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Polish football in Hitler's shadow

Political implications of matches between the football teams of Poland and the Third Reich

Sport as a component of physical culture is part of the society's culture, alongside material culture, spiritual culture, symbolic culture, social culture, economic culture, political culture, historical culture, etc. As such, it is a component of culture and cannot be isolated from such concepts as society, politics or history. A sporting event is a cultural phenomenon, and with the rapid media development in the 20th and 21st centuries, as a result of which it resonates to an ever larger audience, it has become a spectacle bordering on mass culture, which also generates significant financial resources (the commercialisation of sport). The immense popularity of sport has thus become a matter of interest for states, which has consequently led to its politicisation. Sport has become political while a sporting event, under certain conditions, has also become a political event even though sporting competition itself is not political in nature.

The history of world sport shows many examples of how sport has been used for political purposes. The more than 100-year history of the most important organisation in world sport, the International Olympic Committee, which — according to Coubertin — was meant to be apolitical, testifies to an ongoing struggle with politics, with both negative and positive implications for sport (Jung 2010: 131 ff.).

The political nature of sport lies primarily in the legal definition of its function in the state and society. Sport also remains an important tool for accumulating social emotions. In contemporary international relations, sport has become a definable component of a state's soft power. Thus, international sporting competition can be a tool for the state to attain specific political goals in the international arena, which is also aided by sports diplomacy, an element

of public diplomacy. This kind of diplomatic activity often directly supports a state's foreign policy: as a means of shaping relations with other states, initiated and implemented by the state, and aimed at the authorities and public opinion of the country in question. This is the purpose of sporting exchanges, i.e. arranged international contacts between athletes, designed to create a positive image of countries in the societies involved in this type of relationship. In this context, this also applies to fans coming to sporting events, as well as to the issue of organising such events (Kobierecki 2018: 54-67).

These aspects will be the subject of an analysis, based on the historical and decision-making method, of five football matches between the national teams of the Second Polish Republic and Germany that took place during the Third German Reich period, between 1933 and 1938. Football was then (and still is) the most popular sport in both Poland and Germany. The article aims to show that already in the first half of the twentieth century, sport became a tool for articulating political intentions and subsequently fuel for states to achieve specific political goals in the international arena.

1933: Reconstruction of relations

The assumption of the Chancellorship on 30 January 1933 by NSDAP leader Adolf Hitler, which saw the beginning of Nazi rule in Germany, did not break the deadlock in Polish-German relations. This impasse perpetuated the poor state of relations from the 1920s, marked by almost constant crises and conflicts, the effects of the Treaty of Versailles and the imperative of German policy on the temporariness of the Polish state established as a result of the Great War. In the first months of 1933, the breakdown of mutual relations was caused, among other things, by the consequences of the Polish government's attempt to probe German intentions towards Poland by creating an atmosphere of so-called preventive war (Wojciechowski 1980: 15-32).

Under such conditions, social relations between the two countries had also become destabilised, including in the field of sport. Despite the generally poor relations, Polish-German sporting contacts continued to develop until the autumn of 1930. They were halted by Germany's introduction of an unofficial ban on its athletes competing against Polish athletes as a result of the tension in bilateral relations following Minister Gottfried Treviranus's speech in August 1930 on the 10th anniversary of the plebiscite in Warmia and Masuria. In this speech, he argued unequivocally for a revision of the German-Polish border, which triggered large anti-German demonstrations in Poland (Krasuski 1975:

353-354). The restrictions of the German sports authorities caused repercussions on the Polish side, which introduced an unofficial boycott of the German sports associations that enforced the ban (AAN, APRB, 2479: 167, 171-172).

After a temporary resumption of sporting contacts in 1932, the Nazi seizure of power brought a further setback. It was epitomised by the 1933 cancellation of the annual two-legged tie between the Polish and German Upper Silesian national teams due to the tense political relations between the two countries. The matches, which had been played since 1924, were referred to by the German press as *kleine Länderspiele* (small international matches) because of the great interest of fans in the divided Upper Silesian area (Czado, Lubina 2006a, 2006b). The initiated boycott of Polish sport was of a purely political nature (AAN, KGRPB, 114: 240-242).

After a few months in 1933, when both sides discovered the true intentions of the opponent (for Poland it was the axiom of basing its security on an equal balance of the friendliest possible relations with Germany and the Soviet Union, and for the Nazis it was the temporary postponement of plans to revise the border due to the weakness of the National Socialist system in the Reich), there was a 'thaw' in bilateral relations. This was initiated by a conversation between the Polish envoy to Germany Alfred Wysocki and A. Hitler in Berlin on 2 May 1933 (Wojciechowski 1980: 33 ff.).

Sporting contacts between the two countries began to improve towards the end of 1933 with a gradual recovery of political relations. That change was credited to the new Polish envoy to Germany, Józef Lipski, who arrived in Berlin in July 1933. He was the main executor of J. Piłsudski's political will to bring Poland and Germany closer together (AAN, ARPB, 2486: 23-27). A breakthrough came with the speech of the Third Reich's Minister of Sport (*Reichssportführer*) Hans von Tschammer und Osten in Danzig (now Gdańsk, Poland) in late September 1933. The minister stated that: "after consultation with the government officials, I strongly recommend that we establish sporting relations with Poland as soon as possible" ("Przegląd Sportowy", 4 October 1933: 6).

That decision was based on "the desire to tear down the border walls in physical education and thus to put sport in the service of bringing the two great nations together" (ibid., 16 December 1933: 3). This resulted in the organisation on 19 November 1933 of the first ever match between Poles and Germans on the politically sensitive territory of the Free City of Danzig. The Danzig-Warsaw game (2:0) took place four days after another meeting between A. Hitler and J. Lipski that was crucial for Polish-German relations as it introduced the idea of regulating bilateral relations through a political treaty. This progress also marked a rapprochement between the positions of the two

countries on the contentious Danzig issues (Wojciechowski 1980: 77 ff.). The match in Danzig, which took place in a friendly atmosphere, confirmed the relaxation of this aspect of Polish-German relations concerning the politically sensitive issue of the Free City (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 21 November 1933: 2; “Przegląd Sportowy”, 22 November 1933: 2).

It soon became clear that the Danzig game was a prelude to a match between the Polish and German national teams. In the 1920s, it was impossible to organise such an event, primarily for sporting reasons – due to the low level of football in Poland in the first years of independence, but also because of the unstable political relations between the two countries (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 31 March 1928: 4; *ibid.*, 21 April 1928: 5; *ibid.*, 21 September 1929: 6; *ibid.*, 2 December 1933: 2; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 7 November 1933: 12; *ibid.*, 21.11.1933: 6-7). The implementation of this initiative in 1933 was thought to be facilitated by the fact that a solid basis of football contacts had been established the previous year as a result of the efforts of officials from Polish diplomatic and consular missions in Germany as well as Polish journalists and sports activists from Berlin. The proposal was institutionalised in the form of the Polish Committee for Sporting Events in Berlin (PKISB, Ger.: *Polnischer Ausschuss für Sportveranstaltungen zu Berlin*), founded on 17 December 1931 at the Polish Consulate General in Berlin. This initiative, which stemmed from the need to use sport for propaganda purposes in order to spread and strengthen Polish identity and create a positive image of Poland in Germany, aimed to systematically develop Polish-German contacts in various sports.

An official proposal for the match between the Polish and German national teams came from the activists of the German Football Association (*Deutscher Fußball Bund – DFB*) and was officially communicated to the Polish Football Association on 2 November 1933, which accepted it at a board meeting four days later (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 7 November 1933: 12). The decision in this regard was announced in Berlin on 13 November 1933. According to many observers, given the bureaucratic hurdles at the time, this was a surprisingly short time frame to move from considering the match to deciding to organise it. It can therefore be assumed that it had the hallmarks of a high-level political decision on both the German and Polish sides, as the result of an ongoing thaw in bilateral relations.

As the “Przegląd Sportowy” sports daily noted at the time: “(...) in issues regarding ‘apolitical’ sport, foreign ministers increasingly have something to say” (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 8 November 1933: 2). One of the main advocates for the organisation of the match on the German side was the ex-footballer, international referee, *NSDAP* member and then already prominent *DFB* ac-

tivist (he was to head it from 1950 to 1962) Peter Joseph (Peco) Bauwens. His long-standing efforts, supported by Wielkopolska activist and PZPN (Polish Football Association) board member Janusz Mallow, were finally to be realised. Significantly, on the eve of the match, P. J. Bouwens appealed to the Poles not to be prejudiced against the new political regime in Germany when they arrived in Berlin (Die DFB-Präsidenten 2016; Mielech 1963: 97; "Przegląd Sportowy", 2 December 1933: 2; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 21 November 1933: 6-7).

The Polish public was also aware of the political significance of the match, which is why the idea of playing it provoked many disputes. These ranged from positions emphasising the benefits for Polish football of playing a match against a top European team, despite the Nazi blatant political agenda of the event ("Przegląd Sportowy", 18 November 1933: 1) to strong criticism, also from ideological positions: socialist and Jewish ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 7 November 1933: 12).

Interestingly, the possibility of organising a game between Germany and Poland was much sought after by the Danzig Football Association authorities. They urged Berlin that the match be hosted in the 'Free City', which they saw as the symbolically neutral venue for such events. Finally, it was decided that the first game would take place at Berlin's *Post-Stadion* in the Moabit district at Lehterstraße, the city's main football venue alongside the Grunewald Arena, which was being prepared for the 1936 Olympic Games. The date of the match was set for Sunday, 3 December 1933 at 2:00 pm ("Przegląd Sportowy", 18 November 1933: 1).

The decision to play the match against Germany on the Polish side was probably the result of arrangements between the PZPN's foreign affairs officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kazimierz Glabisz, and an unspecified unit or person in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AAN, MSZ, 8466: 88). The key role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the decision-making process was emphasised by the publicist Marian Sttater, who admitted that political rather than sporting considerations prevailed: "The PZPN would not have accepted the match against Germany without the MFA's pressure" ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 14 November 1933: 12). It seems that the arrangements on this matter were made at a higher political level, without the need to consult the relevant departments of the MFA, at the interface between diplomacy and the army.

In football that was increasingly subordinated to the army, which was reflected in the appointment of high-ranking army officers to successive PZPN boards (in 1933 these included General Władysław Bończa-Uzdowski, from January 1928 president of the PZPN, its treasurer – Captain Konstanty Nikolski, or Lieutenant Colonel Zygmunt Żołędziowski, President of the Football

League) (Gowarzewski 1994: 40), it is no coincidence that Lieutenant Colonel K. Glabisz appeared as one of the main promoters of the Germany-Poland match. At that time he was not only a very prominent figure in Polish sport, but also one of J. Piłsudski's most trusted aides. The Wielkopolska sports official was highly regarded by his superiors in 1926-1928 as the head of the Department of German Studies in the General Staff's 2nd Department, which was crucial from the point of view of Poland's security. In the 1930s he combined his work in sports institutions with activity in the Chief Inspectorate of the Armed Forces (Wieczorek 2007: 18). Apart from holding a functional position in the PZPN (he had been a member of this organisation since 1923) from 1928, he presided over the Polish Olympic Committee, an institution integrated into the Union of Polish Sports Federations, where he held the position of vice-president. He therefore had the competence and capacity to be close to the decision to play the prestigious football match against Germany. This was also pointed out by the renowned sports organiser and journalist Stanisław Mielech (Mielech 1963: 133).

The PKISB and personally its new protector, the Polish envoy J. Lipski, played an important role in the preparations for the match in Berlin. At the end of November, he met with Georg Xandri, the Secretary General of the *DFB*, who was also the *Reichssportführer's* envoy, to discuss the organisation of the match. Years later, the *DFB* activist recalled that J. Lipski, as a great football enthusiast, was one of the initiators of this match as an important event for creating a friendly atmosphere between Poles and Germans ("Przegląd Sportowy", 12 September 1938: 3).

The PKISB's efforts in the field of organisation and propaganda, carried out in harmonious cooperation with the *DFB*, contributed to an atmosphere of extraordinary enterprise, beyond sport, both in Poland and in Berlin. The *DFB* urged Berliners to "give a warm welcome to the Polish visitors" (ibid., 25 November 1933: 1). However, too many Polish fans were unable to come to Berlin because the MSZ's press department had advised against sending organised groups of fans to Germany (AAN, MSZ, 8466: 94).

The considerable significance of this match for both nations was reflected in the fact that both teams were expected to field their strongest sides, something that was not always the case in friendly matches. In the case of the Germans, such a recommendation was made by *DFB* President Felix Linnemann to the national team managers. Interestingly, the selection of the German players for the match against Poland was entrusted to the referee Alfred Birlem ("Przegląd Sportowy", 25 November 1933: 1) and not to the official coach of the national team – the union captain Otto Nerz. The PZPN, and on its behalf

the team manager J. Kałuża, also put together the strongest eleven to avoid embarrassment in Berlin (ibid., 25 November 1933: 4).

The Polish delegation arrived in Berlin on Friday evening, 1 December, after a journey of more than eleven hours. The sixteen players were accompanied by an official delegation from the Polish Football Association headed by President General W. Bończa-Uzdowski, Foreign Affairs Officer Lieutenant Colonel K. Glabisz, Union Captain J. Kałuża and other members of the Board (AAN, ARPB, 2483: 19; "Przegląd Sportowy", 25 November 1933: 2). Ten Polish journalists also arrived in Berlin, including S. Mielech from the "Stadjon" weekly magazine, who was to provide a live commentary of a Polish national football match for the first time in the history of Polish Radio (Mielech 1963: 106-108). At Friedrichstrasse station, the Polish delegation was met on the German side by the head of the Berlin-Brandenburg Football Association, *Obersturmbannführer* Oskar Glöckler. Also present were the military attaché of the Polish Embassy in Berlin, Major Antoni Szymański, and representatives of the Polish Consulate, led by Consul General Waclaw Gawroński. As Polish team captain Jerzy Bułanow, a Russian émigré from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, recalled, the Polish team was greeted with particular warmth at every turn in the capital of the Third Reich: "Starting with the German border we felt the hospitality of the Germans. They tried to show their joy at the arrival of the Polish players in various ways, they would indulge in politeness" (Bułanow 2011: 139).

On the eve of the game, the Polish guests, who were accommodated in the Central Hotel, were engaged in a number of activities organised by the German side. Accompanied by F. Linnemann, O. Glöckler, A. Birlem and Major A. Szymański, they visited the Olympic Stadium under construction, the Institute of Physical Education and the main sights of Potsdam to spend the evening at the Winter Garden Cabaret ("Przegląd Sportowy", 6 December 1933: 1). In the afternoon, they were invited to a festive banquet given by J. Lipski at the headquarters of the Polish diplomatic mission. They took part in an event with a clear political context, confirming the improving trend in Polish-German relations. The banquet was also attended by many representatives of the diplomatic mission, the Consulate General headed by W. Gawroński, the PKISB and the Polish Football Association as well as a large number of German guests. Among them were H. von Tschammer und Osten along with his associates, the entire board of the *DFB*, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Reichswehr*, the head of the SS in Berlin-Brandenburg, O. Glöckler, as well as many German and Polish journalists.

As one Polish journalist put it: "Those were wonderful, carefree hours (...) leading up to an atmosphere of trust (...)" (ibid., 9 December 1933: 6).

Similar impressions were conveyed by the host of the banquet, envoy J. Lipski, who confirmed in a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the positive atmosphere around the match was a result of the increasingly visible change in German politics, of a “change of front across the board”. As he noted: “In Nazi circles there is talk of a new Polish-German friendship. (...) Yesterday, at the reception at the Legation, a bronze shirt was gifted to the Polish team and representatives of the *Reichswehr* made the mood very friendly. They spread rumours that the *Fuehrer* himself was interested in the *match* and might well attend it in person in the stands”. Yet Lipski did not draw too many conclusions from this, trying to be cautious, lest “too strong an action in Berlin might cause damage in other territories”. With the alliance with France in mind, he advised his subordinates in the Polish consulates in Germany to take advantage of this favourable ‘mood’ to settle unresolved issues that were important for Polish interests in this country (PDD 2015, 346: 780).

Adolf Hitler did not show up in the Post-Stadion, but as H. von Tschammer und Osten said after the match, the Chancellor was to receive a detailed report from him on the game itself and the atmosphere surrounding it (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 5 December 1933: 3). The government of the Third Reich was represented by the Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, Joseph Goebbels, who watched the match in the company of envoy J. Lipski, Consul W. Gawroński, and Major A. Szymański. This was an unusual event because, as journalists noted, the presence of Joseph Goebbels was the first time that a minister of the Nazi government had attended an important match of the national team. In fact, he visited the players of both teams in their dressing rooms at half-time (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 6 December 1933: 6; *ibid.*, 9 December 1933: 6).

The game, played on a frosty afternoon, was contested in a very friendly atmosphere, with the German crowd proving to be objective observers of the action on the pitch, applauding both the German and Polish players for their successful efforts. Among the more than 30,000 German fans were 2,000 Poles, predominantly from the Polish communities of Berlin, Leipzig and East Prussia, who cheered their players more vigorously than the static German supporters. However, after a very good performance by the Polish team, especially in the second half, the match ended in a ‘lucky’ 1-0 victory for the hosts: just before the end of the game, German striker Josef Rasselberg fired an effective shot into Spirydion Albanski’s goal (*ibid.*, 6 December 1933: 2).

Despite the defeat, both the Polish press and the diplomatic service in Germany reported very good, or even excellent reviews of the Polish team’s performance. They appeared in the German press and in speeches by personalities

from the German sports world, including P. Bouwens (AAN, ARPB, 2483: 20-28; "Przegląd Sportowy", 9 December 1933: 1, 4; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 5 December 1933: 3, 6). As a result, in Poland a defeat was seen as a near-victory, and not just in terms of sport. According to "Raz, dwa, trzy...": "A short news story spread all over the world about an honourable result for us, 0:1, which will greatly increase the prestige of our sport and pave the way for us to develop further international relations" ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 12 December 1933: 8-9).

Polish sporting and political officials made no secret of their satisfaction with the trip to Berlin, both in sporting terms (General W. Bończa-Uzdowski spoke of a "tremendous success" in terms of the result [sic! – R. J.] and the style of play) and in propaganda terms, with Colonel K. Glabisz speaking of the "chivalry of the game and the propaganda value for our reputation abroad" ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 5 December 1933: 6). The very friendly atmosphere created by the Germans around the match was also noticed by envoy J. Lipski, who, in a conversation with German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath in December 1933, said "a few kind words in connection with the Polish-German football match". He emphasised the "very pleasant" role of H. von Tschammer und Osten, who, among other things, visited the Polish players in their dressing room before the match. In a conversation with K. Neurath, J. Lipski complied with the *Reichssportführer's* request to emphasise the importance of similar sporting events for Polish-German relations (PDD 2015, 367: 819).

The Germany-Poland tie in Berlin created opportunities for a more favourable perception of Poles in Germany. It was an impulse to challenge many stereotypes about Poles. In a broader sense, the effective organisation of the game, the cooperation on the pitch, the bravery of the Polish players and the energetic, but (as emphasized by the German press) sportsmanlike cheering of the Polish supporters, in a way reduced the overtones of the popular myth in Germany of the Polish hothead, the bad organiser. Dominant since the late 18th century, it became part of the pejorative concept of the *polnische Wirtschaft* (Polish order) (Loew 2017: 34). It violated the argument consistently put forward by the Reich's elite after 1918 about that Poland was a provisional state (*Saisonstaat*).

The first ever football match between the two countries was a political and sporting initiative of the German elite, and could only take place with its approval. This was because the Nazi elites were determined to overcome the political isolation in which the Third Reich found itself after its withdrawal from the League of Nations and the Geneva Disarmament Conference in October 1933, and to neutralise the possibility of joint military action by the Poles and the French against the Reich, also by intensifying sporting contacts (Farys

2019: 244, 251). Football, like German sport as a whole, was increasingly subordinated and structurally transformed in the spirit of the ideology and for the needs of the National Socialist state, for which H. von Tschammer und Osten was responsible (Hesse 2014: 77; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 19 December 1933: 12-13; Wyskok 2016: 13). In this case it was to serve as a propaganda tool to curry favour with the Polish government and society.

The Polish decision-makers, probably Foreign Minister Józef Beck, the Polish diplomatic and consular services in Germany, with its sports-institutional eminence in the PKISB led by envoy J. Lipski, and the majority of PZPN activists, who were also influential representatives of the Polish army, were aware of this German strategy.¹ However, despite the many objections from sections of the Polish public, the decision-makers claimed that such a spectacular sporting encounter had great political potential. The sporting event, which aroused great interest in both Poland and Germany and took place in an atmosphere full of friendly gestures, thus became a newsworthy symbol of a new opening in general relations between the hitherto feuding states and nations. Football, already the most popular sport in both countries at the time, became one of many instruments to achieve the common political goal of normalising bilateral relations.

The initiation of football contacts at the highest level was followed by cooperation in other sports, in which the PKISB played a major role in the following years. Finally, it could be argued that the December match was also a spectacular prelude to an important political act that the two countries soon decided to undertake. This was the signing of the Declaration of Non-Violence in Mutual Relations, also known as the Non-Aggression Pact, on 26 January 1934, which put an end to a period of poor bilateral relations. For Poland, it removed the threat of redrawing the common border, calmed relations with the Free City of Danzig, ended the economic war and reduced German anti-Polish propaganda. At the same time, it gave rise to Polish-German political interaction, also in the international arena (Faryś 2019: 251-252; Wojciechowski 1980: 104-115). Even at a later stage, in early 1935, the implications of this sporting event were similarly assessed in the Polish press: “(...) the Poland-Germany football

¹ The Polish press wrote explicitly about the political motives behind Germany’s decision to play the match: “The Germans have prepared for the game extremely meticulously. And not just from a sporting point of view. They have realised that they are somewhat alone in Europe at the moment, and so they wanted the match with Poland to prove to the world that they are not alone, and that there are countries that are happy to maintain contact with them in the field of sport, which has recently become so popular” (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 5 December 1933: 2).

match was like the first predictor of friendly relations between the two countries" ("Przegląd Sportowy", 2 January 1935: 4).

The perception in Poland that the Berlin match was a sporting and political propaganda success encouraged sports journalists to argue that sporting contacts with Germany should be continued and even intensified ("Przegląd Sportowy", 16 December 1933: 3; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 12 December 1933: 8-9). After the Berlin match, a similar opinion was voiced by H. von Tschammer und Osten. He described the match as an "encouraging" beginning of "fruitful" sporting contacts within the framework of general relations between Germany and Poland. The political rapprochement between the two countries resulted in a formal agreement on the organisation of sporting events as part of a cultural exchange agreement, which was concluded during a visit to Poland in June 1934 by J. Goebbels, a game observer in Berlin, on the occasion of the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact. Among other things, it was agreed that friendly football matches between the Polish and German national teams would be organised once a year (Urban 2012: 72).

1934: Confirmation of the course of détente

The return match between Poland and Germany was scheduled for 9 September 1934. As in the previous year, it was preceded by a game between the Warsaw and Gdańsk teams (1:0) at Warsaw's Polish Army Stadium ("Przegląd Sportowy", 29 August 1934: 4), which was also to be the venue for the match between the national teams. It was once again heralded as a great event with political significance, underlining the strategic value of Polish-German rapprochement in the field of sport: "No event since the existence of sport in independent Poland has aroused such interest as the Poland-Germany football match in Warsaw" (*ibid.*, 8 September 1934: 2). The importance of the match was demonstrated by the fact that, as early as July 1934, the PZPN appointed a special committee for the organisation of the match, chaired by its vice-president, Colonel Karol Rudolf, and – because of huge fan interest – began negotiations with the District Office of Physical Education and Military Training (Okręgowy Urząd Wychowania Fizycznego i Przystosobienia Wojskowego) on increasing the capacity of the Polish Army Stadium (*ibid.*, 28 July 1934: 4).

The sporting event of the year was to be watched by around 30,000 football fans (instead of the usual 13,000), who were also located on the cycling track around the pitch and on the training ground behind one of the goals (*ibid.*, 11 August 1934: 6). The cost of reconstructing the Warsaw stadium specifically for

the match against Germany totalled 7,000 zlotys, but ticket revenues of 30,000 zlotys more than recouped the investment (*ibid.*, 17 November 1934: 2; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 11 September 1934: 2). Twenty-six trains with over ten thousand fans from all over Poland arrived in Warsaw, but the demand for tickets was several times higher, as evidenced by the PZPN’s refusal to accept numerous orders from all over the country (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 8 September 1934: 3).

Given the huge interest in the match in Poland and the ambivalent attitude of Poles towards the Germans, the PZPN issued a special appeal to Polish football fans to welcome the German guests with dignity and to support both teams in a sportsmanlike and objective manner: “It depends on the public whether the match will take place in a truly sporting and civilised atmosphere and whether our guests will take home from Warsaw as pleasant and good memories as we did from Berlin [from the December match – R. J.]. (...) Sporting competitions are supposed to bring people together, not divide them. (...) Let us remember this, let us silence the shouters and troublemakers who want to disturb the harmonious course of the competition” (*ibid.*, 8 September 1934: 4). The appeal was successful, for apart from a few instances of booing the German defenders, who often passed the ball to their goalkeeper, the Polish crowd were respectful towards both the German players and supporters, which was also confirmed by the German “Kicker” magazine: “During our two-day visit, the Poles were extremely hospitable, friendly and polite” (quoted in Urban 2012: 76).

The Warsaw match also aroused great interest in Germany (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 1 September 1934: 2). Consequently, the organisers allocated up to 5,000 tickets for German fans. In the end, more than 6,000 fans arrived in Warsaw on special trains, mainly from East Prussia, German Silesia, Berlin and even Bavaria. It was probably the largest, as “Przegląd Sportowy” put it, “invasion of Germans in Warsaw” since the end of the First World War: “They were everywhere and behaved in a peculiar way: they toured the city in groups, using banners showing their dedication for order and a sense of community; they admired the monuments while eating the sandwiches they had brought with them; they took multiple photographs; they stood for hours in front of the Bristol hotel [where the German team were staying – R. J.] to catch a glimpse of a German international; and, above all, they drank beer, at any time of the day and in any part of the city”. As a result, Warsaw’s restaurants had a problem since they had run out of beer by the end of the day (Gawkowski 2013: 83).

The German team arrived in Warsaw on 8 September 1934 with the strongest squad selected by coach O. Nerz. They were accompanied by a group of a dozen or so German correspondents, not only from sports press but also

from political dailies, who had consulted with a representative of the PKISB before their trip to Poland, and two lower-ranking officials of the Foreign Ministry (AAN, MSZ, 8484: n.p.; *ibid.*: 185; ARPB, 2487: 39; "Przegląd Sportowy", 8 September 1934: 2). At the Warsaw railway station the guests were officially welcomed by General W. Bończa-Uzdowski, Colonel K. Rudolf and Colonel K. Glabisz, who was delegated by the PZPN to attend to the German team during their stay in Poland ("Przegląd Sportowy", 12 September 1934: 1). The German delegation was headed by DFB President, *Bundesführer* F. Linnemann. The arrival of this influential FIFA official in Warsaw was an event in itself. As "Przegląd Sportowy" noted: "As the long-serving president and leader of the DFB, Linnemann had never travelled abroad except for the World Cup. In Warsaw, he will be in charge of the German national team abroad for the first time. This shows, among other things, how much importance the German football authorities attach to the Poland game (*ibid.*, 8 September 1934: 2). The German team spent the time before the match on a sightseeing tour of Warsaw on a special coach, including a visit to the Central Institute of Physical Education. The sports academy and the 1930 modern Polish Army Stadium made an "excellent impression" on the German guests (*ibid.*, 15 September 1934: 4).

The match began at 4pm with the traditional rendition of the national anthems. That moment was vividly described by an eyewitness, the then teenager Mieczysław Szymkowiak, who went on to a career as a respected footballer, coach and football journalist:

"At first we were shocked. When the German national anthem began to be played, the sight of thousands of flags with swastikas, thousands of hands raised in the Nazi salute and, of course, the efficient singing made a shocking impression. *Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles...* This was followed by a Polish rendition of the *Dąbrowski Mazurka*, the likes of which I have never heard again! The audience sang the anthem [for the first time in the stadium *a cappella* – R.J.] with extraordinary passion, beating the thousands of German fans not only by sheer numbers... This unusual musical prelude put the crowd in an extraordinary mood. Nervousness and the fighting spirit were visible on the faces of all participants" (quoted in Gowarzewski 1991: 10).

The tension associated with the solemnity of the event must also have been felt by the Polish senior government officials, who took their seats in the stand of honour at the Warsaw stadium. Their presence confirmed the political significance of the match. Besides its organisers – the prominent representatives of the PUWFiPW (the State Office of Physical Education and Military Training) and the PZPN, led by Colonel W. Kiliński and General W. Bończa-Uzdowski – the match was also attended by Speaker of the Sejm Kazimierz Świtalski as

well as by Deputy Ministers: of Foreign Affairs Jan Szembek; of Military Affairs General Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski and General Tadeusz Kasprzycki; and of Finance Colonel Adam Koc. They were accompanied by General Edward Rydz-Śmigły, who did not play a significant political role at the time, and Polish members of the International Olympic Committee: General Stanisław Rouppert, who was also Vice-President of the Scientific Council for Physical Education and Head of its Medical Committee, and the former Minister of Finance, Colonel Ignacy Matuszewski. The German side was represented by officials from the German Embassy in Warsaw: Counsellor Martin Schliep and the German Military Attaché in Warsaw, General Max Schindler (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 11 September 1934: 2).

The Germans were apprehensive about the Polish team after their performance in Berlin, but having finished third at the recent 1934 World Cup in Italy, they were clear favourites for the match in Warsaw. This was confirmed by the 33,000-strong crowd, the largest ever to attend a Polish sporting event, as the Poles went down 5-2 to the Germans despite being 2-1 up with twenty minutes remaining. After the referee’s final whistle, “the German players were carried triumphantly across the pitch on the shoulders of their compatriots. There was even a Nazi banner, which, held high above their heads, made a rather strange impression. The Polish fans left the stands in silence (...)” (ibid. 2-3).

The clear victory of the Third Reich’s footballers in no way disturbed the friendly atmosphere of the festive Polish-German sporting event in Warsaw, at least not at the post-match banquet, where Polish and German officials vied with each other in making friendly gestures. Colonel K. Glabisz was pleased that an excellent German team, playing beautiful and noble football, had come to Warsaw. At the same time he emphasised that the match in Warsaw was of great importance for the development of Polish-German relations. He was echoed by F. Linnemann, who began his speech by admiring the beauty of Warsaw, before declaring: “We have learned to appreciate in you such fine qualities as chivalry, fair play and fighting to the end. These qualities manifested themselves magnificently in today’s match. (...) With such an opponent, with whom the match was played in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, and who knows how to lose, we want to continue our relationship”. He went on to say that there would be further games between the two teams over the next two years. This announcement by the head of the DFB was confirmed by General Max Schindler, who thanked PUWFiPW Director Colonel W. Kilinski for his enthusiastic toast “Let’s love each other”. At the end of the friendly ceremony, both sides exchanged gifts: The Poles presented their guests with a miniature of the Sigismund column, the Germans returned the favour with a commem-

orative vase ("Przegląd Sportowy", 15 September 1934: 3; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 11 September 1934: 7).

The German victory did not come as a surprise to the Polish public, given the level of J. Kałuża's team at the time. Nonetheless, that damage to the image of Polish sport left its mark on the Polish press. In particular, the political and sporting authorities were criticised for not showing enough interest in sport compared to their counterparts in the Third Reich. It was even claimed that football in Poland was tolerated as a necessary evil, resulting in serious shortcomings in terms of infrastructure and training. Meanwhile, the Warsaw match, which, according to publicists, attracted a huge crowd of Polish fans, proved the importance of football in the lives of the 'broad masses'. Unlike in Poland, this truth was well known in Germany, as evidenced by the sight of several thousand Germans following their team to Warsaw ("Przegląd Sportowy", 12 September 1934: 2; *ibid.*, 15 September 1934: 2 and 4; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 18 September 1934: 8-9).

However, the September match met its political objective as another expression of Polish-German rapprochement. As the press emphasised, despite Poland's painful defeat, the game was "of outstanding importance for Polish-German relations as thousands of Germans and numerous German journalists got to know our country" ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 11 September 1934: 7). In fact, the latter were not only much less critical of the Polish team's performance, but also did not spare words of admiration for what they saw in Poland, probably due to instructions from the Third Reich's Ministry of Propaganda. Correspondents of the German press, for example, glorified Polish system solutions and state support for physical education, which prompted sympathetic smiles from Polish journalists ("Przegląd Sportowy", 22 September 1934: 3; *Ibid.*, 20 October 1934: 5; AAN, MSZ, 8484: n.p.).

1935: Towards Cooperation

The increasing contacts between Polish and German football, including the Free City of Danzig, and the announcement of more to come ("Przegląd Sportowy", 6 April 1935: 4) proved that sporting relations between the two countries were stabilising at a high level, also in terms of quality. This was confirmed by H. von Tschammer und Osten in an interview with "Przegląd Sportowy" in April, in which he pointed out that the intensification of these contacts had taken place not only in football, but also in other sports such as boxing, cycling, tennis, athletics, equestrianism, skiing and hockey. He reiterated the great im-

portance of sport “for the idea of international brotherhood”, citing the example of the unexpected friendliness of the Germans during the France-Germany football match in Paris the day after the announcement of the German government’s decision to introduce universal military service in the territory of the Third Reich (ibid., 6 April 1935: 4). The German decree of 16 March 1935, which represented an ostentatious violation by the Nazi authorities of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and the beginning of German armament, was received with cautious approval by Polish politicians. This attitude was based on the axiom of maintaining good, partner-like relations with Germany, even though the political elite of the Second Republic was aware that this step posed a great threat to Poland, which could not be compensated for by the 1934 non-aggression treaty (Wojciechowski 1980: 164 ff.).

The German military decree coincided with the appointment of the German Kurt Otto as head coach of the Polish national football team. The then 35-year-old coach was to help the then manager of the team, J. Kałuża, to prepare the players effectively for the Olympic Games, which were to be held in Berlin in just over a year’s time. K. Otto, a graduate of the renowned Berlin *Hochschule für Leibesübungen* (University of Physical Education), who had previously played football for Arminia Bielefeld, Tennis Borussia Berlin and Schalke 04 Gelsenkirchen, among others, and was later a coach in the West German District and in Gelsenkirchen (German runners-up with Schalke in 1933), Essen and Dortmund, was recommended to the PZPN by the then head coach of the Third Reich national team, O. Nerz (Kowoll 2019: 278-279; “Przegląd Sportowy”, 27 February 1935: 2; Ibid, 6 March 1935: 4; Ibid, 16 March 1935: 1). The selection of a German for this important post – with a salary of 800 zloty a month, high by the standards of the time – came as no surprise, not only because of the location of the Games and the strong position of German football. It also had a kind of political dimension, emphasising the Polish-German partnership, not only in the field of sport. In the German press, K. Otto regarded the Polish players as talented, technically gifted, and with an understanding of football (Urban 2012: 76). One of the first significant tests for the German coach was to be a game between the Polish national team... and his compatriots, scheduled for 15 September 1935 in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland).

Despite the ‘unprecedented’ interest it generated in both countries, the Breslau match was not announced and covered in the same way as the previous games between the two teams, i.e. as a major, even spectacular, event, not just a sporting one. In 1935, in Poland, the match was regarded as a natural symptom of what seemed to be normal neighbourly relations, although it remained a prestigious event. This was evidenced by the fact that both football federations

fielded their best players even though both national teams were due to play other friendly matches scheduled for the same day(!) – the Germans played Estonia in Stettin (now Szczecin, Poland) while the Poles faced Latvia in Łódź (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 12 September 1935: 1; *ibid.*, 14 September 1935: 2). The general opinion in Poland and Germany again pointed to the German players as the favourites for the Breslau game, but the Breslau press, for example, described the Poles as surprisingly “formidable opposition”, while in Poland a mood of tempered but cautious optimism prevailed (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 14 September 1935: 1-2; Szymański 2011: 179).

On the eve of the match, the Polish team travelled by train from Katowice, where they had been training for several days under the direction of K. Otto. The importance attached to the match by the Polish side was reflected in the low rank of the managerial team. It consisted of Tadeusz Kuchar, the PZPN training officer, J. Mallow, a member of the PZPN board, and J. Kałuża, the team manager (“Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny”, 16 September 1935: 19; “Przegląd Sportowy”, 14 September 1935: 2). After a three-hour journey, the guests were formally welcomed at Breslau’s railway station, which had been decorated for the occasion with a large banner welcoming the Poles, by the special envoy of the *Reichssportführer*, Count Schulenberg, and the Mayor of Breslau, Hans Friedrich. The footballers stayed at the nearby *Nordhoff Hotel*, which had been given a “completely Polish face”. They were greeted by the *DFB* President, F. Linnemann, and visited by the Polish Consul in Breslau, Raczkowski. The Polish delegation toured the city while in the evening a performance was organised for both teams in the *Liebich-Theather* (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 16 September 1935: 2; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 24 September 1935: 8; Szymański: 182).

The Breslau match drew more than 20,000 fans from outside the city, including an estimated 10,000 supporters of the Polish team. Besides Poles living in Germany, organised groups of supporters arrived on special trains, mainly from the Polish part of Upper Silesia as well as from Warsaw, Krakow, Poznań and Lviv. In the end, the Hermann Göring Stadium was packed with between 45,000 and 50,000 fans, a new record attendance for a football match in the German city of Breslau. On the stand of honour were representatives of the German state, military and sporting authorities, as well as the Polish Consul General from Oppeln (now Opole, Poland) Samborski, and the Vice-Consul from Breslau, Kwiatkowski (“Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny”, sports supplement, 17 September 1935: IV; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 17 September 1935: 2; Szymański 2011: 179-182). They witnessed how the German crowd gave the Polish players a rousing welcome as they ran onto the pitch. They were also given a warm farewell after a competitive and evenly contested match, which the

Germans won again: through a goal by Edmund Conen (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 24 September 1935: 8).

The Polish media were rather critical of the result (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 19.09.1935: 3), likewise the German press, which criticised the Third Reich team’s modest scoring record. The Germans praised the quality of the Polish team, which lost in an honourable manner, a fact that the media attributed mainly to the German coach, K. Otto (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 21 September 1935: 6; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 17 September 1935: 2-3; Szymański 2011: 182-183).

The Breslau match seems to have fulfilled the political and propaganda objectives of both sides. The gentle intimacy that marked Polish-German relations at the time was reflected in the behaviour of the officials, for example at the post-match gala dinner attended by both teams at the *Vier Jahreszeiten* hotel. The banquet, which lasted until the early hours of the following morning, was attended by the *DFB*’s most important activists, the city authorities and, on the Polish side, the Polish consul in Breslau. F. Linemann’s toast in honour of “the Polish nation and President Mościcki” was answered by T. Kuchar with a speech in honour of “the German nation and Chancellor Hitler”. The German officials “(...) spoke in the warmest terms about the friendly relations which bind them to the PZPN, calling them the closest”. They confirmed that another match between the two teams would take place in a year’s time, this time in Poland, depending on the final arrangements, in Warsaw, Kraków or Katowice (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 16 September 1935: 2; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 17 September 1935: 2; *ibid.*, 24 September 1935: 8). The positive propaganda message was completed by a statement in the Breslau *Ostdeutsche Sportzeitung* daily, which emphasised the very good sporting relations between the two countries: “There are few [national] federations with which the Germans have found such close contact in such a short time” (quoted in Szymański 2011: 183).

1936: Attempts to subordinate Poland

However, the organisation of the fourth Poland-Germany match in 1936, a rematch of the Breslau game, ran into serious problems. Originally scheduled for the spring of that year, it was cancelled by the *DFB*, the reason being a lack of available dates due to preparations for the Berlin Olympics. As a result, despite earlier statements by the Germans, the match between the two teams would not take place the following year, and the likely new date would not be until the spring of 1937 (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 20 February 1936: 5). Eventually, following negotiations with the PZPN, the *DFB* activists agreed to a date of 13

September 1936 (*ibid.*, 9 April 1936: 1), but the venue of the match became an issue. The PZPN wanted the match to be played in Poznań, which was announced in April 1936 (*ibid.*, 23 April 1936: 3). As in the case of Breslau, this location, in the Polish-German borderland, was intended to boost interest in (and thus profit from) the event in both countries, including the German minority living in large numbers in the Wielkopolska region (*ibid.*, 17 April 1936: 2). The match was to be played in a stadium with a capacity of around 30,000 in the Wilda district of Poznań, the home of the Warta Poznań football club. In the end, due to a structural defect in the stadium's stands, it was decided in June that Poland's second match on home soil against Germany would again be played in the Polish Army Stadium in Warsaw (*ibid.*, 26 June 1936: 2).

The Poland-Germany match in Warsaw was traditionally regarded as a major event in both countries: "The match went far beyond the dimensions of an ordinary international football competition and was the real sensation of the day. For several days, the streets, cafés and trams were filled with talk of nothing else (...)" ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", sports supplement, 15 September 1936: III). The most tangible measure of interest in the match was the number of tickets sold: the press announced a record attendance of 35,000 at the stadium, which forced the organisers to temporarily extend the facility once again. "Przegląd Sportowy" announced the arrival of more than 5,000 fans from Germany, mainly from East Prussia, German Silesia and Berlin ("Przegląd Sportowy", 10 September 1936: 2; *ibid.*, 17 September 1936: 5). The arrival of German supporters in Warsaw for the match was facilitated by representatives of the PKISB through Polish consulates in Germany, including the issue of free visas and coordination with the Polish travel agency 'Orbis'. They emphasised the desirability of German 'sports' tourism to Poland as a useful tool for creating a favourable image of Poland in Germany, as in the case of the 1934 match, when "(...) Germans from East Prussia who took part in the tours came back enthusiastic about Warsaw and looked at Polish-German affairs quite differently afterwards" (AAN, ARPB, 2491: 148-149 and 151-152).

The match against Poland marked the debut of coach Josef Herberger. He replaced O. Nerz, who had led the Third Reich's players in all their previous matches against Poland. Herberger was to work with the German national team until 1963 (Gowarzewski 1991: 130). He prepared the strongest possible team for the game with the Poles, despite the rather disorganised nature of the preparations caused by a demonstration match scheduled for the day before the Warsaw match, featuring German representatives of the leading German teams, 1. FC Nürnberg and Schalke 04 Gelsenkirchen, who played for Adolf Hitler and other participants at the NSDAP party conference in Nuremberg. However, the

German sports authorities considered the match against Poland to be of equal prestige, especially in the context of the German footballers' heavy defeat at the Berlin Olympics ("Przegląd Sportowy", 10 September 1936: 2; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 8 September 1936: 3). On the other hand, the Polish team, led by J. Kałuża and still coached by K. Otto, after a successful performance at the Berlin Olympics, where they finished fourth, had to prove that the 9-2 defeat they had suffered a week earlier in Belgrade was just an accident ("Przegląd Sportowy", 10 September 1936: 1-2).

The German team arrived in Warsaw on Saturday 12 September. At the Warsaw railway station they were greeted "very warmly" by PZPN officials: Vice-President for Organisation J. Michałowski, Colonel K. Glabisz, Captain. K. Nikolski, and officials from the German Embassy in Poland, including the second secretary in the rank of chargé d'affaires, Gebhard Seelos. The delegation accompanying the footballers was small this time, consisting solely of lower-ranking members of the *DFB*. In addition to the coaching staff, it included the delegation leader, *DFB* Vice-President Schmidt from Hanover, his deputy and team manager Kneche from Düsseldorf, and federation secretary G. Xandri. The Germans stayed at the *Bristol Hotel* ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", 14. September 1936: 19). Interestingly, the Polish dailies gave rather reserved accounts of the events surrounding the match involving the German guests even though they made important political gestures. There was only a brief mention of the reception of footballers, officials and journalists from both countries by the German ambassador to Poland, Hans-Adolf von Moltke, at the Third Reich's embassy in Warsaw on Saturday evening ("Przegląd Sportowy", 14 September 1936: 1). However, the Polish public was not informed about the ceremony of laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Marshal Józef Piłsudski Square by the footballers and the German delegation before the match (NAC 2017).

The Poland-Germany football match, which was broadcast live on Polish and German radio ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", 14 September 1936: 19), was preceded by another important sporting event involving representatives of both countries, which in propaganda terms was a manifestation of friendly Polish-German relations. Just before the kick-off, the Polish Army Stadium hosted the finish of a cycling competition featuring Polish and German riders, who participated in the third edition of the six-stage Berlin-Warsaw race, an event organised cyclically in the years 1934-1936 (AAN, KGRPB, 114: 324; Ferenc 2008: 43; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 22 September 1936: 8-9).

The events in the Warsaw stadium were eventually attended by a record number of more than 40,000 spectators (including around 7,000 Germans),

which caused a great deal of chaos in the city and in the stands, among fans and journalists, and became the subject of harsh criticism in the Polish press. It was claimed that the PZPN officials, guided by purely commercial considerations (the Federation's income from ticket sales amounted to 53,000 zlotys, almost the PZPN's annual budget ("Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny", 17 September 1936: 20)), committed fundamental organisational errors ("Przegląd Sportowy", 17 September 1936: 5; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 15 September 1936: 2). It should be noted, however, that this audience, huge for Polish conditions, was also the result of the unrestricted activity of 'touts', who sold a few thousand very well forged tickets, mainly at Warsaw's Kercelego Square (Gawkowski 2018; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 15 September 1936: 6). On a positive note, however, there was no hostility between Polish and German football fans, who behaved respectfully towards each other both before the match and in the stands ("Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny", sports supplement., 15 September 1936: III).

Those organisational flaws could not have escaped the attention of the political dignitaries seated in the stand of honour of the Warsaw stadium. However, if one were to measure the political significance of this sporting event by the number of public figures attending the match, one could not make the same claim as in 1934. First and foremost, "the event was not honoured by the presence of the Commander-in-Chief [General Edward Rydz-Śmigły – R. J.], for whom the public had been waiting", while the politicians and officials who attended the match were a political "second class". Among them were members of General Felicjan Sławoj-Skłodkowski's government: Minister of Communications and President of the ZPZS (the Association of Polish Sports Associations), Colonel J. Ulrych, Deputy Ministers for Military Affairs, General Aleksander Litwinowicz, and for Communications, Colonel Aleksander Bobkowski, as well as Army Inspector General Stanisław Burhardt-Bukacki, Commander of Corps District No. 1 in Warsaw, General Mieczysław Ryś-Trojanowski, another Polish member of the IOC, former Minister Colonel I. Matuszewski, and the Field Bishop of the Polish Army, General Józef Gawlina. The Bishop's presence at the match caused great surprise among German journalists. The ambassador of the Third Reich was represented by chargé d'affaires G. Seelos. Besides the *DFB* officials who had come to Poland, the match was also attended by members of the PZPN board led by General W. Bończa-Uzdowski and Colonel K. Głabisz ("Raz, dwa, trzy...", 15 September 1936: 2; Urban 2012: 77).

The match was preceded by the traditional rendition of the national anthems. In addition to the *Deutschlandlied*, the *Horst Wessel Lied* was played for the Germans, and the *Dąbrowski Mazurka* was not sung too loudly by the Polish fans, as "many people were overcome with emotion". The game ended

in a 1-1 draw after goals by Karl Hohmann and Gerard Wodarz (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 15 September 1936: 2). The result, Poland’s best against Germany in their short history, was received enthusiastically in Poland as the Polish players were carried off the pitch in the arms of their fans immediately after the match. There were, however, a few voices in the press who argued that the weaker-than-expected performance of the German team meant that Poland had missed out on the chance for a first prestigious victory that would boost the nation’s spirit (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 14 September 1936: 1-2). The Germans, on the other hand, were pleased with the draw, as evidenced by their post-match opinions and behaviour at an evening banquet hosted by the PZPN in the lounges of the Europejski Hotel. The event, which lasted several hours for both teams and was attended by a very large group of German journalists, was once again held in an aura of cordiality. General W. Bończa-Uzdowski, Colonel K. Glabisz and manager Schmidt toasted each other and exchanged gifts: the Poles gave the Germans a painting of the Old Town of Warsaw and the Germans – a sculpture of a lioness (“Przegląd Sportowy”, 14 September 1936: 2; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 15 September 1936: 6).

From a Polish perspective, the Warsaw match, despite the draw, was a sporting success, but an organisational disaster. The latter aspect perpetuated Germany’s unfavourable stereotype of the Poles as a disorganised nation. Especially as the chaos in the Polish Army Stadium was seen by a dozen prominent German journalists who worked under abnormal conditions to cover both the football match and the finish of the cycling race (“Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 22 September 1936: 8-9). Nevertheless, the German press, while noting ‘shortcomings’, praised above all the Polish public for creating a friendly atmosphere towards the German players and fans, confirming the ‘sincere sporting friendship’ that united the two nations (“Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny”, 17 September 1936: 20).

In 1936, Polish-German sporting cooperation, including football contacts, continued to develop smoothly. Its enhancement should not only be interpreted in terms of the political situation, but it should also be attributed to a significant increase in the sporting level of Polish football teams, making them attractive competitors for German clubs. The atmosphere around the key match between the national teams confirmed the friendly bilateral relations. A similarly favourable climate prevailed during the performance of Polish athletes at the Berlin Olympic Games (Jung 2017: 37-38).

However, there were an increasing number of critical comments in the press about the competition between Polish and German athletes on both sides. These comments were usually made at club and city level. This was exacerbated by unfavourable decisions taken by political and sporting bodies in

both countries, such as the dissolution of the PKISB, an institution that had done a great deal to increase sporting contacts between Poles and Germans.² Perhaps it should be linked to a noticeable change in the nature of Polish-German political relations from the end of 1936. At that time, the Nazi regime in Germany was consolidating itself internally and beginning to succeed internationally. An example of this trend is the politically 'cost-free' militarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936. It was then that A. Hitler's policy towards Poland started to evolve, moving from a kind of partnership to attempts to 'subordinate' its eastern neighbour. This was demonstrated by attempts to gauge Poland's reaction to the first announcements of the annexation of Danzig to the Reich, which led to a growing lack of trust in the Germans in the Polish decision-making groups, especially those around E. Rydz-Śmigły, who were not in favour of close cooperation with the western neighbour at the expense of France (Wojciechowski 1980: 263 ff.).

Another unfavourable circumstance for sporting relations between the two countries was the question of another match between the national teams in 1937. Despite the *DFB*'s earlier assurances to include annual matches against the Polish national team in its schedule, the Germans decided to withdraw from this promise in late 1936. The *DFB* officials offered bizarre explanations to the PZPN. According to the German association's press officer Koch, the main reason for not organising Poland-Germany matches every year was that "Poland is too strong an opponent". This was greeted with a mocking comment by "Przegląd Sportowy": "Apparently the Italians [1934 and 1938 world champions – R.J.] are 'less threatening,' because it turns out that the German Football Association has already secured two more matches against Italy." The journalist concluded: "We don't hold any particular grudge against the Germans for deciding to play Poland every two years in view of their busy international schedule. After all, we have gone so many years without playing Germany that we will survive next year, especially as our programme needs to be re-focused. But what is the point of making a fool of ourselves 'about an opponent who is too strong,' which is obviously aimed at naive foreign sporting public?" ("Przegląd Sportowy", 23 November 1936: 2). In January 1937, the *DFB* officially informed the PZPN that the next international match would not be played until 1938 (*ibid.*, 14 January 1936: 4).

² The PKISB was dissolved on 1 November 1936, the official reason being that it had achieved its stated aims of strengthening Polish-German sporting relations and propaganda activities to bring Poland, including the Polish sporting movement, closer to the Germans (AAN, ARPB, 2491: 177-178).

1938: Towards the war

In 1938, benevolent neutrality or even subtle cooperation in the almost parallel diplomatic and military actions of the Third Reich against Austria and Poland against Lithuania, and both countries against Czechoslovakia, did not prevent an increasingly visible regression in Polish-German political relations. They finally turned into a crisis, when, on 24 October 1938, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop made Ambassador J. Lipski a proposal for a “global solution” (*Globallösung*) to their mutual relations, i.e. a demand for the incorporation of Danzig into the Third Reich and the creation of an extraterritorial corridor connecting East Prussia with the territory of Germany proper. From then on, German policy increasingly took the form of blackmailing the Polish authorities (Żerko 1998: 67 ff.).

On 18 September 1938, more than a month before the *Globallösung*, and amid an increasingly tense political situation between Berlin and Warsaw, the long-awaited fifth match between the Polish and German national teams took place. The Germans had decided to play the match in Chemnitz, Saxony’s industrial centre with a population of 350,000, to celebrate the opening of the city’s modern *Grosskampfbahn* stadium for local club Polizei SV 1920 (“Prześląd Sportowy”, 14 February 1938: 4; “Raz, dwa, trzy...”, 18 September 1938: 3). The DFB’s decision was greeted with enthusiasm in Saxony as it was the first time that an international match had been organised in this part of Germany. As a result, tickets were sold out more than two weeks before the match. Consequently, several groups of Polish fans cancelled their trip to Chemnitz, and the largest group of Polish national team supporters at the stadium were representatives of the large Polish colony in Saxony and, in smaller numbers, Poles from Westphalia (“Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny”, 16 September 1938: 1; “Prześląd Sportowy”, 1 September 1938: 2).

The Germans wanted to avoid the impression that the game was political. This was stated by DFB Secretary General G. Xandri, who voiced the hope that the meeting would take place “in a truly friendly atmosphere”. He referred to the attitude of the Polish ambassador in Berlin, J. Lipski, “a great football enthusiast”, who was guided by the idea of a friendly rapprochement between the two nations when organising football matches. The hosts tried to create such an atmosphere by, among other things, inviting the Polish team to the operetta *Gräfin Dubarry*, staging Stanisław Moniuszko’s *Halka* in the same local opera house and accommodating the Polish team in the ‘excellent’ hotel *Chemnitzer Hof*. Finally, G. Xandri expressed his regret that the Polish delegation to Chemnitz would not be led by the President of the Polish Football Association, Colo-

nel K. Glabisz, who was detained in Poland by other official duties, especially since the Reich Sports Leader, H. von Tschammer und Osten, was to attend the match ("Przegląd Sportowy", 12 September 1938: 3). In the context of escalating bilateral relations, the absence of the President of the Polish Football Association, one of the best specialists in German affairs in the Polish army, may not have been a coincidence.

A friendly tone was also maintained in an open letter to the Polish football community from *DFB* president F. Linnemann on the occasion of the Germany-Poland match. Interestingly, it was an initiative of "Przegląd Sportowy" journalists and appeared on the front page of the newspaper a few days before the match. The head of German football wrote in it:

"On the occasion of the fifth match between the national teams of Poland and Germany, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our Polish sporting colleagues. Since 1933, a true sporting friendship has developed with our Polish neighbours, based on good, collegial contacts. A manifestation of this friendship is the upcoming game, which we are looking forward to. We have invited our Polish sporting friends to Chemnitz to celebrate with them the opening of the city's magnificent new sports arena. We were all the more pleased to do so because Saxony in particular has many historical and cultural links with Poland. I therefore hope that this meeting will further strengthen bilateral sporting relations and that its representative nature will make it a powerful propaganda tool for football. F. Linnemann" (ibid, 15 September 1938: 2)

In the opinion of both the Polish and German press, the Germans were once again favourites to win the game, despite the humiliation suffered by their team, with prominent Austrian players co-opted after the *Anschluss*, at the World Cup in France three months earlier, where they were eliminated by the Swiss in the first round. The Poles were knocked out of the tournament at the same stage after a superb performance against Brazil (5-6), which is why the German press was 'very favourable' to the Polish team ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", 16 September 1938: 1; "Przegląd Sportowy", 29 August 1938: 5; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 18 September 1938: 2).

The Polish football delegation, led by PZPN Vice-President for Organisation Colonel Władysław Picheta and accompanied by PZPN Secretary General Roman Gielda and team manager J. Kałuża, arrived in Chemnitz on the night of 17 September, after a nearly 17-hour journey from Warsaw, with an unscheduled stopover in Bytom, where the footballers were spontaneously welcomed by youngsters from the local Polish grammar school. They were officially greeted at the Chemnitz train station by G. Xandri and *DFB* deputy head Erbach, on behalf of President F. Linnemann, as well as representatives

of the local Polish community and the city's residents, who greeted the Poles with a round of applause. The Polish team received the same warm welcome in Saxony as they did in Berlin and Breslau. They spent the day before the match exploring the city, including the new stadium and what was then Europe's largest indoor swimming pool, as well as Augustusburg Hunting Lodge, with K. Otto as their guide. In front of the *Chemnitzer Hof* hotel, where the Polish guests were staying, stood a guard of honour of uniformed members of the Nazi sports organisation *Kraft durch Freude*. On the post bus outside the stadium, postal workers stamped postcards issued for the match, and the promised premiere of S. Moniuszko's opera took place at the local opera house. However, the Polish team did not attend this event, as they spent the day after the match seeing the sights of nearby Dresden ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", 18 September 1938: 13; "Przegląd Sportowy", 19 September 1938: 2 and 5; *ibid.*, 22 September 1938: 3; "Raz, dwa, trzy...", 25 September 1938: 2).

The match was preceded by a ceremony to inaugurate the new stadium, presided over by H. von Tschammer und Osten and the city's mayor Walter Schmidt. The Polish side was represented by officials of the Polish Consulate in Leipzig, headed by F. Chiczewski. The crowd of nearly 70,000 gave the Poles a friendly welcome. The game, which was played hard but fair, ended with a clear 4-1 victory for the Germans after three goals by Josef Gauchel and one by H. Schön, later, in 1964-1978, the legendary national coach with Teodor Peterek scoring the only goal for the Poles ("Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny", sports supplement, 20 September 1938: II). However, there was no sign of triumphalism in the German camp after a match that was also victorious from a propaganda point of view. Their victory was well deserved and the most convincing in the history of matches between the two national teams, as was unanimously acknowledged by the press in both countries ("Przegląd Sportowy", 19 September 1938: 2; *ibid.*, 22 September 1938: 3).

After the match, the *Reichssportführer* commented on the "beautiful and chivalrous competition between the players of both teams in a truly friendly atmosphere" (*ibid.*, 19 September 1938: 1). A similar atmosphere prevailed at the post-match banquet:

"The finale of the meeting in the banquet hall, decorated with the flags of both countries, was even more cordial. What the leaders of the opposing teams said to each other could be called compliments. But there is no doubt that the atmosphere of relations between the two football associations is of a kind that one would wish for in every other area of common contact. This was expressed by all the speakers, including the German sports leader Von Tschammer Osten, who clearly emphasised the role of the Polish players as their first opponents after the coup. This was emphasised even more strongly by Mr Erbach (...),

who described our relations as a model to be followed for the benefit of both countries. He sees youth contacts as ideal work for the state in the spirit of love for one's homeland, which is everyone's duty" (ibid).

The Mayor of Chemnitz, W. Schmidt, also spoke warmly of Poland. The *Oberführer* of the local SA, who, in addition to building the stadium, also initiated the construction of the so-called Jewish Pillory in the city, a plaque with the names of the Jewish inhabitants of Chemnitz, also expressed his wish to get to know Poland personally. He planned to visit it the following year.... ("Raz, dwa, trzy..."; 25 September 1938: 3; Urban 2012: 80).

At the post-match celebration, as if to sweeten the blow, the Germans generously presented the Polish players with multiple gifts, which were products of local industry: fine porcelain, silver cigarette cases, lighters and wallets ("Raz, dwa, trzy..."; 25 September 1938: 3). Eight of them from Upper Silesia, Ewald Dytko, Wilhelm Gora, Erwin Nyc, Teodor Peterek, Leonard Piątek, Ryszard Piec, Gerard Wodarz and Ernest Wilimowski, would be playing for German clubs within a dozen months (E. Wilimowski would even make his debut for the Third Reich's national team) in the wake of the German aggression against Poland in September 1939 (Kowoll 2019: 405-406, 412, 417-418). They were therefore unable to take part in the next match between the Polish and German national teams, which was announced by *DFB* representatives after the game in Saxony and scheduled for September 1940.... ("Przegląd Sportowy", 19 September 1938: 1).

The analysis of the football matches between Poland and the Third German Reich in the 1930s shows that international sporting competition, which usually arouses great public interest, becomes a useful tool for political decision-makers pursuing specific political goals in the domestic and international space. Those five confrontations between Polish and German footballers took place in the unique and changing realities of bilateral relations, but, which is worth emphasizing, the sporting events described also created a 'political atmosphere' in Polish-German relations, becoming a test of their state. It has to be said that the political nature of these confrontations was the result of the gradual subordination of sport to state institutions in both countries: sport was thus institutionalised by political actors. This finding is in line with one of the definitions of sports politics (Matras 2017: 56). It can therefore be concluded that the events described were the implementation, using the instruments of diplomacy (including public, cultural and sports diplomacy), of the sports policies of both countries in order to achieve the political objectives set.

In the case of Poland, these objectives were somehow embedded in the imperative to create a favourable image of Poland in Germany as a reliable partner of the Third Reich in the changing geopolitical configuration of Europe in the early 1930s. However, implementing the postulate of cooperation with Germany as a key element of J. Piłsudski's policy of balance through sporting contacts ran the risk of being counterproductive. There were fears about the legitimacy of organising matches between Poland and a leading European team, not only because of the nature of the Nazi regime, but above all because of the disparity between the sporting levels of the two national teams. This explains the grotesque expressions of joy on the faces of the Polish sporting and political dignitaries, even after minor defeats suffered by Polish footballers.

For the Germans, the initiation of high-level football contacts with Poland was intended to create a positive image of the new German regime in its eastern neighbour as an instrument for normalising Polish-German relations at a time when the authorities in Berlin were isolated on the international stage. The continuation of these contacts was, however, to serve as a tool for strengthening political influence in Poland in order to subordinate it to German geopolitical interests. To this aim, the Nazis used their propaganda apparatus, including the sports press. In the end, Poland's political elite opposed this intention, despite the Germans' apparent efforts at 'cordiality', for example during the last match in 1938. The peaceful sporting competition on the football pitch was soon replaced by Germans with a bloody confrontation on the battlefield.

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ABSTRACT

This article is a historical-political analysis of inter-war Polish sporting events. It focuses on five football matches played between the Polish and German national teams during the Third Reich period, between 1933 and 1938. Apart from their obvious sporting value, these matches had significant political implications. These stemmed from the volatile political relations between Warsaw and Berlin after the Nazis came to power in 1933. Generating enormous public interest in both countries, they became a useful tool for the political and sporting elites of Poland and the Third Reich to achieve political goals in their mutual relations. This was facilitated by the progressive subordination of sport to state institutions in both countries.

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