on his performance, which he considered unfair. It was then that he promised that he would yet show his teeth (*Pejzaż Polski*, 2001, issue 50/15, p. 31, *Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

Zygmunt recalls the preparations for the Olympics in Nagano as one huge scandal. He practiced individually and covered his trainers' costs on his own. Therefore, the sole fact that he made an appearance in Japan can be perceived as a success (*Pejzaż Polski*, 2001, issue 50/15, p. 31, *Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

After Nagano, Paweł Zygmunt was fed up. Speed skating was not a very popular sport in Poland at that time, there were and there still are no modern indoor speed skating rinks, and finding a sponsor even for the best athlete was a big problem. After the Olympics in Nagano, the speed skater from Iwonicz started to think of settling down, graduated from the University of Physical Education in Kraków, specialising in skating and skiing (*Pejzaż Polski*, 2001, issue 50/15, p. 31).

The Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in twenty oh-two were to bring a huge success, but they turned out to be another failure. According to Zygmunt, there were mistakes in the organisation of preparations and he was surprised with the hard and fast ice on the Olympic rink. As a result, during training he achieved split times worth a medal, and three rounds before end, he would lose his stamina. Those were the blackest days in his career, he said (*Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

During the Olympics in Torino, Paweł did not focus on the individual performance and partly blamed himself for the fact that the team did not qualify for the Olympic run, as there was no collective spirit in the team. After the Olympics, Paweł Zygmunt decided to finish his sports career (*Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

After the termination of his career, the Iwonicz speed skater took up sports diplomacy. He was a member of the Technical Committee of the International Skating Union, where he was responsible for the issues related to speed skating. Moreover, he was also a Board Member of the Polish Association of Speed Skating and the Polish Olympic Committee, and he took part in the sittings of the Parliamentary Commission of Physical Culture and Sport. Since twenty oh-one, together with his wife, Katarzyna, he has been organising the "Sport Against Addictions" event. To date, the event took place in Iwonicz-Zdrój and Krynica-Zdrój, among others. The Zygmunts believe that such events with good music, dancing and sports competition may help many young people, and

the mass practice of sport should serve the same purpose as social activities directed against drug addiction once did. For Paweł Zygmunt the winners are those who participate in such events, as that is the right way of living (*Pejzaż Polski*, 2001, issue 50/15, p. 31, *Przegląd Sportowy*, 2006, issue 262, p. VIII).

Łukasz Szczurek

Born on first April nineteen eighty-eight in Krosno. He was not even four years old, when he put on short plastic skis for the first time. His first movements were quite clumsy, but as his father, Piotr Szczurek recalls, he enjoyed it a lot. That is how he grew up, jumping on improvised ski jump hills made by his older colleagues. When his sister, Agnieszka, decided to join IKN "Górniki", the then seven-year-old future Olympian went with her just to keep her company, but after they came back home, he started nagging his parents that they allow him to visit them club together with his sister. No one needed to convince them, as his father used to practice shooting and biathlon. Since his earliest years, he would look at the photos, medals and diplomas of his father's, dreaming of winning in sports competitions by himself. In the neighbourhood where he grew up, there were many people who practised winter sports. After speaking to the club's trainers, his parents came to the conclusion that Łukasz should visit the club. Trainer Tadeusz Zygmunt even prepared his son Paweł's first skis and, even though those were the smallest skis in the club, they were still too big for little Łukasz. His sports adventure started with Nordic combined, but he recalls that once, while standing on the threshold of a ski jump hill, he started to be afraid. It was then that he decided to move to the cross-country skiing section (Szczurek, 2006, an interview with Ł. Szczurek from 11.05.2014, <http://www.lukasz-szczurek.pl/index.php?id=biografia>).

After graduating from elementary school and some wins at the UKS (Student Sports Club) Polish Championships, Łukasz decided to enrol in the Sports Middle School in Iwonicz. That is when he started his professional biathlon training. His first significant success was the fourth place at the international *Olympic Youth* competitions [Szczurek 2006, an interview with Ł. Szczurek from 18.05.2014].

From twenty oh-four to twenty oh-seven, he participated in the National Youth Olympics, taking podium places every time and winning fourteen medals (ten gold, two silver and two bronze). Then Szczurek competed at the Polish Senior Championships, winning sixteen medals (five gold, seven silver and four bronze) until twenty thirteen. One of the most beautiful moments for the biathlete of Iwonicz was winning a silver medal in twenty oh-six, and a gold one a year later at the World Junior

Championships. Apart from that, Łukasz also participated in relay runs at the World Senior Championships, as well as in the World Cup [an interview with Ł. Szczurek from 11.05. and 18.05.2014].

His first appearance at the Olympic Games as a representative of Poland took place in twenty and ten, in Vancouver. Together with Tomasz Sikora, they were the only male representatives of the Polish biathlon. Łukasz was fifty ninth in the individual run and eighty fifth in the sprint. Four years later, in Sochi, he ranked seventy seventh in his first sprint run. Afterwards he said that he did not do too well at shooting and was still struggling to acclimatise. Then he participated in the twenty kilometres individual run. He finished fifty first. After that he participated in another two runs. In the mixed relay, the team composed of Krystyna Pałka, Magdalena Gwizdoń, Łukasz Szczurek and Krzysztof Pływaczyk took the fourteenth place. According to Łukasz, the last run was one of his worst moments. Before the third change to be started by Szczurek, the relay ranked third, but eventually finished fourteenth. As for now, the last run during the Olympics for the biathlete of Iwonicz was the men's relay composed of Krzysztof Pływaczyk, Łukasz Szczurek, Łukasz Słonina and Rafał Lepel. The Polish team took nineteenth place (an interview with Ł. Szczurek from 18.05.2014, <http://www.przegladsportowy.pl/igrzyska-olimpijskie/soczi-2014,lukasz-szczurek-po-pierwszym-startcie-na-io-w-soczi,artykul,420515,1,1047.html>).

The most interesting experience for Łukasz in his biathlon career to date was the participation in the Olympic Games and training at the same facilities with competitors such as Ole Einar Bjoerndalen, Justyna Kowalczyk, Marit Bjoergen and many other athletes from the top of the world biathlon and cross-country skiing. The sports role model for the biathlete of Iwonicz is Ole Einar Bjoerndalen. Łukasz admires his perfectionism and professional attitude in trying to be perfect in whatever he does. For him, Bjoerndalen is the king of biathlon. Łukasz strives to cross the borders of pain that accompanies him during each run, because only then, he underlines, one can think of achieving a good result [an interview with Ł. Szczurek from 11.05.2014].

Mariusz Jakiela

Born on twenty fourth August nineteen seventy-six in Jasło. Lives in Lubatowa, a locality that belongs to the Iwonicz-Zdrój commune. Like with the two Olympians described above, Mariusz has been keen of sports since his early years. Family tradition was the reason behind it. In Mariusz Jakiela's family his uncle was a good cross-country skier, and a cousin of his was a very good biathlete, and he admitted that it were the cousin's medals that motivated him. Later on, being a young competitor and knowing the results of the most prominent

IKN "Górnik" figures, he wanted to match their achievements. When he was five, his father introduced him to Kazimierz Zima, who was a skiing teacher at the school of Lubatowa. It was him who gave him his first cross-country skis – the wooden Hermeses. In that times, he recalls, almost everyone tried their hand at cross-country skiing. His adventure with biathlon started during his final year of elementary school. It was the unpredictable nature of this sports discipline that tempted him most. The feeling of having skis attached to his legs and a rifle in his hand was the motivation to challenge himself [an interview with M. Jakiela from 17.05.2014].

Two medals (a gold and a bronze one) during the Polish Junior Championships in nineteen ninety-three can be considered Jakiela's first significant achievements. Two years later, he won two bronze medals at the same event and then went on to win the fourth place at the European Junior Championships. In nineteen ninety-six, he was second at the Polish Junior Championships and took the eighth place at the World Junior Championship in the relay run. A year later, the biathlete from Lubatowa was placed just behind the podium at the Polish Senior Championships and in nineteen ninety-eight won a bronze medal at the same event [an interview with M. Jakiela from 17.05.2014].

In nineteen ninety-eight, Mariusz Jakiela was chosen to represent Poland at the Winter Olympic Games in Nagano as a reserve competitor. According to the biathlete from Lubatowa, the Olympics are the grandest event for any athlete, a magical competition and great competitors all in one place. He was twenty one at that time and thought that the best was yet to come. Although a reserve competitor during the whole Olympics, he silently hoped to be given a chance to compete, but trainer Aleksander Wierietielny had already decided on his team that won the fifth place in the relay run. At that point, the trainer promised that Mariusz would compete in the team run during the World Championships, but he did not keep his word [an interview with M. Jakiela from 17.05.2014].

He admitted that the decision to terminate his career was the most difficult one in his life, in spite of being aware that everything that has its beginning, has its end. To Mariusz a hero is one who is said to be a 'good person', for 'perfect' does not exist. In his professional sports career, his motto was the following: "God put the man at the starting point and he constantly heads to the finish, even though the road is uphill or sometimes he deviates from it" [an interview with M. Jakiela from 17.05.2014].

Upon termination of his sports career, Jakiela became a physical education teacher at a school in Lubatowa and a trainer at IKN "Górnik" Iwonicz-Zdrój. He works with young skiers and biathletes, passing the bug on to new generations [an interview with M. Jakiela from 17.05.2014].

Closing paragraph

Starting from the early years of the twentieth century and up to this day, despite the turbulent history and various issues of the organisational and financial nature, the Iwoniczki Klub Narciarski "Górnik" Iwonicz-Zdrój ski club is raising another generations of athletes who represent Poland and the town of Iwonicz during sports events on a global level, from European and World Championships to the Olympics, where there has been a representative of Poland originating from Iwonicz every time for twenty years. This testifies to the deep-rooted sports tradition among the members of the Iwonicz community, as well as to the awareness of the fact that physical culture is an important element of human life, which allows to live many unforgettable moments and become part of the history of Olympism, and the Olympic Games are the most important sports event in the world.

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