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POLISH FENCING COACHES IN THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN FENCING AFTER 1989

In the first decade of the 21st century the United States has joined the historical leading European fencing powers: France, Italy, Russia, Germany, Hungary and Poland. At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens the American fencers won the gold and bronze medals in women's individual saber – an event debuting in the Olympic program. Four years later at the Olympics in Beijing the US fencers swept all three medals in women's individual saber, bronze in women's team saber, silver in women's team foil and silver in men's team saber. Olympic fencing, especially women's saber fencing, is currently in its heyday in the United States.¹ It is an important part of collegiate athletics and the number of fencing clubs in the USA is probably the largest in the world.

¹ E. Korfanty, Preface, [in:] Z. Borysiuk, *Modern Saber Fencing*, SKA SwordPlay Books, Staten Island, NY 2009, p. 17.

The author of the mentioned successes of the American women's saber in the two consecutive Olympics is a Polish fencing master Edward Korfanty, who is regarded as one of the most renowned fencing coaches in the present-day United States. In July 2009 the United States Fencing Association (USFA) formally announced the hiring of national weapon coaches to lead all of the national fencing team programs (women's foil, women's epee, women's saber, men's foil, men's epee, men's saber and Paralympic wheelchair fencing) "with the ultimate goal of medal performances in the London Olympics in 2012 and beyond".² Out of the newly appointed National Coaching Team, Edward Korfanty is to lead the women's saber team, while another Polish fencing master Lesław "Les" Stawicki will be in charge of the US wheelchair fencing team at the London Paralympics in 2012.

Korfanty and Stawicki are not just two isolated examples of successful Polish fencing coaches in the United States. In fact, Polish fencing masters work in many American sports clubs and schools, colleges and universities. Their pupils are placed high at the national and international competitions in all fencing age categories (Y10, Y12, Y14, Cadet, Junior and Senior). There are also Polish-American fencing schools, which maintain Polish cultural traditions.

Many Polish fencing coaches came to the United States after 1989, at the time of dramatic post-communist economic and social transformations in Poland. The year 1989 coincided with the World Championships in Fencing in Denver, after which a number of European coaches decided to stay in the United States and contribute with their valuable skills and experience to the development of American fencing. At that time the USFA started to organize a number of courses with European masters aimed at the improvement of fencing coaches' professional level in the United States. In 1990 these courses took place in the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, under the supervision of the "Father of the Polish School of Fencing" Zbigniew Czajkowski, Lesław Stawicki, as well as famous coaches Lev Saychuk and Vladimir Nazlymov from the USSR.³

This article is a presentation of the work and achievements of the most famous Polish fencing coaches working in the United States today against the background of the recent international successes of American fencers. It is an attempt to discuss an important Polish-American link in the area of sport, which, unfortunately, remains rather unknown to the general public in Poland.

² A. Lagan, *National Coaches Announced*, "USA Fencing", 2009, date of access: 1 Mar. 2010, <http://usfencing.org/news/article/14644>.

³ Z. Czajkowski, *Wakacje kierowcy autobusowego, czyli listy z Ameryki i Estonii* (Bus Driver's Holidays – Letters from America and Estonia), "Sport Wyczynowy", no. 11-12 (1990), pp. 6-7.

HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF FENCING IN THE UNITED STATES

Fencing was practiced already in the American colonies in the 17th century, most notably in Virginia, where plantation owners carried on the genteel traditions of England.⁴ The first fencing school was founded in Boston in 1673. In 1734 *A Complete System of Fencing or The Art of Defence* by Edward Blackwell was published in Williamsburg, Virginia, as the first ever book on sports to be published in America.⁵ At the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 New Orleans had a number of fencing masters as part of its French heritage.⁶ According to Richard Gradkowski, a former Secretary and Treasurer of the United States Fencing Coaches Association, a certain Mr Wengerski, “an interesting Young Polander” propagated fencing in the United States in 1834. In Philadelphia, Wengerski organized exhibition saber and bayonet duels, cavalry contests with sabers and lances as well as fencing bouts against four opponents at a time.⁷

After 1848 the German Turners brought modern fencing to the United States. After the Civil War, fencing was incorporated into the programs of colleges and athletic clubs. In 1888 the first national governing body for fencing was founded in the United States as part of the Amateur Athletic Union. Three years later, the Amateur Fencers League of America (AFLA) was formed by a group of New York fencers seeking independence from the AAU, and in 1892 it organized the first US national championships. In the 1890s the renaissance of interest in fencing was nearly concurrent with the revived interest in the Olympic Games and the expansion of collegiate sports.⁸

Since 1981 the AFLA has been known as the United States Fencing Association (USFA). In 1982 the USFA national office was opened at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. The USFA is the US member of the International Fencing Federation (Fédération Internationale d’Escrime, FIE) and the main governing body of American fencing, conducting national championships and other important fencing events.⁹

Collegiate fencing in the United States is administered by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which held its first fencing championship in 1941; the Intercollegiate Fencing Association (IFA), founded in 1894 by Columbia, Harvard and Yale; and the National Intercollegiate Women’s

⁴ R. Cartagena, *Spotlight on Laura Colon-Marrero*, “Newlink – a Monthly Publication of CSOSA”, vol. IV, no. 5 (2004), p. 8.

⁵ “Museum of American Fencing”, date of access: 15 Feb. 2009, <http://museumofamericanfencing.com>.

⁶ R. Cartagena, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷ Z. Czajkowski, *Listy z Ameryki czyli kolejne wakacje kierowcy autobusowego* (Letters from America – Bus Driver’s Holidays One More Time), “Sport Wyczynowy”, no. 3-4 (1996), pp. 106-107.

⁸ J. R. Tishman, *Fencing*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of World Sport from Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. D. Levinson and K. Christensen, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 128-129.

⁹ “USA Fencing”, date of access: Feb. 15 2010, <http://usfencing.org>.

Fencing Association (NIWFA), founded in 1929 by Bryn Mawr, Cornell, New York University and the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁰

The teaching of fencing is administered by the US Coaches Fencing Association (USFCA) founded in 1941. The USFCA is a national academy of the International Academy of Arms (Academie D'Armes International, AAI), the international governing body of fencing masters. The diplomas awarded through the USFCA are recognized by the AAI and its national academies throughout the world.¹¹

An institution devoted to the historical records of American fencing is the Museum of American Fencing at the Fairfield Avenue School of Fencing in Shreveport, Louisiana. Its director is the USAF Official Historian Andy Shaw, who also operates the United States Fencing Hall of Fame. Nominations to the Hall are based on research as well as suggestions from the USFA membership and voted by the USFA Congress.¹²

POLISH COACHES IN AMERICAN FENCING SCHOOLS AND CLUBS

Polish coaches working in fencing clubs and Polish fencing school can be found in all regions of the United States. Many graduates of these schools have found their way into collegiate fencing and are active participants in fencing competitions at the national and international levels.

One of the most famous fencing clubs in the Washington-Baltimore-Annapolis area is Salle Palasz founded by Richard Olszowski a.k.a. Dick Oles – a Polish-American coach who served as head coach at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore for forty-three years¹³. Dick Oles has never been to Poland but the club name (*palasz* is broadsword in Polish) and its emblem of the crowned Polish white eagle are important marks of Polish tradition.¹⁴

In the same region there is the DC Fencers Club in Silver Spring, Maryland, headed by an accomplished Polish fencer and coach Janusz Smoleński. In Poland Smoleński had practiced fencing in the CWKS “Resovia” military sports club in Rzeszów and in the AZS AWF sports club in Katowice. In the late 1970s he was one of the top fencers of the Regional Division of the Polish Fencing Association in Rzeszów and a member of the Junior Polish National

¹⁰ J. R. Tishman, op. cit., pp. 128-129.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “US Fencing Hall of Fame”, date of access: 15 Feb. 2010, <http://usfencinghalloffame.com>.

¹³ Richard Oles, *Maitre de'Armes*, “Coach’s Corner At Tri-Weapon Fencing”, date of access: 17 Feb. 2010, <http://www.twcfencing.com>.

¹⁴ Z. Czajkowski, *Listy z Ameryki czyli kolejne wakacje kierowcy autobusowego*, op. cit., p. 108.

Team.¹⁵ Smoleński majored in sports coaching at the University School of Physical Education in Katowice and obtained his master's degree in 1986 after a successful defence of his thesis on Polish fencing literature at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. After graduation he became an assistant in the Department of Fencing and Chair of Individual Sports in his alma mater.¹⁶ He emigrated to the United States in 1990 and started working in the DC Fencers Club. Since his arrival the club "has grown from a small recreational center to one of the best in the United States".¹⁷ He is currently the club head coach and a certified fencing master with the USFCA. Smoleński's students have won medals at the National Championships, the Junior Olympics and North American Cup Competitions. The women's epee team under his supervision became the US team champion in 1995, and junior fencers on the same team won a bronze medal at the US National Championships a year later.¹⁸

Another famous coach at the DC Fencers Club is Dariusz Gilman, who had begun his fencing career at the age of ten in the "Zryw" fencing club in Opole. Gilman achieved his most spectacular fencing successes under his first fencing master Zbigniew Borysiuk. In college he majored in rehabilitation and trained fencing under Bogdan Kubicki and Zbigniew Czajkowski in the fencing section of the AZS AWF sports club in Katowice. His collegiate fencing successes included Polish national championship in team saber, Cadet European Championship, Cadet World Championship, Junior European Championship and the bronze medal at the FIE World Championships in Fencing in 1998. He graduated from the University School of Physical Education in Katowice in 1999, after having defended his master's thesis on wheelchair fencing. In the same year Dariusz Gilman came to the United States and started working as a fencing coach at the Penn State University, winning the NCAA championship with the Penn State team the same year. Since 2000 Gilman has been a saber coach (and occasionally epee coach) in the DC Fencers Club. Gilman's coaching achievements in the United States are truly impressive. A number of his students have won US fencing championships in the Y10, Y12, Y14, Cadet and Junior categories. One of his students is a US-based, Norwegian fencer Elizabeth Dobloug, who has won the world veteran championship in women's epee.¹⁹

New Jersey as a state with a formidable Polish-American population also has some of the most prominent fencing schools run by Polish coaches. One of

¹⁵ G. Szajna, *Ewolucja sportów walki na Podkarpaciu w latach 1945-1989 w świetle przemian społecznych* (Evolution of Combat Sports in Poland's Podkarpacie Region between 1945 and 1989 in the Light of Social Transformations), unpublished PhD dissertation, University School of Physical Education (Katowice) 2009, pp. 301-303.

¹⁶ M. Łuczak, *Szermierka w Polsce w latach 1945-1989* (Fencing in Poland 1945-1989), "Monografie nr 34 AWF Poznań" (2002), p. 358.

¹⁷ "DC Fencers Club", date of access: 1 Mar. 2010, <http://dcfencing.com>.

¹⁸ Z. Czajkowski, *Listy z Ameryki czyli kolejne wakacje kierowcy autobusowego*, op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁹ Personal correspondence with D. Gilman, 2 Feb. 2010.

the most successful schools for children is the Polish-American Fencing School in Linden. According to its official website, “In each year of the past four years, at least two of PAFS fencers have been selected by the US Fencing Association to represent the United States at either the Senior, Junior or Cadet World Championships. Very few fencing schools or clubs in America can claim such successful results”.²⁰ The PAFS fencers have won over 150 medals at different levels of national competition, and World Championships. Currently, three Polish-American graduates from the school, who also work there as assistant coaches, have become members of the new USA National Fencing Team: Dagmara Woźniak, Karolina Vloka and Monika Aksamit.²¹ In 2009, a Polish fencer from the PAFS Aleksander Ochocki won the NCAA championship in individual saber, representing the Pennsylvania State University. The Penn State fencing team consisting of former PAFS competitors Aleksander Ochocki, Daniel Bąk and Monika Aksamit won also the gold medal in team competition.²²

The founder and head coach of the New Jersey school is Janusz Młynek, who has a 30-year fencing and coaching experience. He graduated from the Academy of Physical Education in Kraków, and was a two-time saber vice-champion of Poland. Młynek had trained in the Legia Warszawa Fencing Club, where he was on the same team with the best Polish sabreur in history Jerzy Pawłowski.²³ In 2001 he was appointed head coach of the fencing team at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, where he revived the varsity fencing program, and then became the Technical Coach for the saber squads at the US Military Academy at West Point.²⁴ Apart from the PAFS Młynek also heads fencing clubs in the Polish Cultural Foundation in Clark, New Jersey and the Polish-Slavic Center in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York.²⁵ Młynek’s PAFS has already acquired its reputation among the American fencing schools for children. The head coach notes that “Once my kids show up at any fencing contest, they tend to instill fear in the other teams. We all wear PAFS badges on our outfits, we are recognized and respected, and this is beautiful”.²⁶

On the west coast one of the top youth fencing clubs employing fencing masters from all over the world is the California Fencing Academy in San Jose, which is jointly run by American fencing master Dan Tibbets and his Polish

²⁰ “Polish-American Fencing School”, date of access: 1 Mar. 2010, <http://pol-amfencing.com>.

²¹ L. Zajkowska, *Wołodyjowscy Młynka* (Młynek’s Wołodyjowskis), “PLUS Polonijny Tygodnik Reklamowy”, 19 Feb. 2009, p. 10.

²² *Sukces Polonijnych Studentów w NCAA* (NCAA Successes of Polish Students), “PLUS Polonijny Tygodnik Reklamowy”, 2 Apr. 2009, p. 32.

²³ A title conferred on Pawłowski by the International Fencing Federation (FIE) in 1967 (L. Zajkowska, op. cit., p. 10).

²⁴ “Polish-American Fencing School”, op. cit.

²⁵ “Centrum Polsko-Słowiańskie” (Polish-Slavic Center), date of access: 17 Feb. 2010, <http://www.polishslaviccenter.org>.

²⁶ L. Zajkowska, op. cit., p. 10.

wife Anna Stokłosa. Before her coaching career in the United States Stokłosa was a fencer in the AZS AWF sports club in Katowice, Polish national champion and member of the Polish Olympic Team.²⁷ In the words of Dan Tibbetts, the California academy “is now a mom and pop operation. Her [Stokłosa’s] influence here has been paramount to our program”.²⁸

In the Midwest, the Cracovia School of Foil in Madison maintains Polish fencing traditions in the State of Wisconsin. The school was founded in 1997 by its current head coach and director Krystyna Kostecka, who had come to the United States in 1990 and was a former student of Lesław Stawicki. The Cracovia fencing halls are decorated in Polish flags and emblems and the school website contains links in the section “Salute to the Past” to various Kraków websites. The club is dedicated to promoting the sport of foil fencing at both the recreational and competitive levels. According to its promotional leaflets, “Beginners and experienced fencers, women and men are welcome equally. Students with accent and no accent are welcome equally (our Coach speaks in five languages)”.²⁹

In Texas, the Dallas Fencers Club established in 1930 is also currently led by Polish head coach Waldek Czaja, who has been fencing and coaching for over twenty-five years and is the author of a number of successful DVD fencing trainers. He was a member of the Polish Junior and Senior National Teams and has been a finalist in numerous fencing World Cup events. His students have won US national medals in foil, epee, and saber and are currently listed on the national point standings. Coach Czaja is a highly rated national level referee in all three weapons and has been awarded the degree of Moniteur L’Armes from the USCFA. According to Czaja, “Our goal is to promote the Olympic sport of fencing by developing skills in adults and children such as coordination, quick creative thinking and the use of strategy. These skills carry over into everyday life and help students get into shape, have fun and relieve stress”.³⁰

Finally, the Rocky Mountains region can boast the Cheyenne Fencing Club and Modern Pentathlon Center in Denver, Colorado. Its fencing hall is decorated with Polish hussar weaponry and arms, pennants and plenty of photographs. In 1989 the USFA together with the Cheyenne Fencing Club organized the FIE World Championships in Denver.³¹ Currently one of the fencing coaches there is the Polish modern pentathlon legend Janusz Peciak-Pyciak – the gold medalist from the 1976 Montreal Olympics – who has been living in

²⁷ J. Wallner, *California Fencing Academy Brings Mythic Sport to Santa Cruz County*, “The Mid-County Post”, 16 May 2006.

²⁸ “California Fencing Academy”, date of access: 17 Feb. 2010, <http://www.calfencingacademy.com>.

²⁹ “Cracovia School of Foil Fencing”, date of access: 17 Feb. 2010, <http://www.cracoviafoilfencing.com>.

³⁰ “Dallas Fencers Club”, date of access: 18 Feb. 2010, <http://www.dallasfencers.com>.

³¹ Z. Czajkowski, *Wakacje kierowcy autobusowego, czyli listy z Ameryki i Estonii*, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

the United States since 1985, and is also coaching the US Modern Pentathlon Olympic Team.³²

NCAA SUCCESSES OF POLISH FENCING MASTERS

At the collegiate level in the United States fencing became a championship sport in 1941. In addition to NCAA individual championships for men in foil, epee, and saber, there were team weapons championships, which determined the winner of the overall team championship. Women's fencing was added as a separate sport in 1982, with individual competition only in foil, along with a team championship. Since 1990 there has been a single NCAA fencing championship meet, with the team championship based on combined men's and women's events.³³

The table below lists the NCAA fencing champions and runners-up since the introduction of the combined team championship. In fact, the last twenty years of collegiate fencing in the United States have been dominated by teams from the Pennsylvania State University and University of Notre Dame in Indiana led by two renowned Polish coaches Wiesław "Wes" Głon and Janusz Bednarski, respectively.

Table 1. NCAA fencing championship results.³⁴

Year	Team Champion	Second Place
1990	Penn State	Columbia-Barnard
1991	Penn State	Columbia-Barnard
1992	Columbia-Barnard	Penn State
1993	Columbia-Barnard	Penn State
1994	Notre Dame	Penn State
1995	Penn State	St. John's
1996	Penn State	Notre Dame

³² "Cheyenne Fencing Society", date of access: 17 Feb. 2010, <http://www.coloradofencing.com/janusz.htm>.

³³ NAIA and NCAA Fencing Scholarships, date of access: 2 Mar. 2010, <http://www.collegesportsscholarships.com/fencing.htm>.

³⁴ Adapted from "NCAA.com", date of access: 2 Mar. 2010, <http://www.ncaa.com>.

1997	Penn State	Notre Dame
1998	Penn State	Notre Dame
1999	Penn State	Notre Dame
2000	Penn State	Notre Dame/St. John's
2001	St. John's	Penn State
2002	Penn State	St. John's
2003	Notre Dame	Penn State
2004	Ohio State	Penn State
2005	Notre Dame	Ohio State
2006	Harvard	Penn State
2007	Penn State	St. John's
2008	Ohio State	Notre Dame
2009	Penn State	Notre Dame

Wiesław Głon was born in 1954 in Bydgoszcz. He started fencing in saber in the “Gwiazda” sports club and was coached by Adam Papeè (1895-1990) the Olympic team saber bronze medalist in Amsterdam 1928 and Los Angeles 1932, and one of the founders and directors of the Polish Fencing Association (Polski Związek Szermierczy, PZS).³⁵ Between 1976 and 1981 Głon then continued fencing in the AZS AWF sports club in Warszawa. Before the commencement of his coaching career in the USA Głon's major successes included three Junior Polish Championships (1976, 1980, 1979), two Senior Polish Championships (1980, 1981) and a bronze medal at the Collegiate World Championships in Mexico in 1979.³⁶

Głon left Poland in 1981, arrived in the United States in 1983 and began to work as the men's saber team assistant coach at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. In 1985 he became an assistant coach for the

³⁵ T. Malinowski, Z. Smoliński and Z. Urbanyi, *Ważniejsze osiągnięcia sportowców województwa bydgoskiego w latach 1957-1986* (Significant Achievements of Athletes from the Bydgoszcz Province, 1957-1986), [in:] *100 lat sportu na Kujawach i Pomorzu* (One Hundred Years of Sport in Cuiavia and Pomerania), ed. W. Jastrzębski, Centralny Ośrodek Informacji Turystycznej, Bydgoszcz 1993, p. 271; Z. Urbanyi, *Zarys historii sportu bydgoskiego 1886-1975* (Outline of sport in Bydgoszcz, 1886-1975), Bydgoszcz 1980, p. 123; E. Lewandowska, *Analiza działalności organizacyjno-szkoleniowej sekcji szermierczej KS “Gwiazda” w Bydgoszczy w latach od 1971 do 1979 roku* (Analysis of Organizational and Training Activities of the Fencing Section of the KS Gwiazda Sports Club in Bydgoszcz, 1971-1979), unpublished MA thesis, Academy of Physical Education (Warszawa) 1982, p. 9; personal correspondence with A. Papeè, 20 July 1987.

³⁶ M. Łuczak, op. cit., pp. 326-328.

men's fencing team at the Pennsylvania State University. According to Glon's official Penn State profile, "He has been an integral part of every success Penn State has achieved during his tenure".³⁷ He has coached the US national teams for the Junior and Senior World Championships between 1990 and 1993, the Pan-American Games in Havana in 1991, and – most importantly - the Olympic Games in Barcelona (1992) and Atlanta (1996).³⁸

Janusz Bednarski has been coaching the fencing squad of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana for eight years³⁹ and has been recognized as an elite fencing instructor on the international level for more than thirty years, emerging as a specialist in all three weapons (foil, epee and saber) during that time.⁴⁰ Bednarski started fencing in the Cooperative Sports Club "Warszawianka" in Warsaw. In 1964 and 1969 he won the Polish championship in team saber.⁴¹ In 1975 he became director of the training section of the Polish Fencing Association (PZS).⁴² Between 1980 and 1984, as a member of a team of fencing experts including Zbigniew Czajkowski, Bednarski made four fencing training video manuals which were highly successful contributions to the propagation of Polish fencing coaching school.⁴³

Bednarski served as head coach of the Polish Olympic Saber Team from 1978 to 1988, whose members won eleven Olympic and World Championships medals.⁴⁴ In 1984, with the cooperation of the Polish Olympic Committee (PKOl) and PZS, he organized an international fencing coaching course in Warsaw with English as the language of instruction. The course was conducted by Zbigniew Czajkowski and Stanisław Kruciński. During the 1985-1988 term of office of the Polish Fencing Association Bednarski was awarded the prestigious Polish Silver Cross of Merit for his coaching accomplishments.⁴⁵ He is also a certified international fencing referee.⁴⁶

After having moved to the United States in 1988 Janusz Bednarski worked as the head coach at the Cheyenne Fencing Society in Denver, Colorado (1989-1994). In 1993 and 1994 he served on the US coaching staff during the Junior

³⁷ Wiesław "Wes" Glon Profile, "Penn State Men's Fencing", date of access: 12 Feb. 2010, http://www.gopsusports.com/sports/m-fenc/mtt/ghon_wieslawwes00.html.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Janusz Bednarski Profile, "CBS College Sports XXL", date of access: 12 Feb. 2010, <http://www.cbssports.com>.

⁴⁰ Notre Dame Fencing Coach Janusz Bednarski Signs Contract Extension, "CBS College Sports", 30 June 2006, date of access: 12 Feb. 2010, <http://www.cstv.com/sports/c-fenc/stories/063006aaa.html>.

⁴¹ M. Łuczak, op. cit., pp. 321, 324.

⁴² *Sprawozdanie Zarządu Polskiego Związku Szermierczego za lata 1978-1980* (Official Report of the Polish Fencing Association, 1978-1980), Polski Związek Szermierczy, Warszawa 1980, p. 4.

⁴³ *Sprawozdanie Zarządu Polskiego Związku Szermierczego za lata 1981-1984* (Official Report of the Polish Fencing Association, 1981-1984), Polski Związek Szermierczy, Warszawa 1984, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁴ Janusz Bednarski Profile, op. cit.

⁴⁵ *Sprawozdanie Zarządu Polskiego Związku Szermierczego za lata 1985-1988* (Official Report of the Polish Fencing Association, 1985-1988), Polski Związek Szermierczy, Warszawa 1988, p. 15.

⁴⁶ B. Borzęcki, *Białą bronią urzeczeni* (Fascinated with Fencing Weapons), Polski Związek Szermierczy, Warszawa 1994, p. 21.

World Championships. From 1994 to 2002 he was the head coach in the Indiana Fencing Academy in Mishawaka, Indiana. And finally in 2002 he started his successful career in Notre Dame. Bednarski's fencers have competed in the Olympic Games, World Championships and World Cups in all fencing age categories. His most famous recruits include Gerek Meinhardt, a US representative in men's foil at the 2008 Olympics, and Olympic epeeist Courtney Hurley. Two of his Polish pupils even reached the NCAA championship level in the United States: Alicja Kryczalo – women's three-time foil champion, and Michał Sobieraj – men's epee champion in 2005.⁴⁷

Janusz Bednarski has been a member of numerous advisory groups for the USFA, the US Olympic Committee and the USFCA. He is licensed by the FIE as an "A" category Fencing Director and "one of just a handful of fencing specialists in North America who are ranked by the International Fencing Federation".⁴⁸ He has also published a number of articles on coaching, effective club management and the counseling of athletes.

In New England one of the top NCAA fencing program has been run at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for sixteen years by Jarosław Koniusz. Koniusz was born in 1961 in Sosnowiec. His saber fencing career began in the GKS Zagłębie fencing club in Sosnowiec under coaches Jerzy Kubiczek and Jerzy Wandzioch. Some of his major team saber fencing achievements include Junior Polish Championships in 1978 and 1980 and Senior Polish Championships in 1984 and 1985; silver medal in the team saber tournament at the World Championships in Denver in 1989; gold medal at the Collegiate World Championships in Duisburg the same year and many other successes at the national level in Poland.⁴⁹ A former student of Zbigniew Czajkowski, he graduated from the University School of Physical Education in Katowice in 1989.

Jarosław Koniusz came to the United States in 1991 and founded the Cambridge Fencing Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, MA, where he is currently an associate professor on Physical Education and head coach of MIT's women's and men's varsity fencing teams.⁵⁰ Many of his students captured NACC championship titles and reached the fencing World Cup finals. "Koniusz has built MIT fencing into a perennial powerhouse, qualifying 25 fencers to the NCAA National Championships and

⁴⁷ *Janusz Bednarski Profile*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Sprawozdanie z działalności Okręgowego Związku Szermierczego w Katowicach za okres od 18 listopada 1976 r. do września 1980 r.* (Official Report on Activities of the Regional Division of the Polish Fencing Association in Katowice, 18 Nov. 1976 - Sept. 1980), Polski Związek Szermierczy, Katowice 1980; M. Łuczak, op. cit., pp. 329-333; H. Marzec, *Historia medalami pisana. 75 lat śląskiej szermierki* (History Written with Medals: 75 Years of Fencing in Silesia), Śląski Okręgowy Związek Szermierczy, Katowice 2002, pp. 49, 79, 99-101; B. Borzęcki, op. cit., p. 65.

⁵⁰ "Cambridge Fencing Center", date of access: 2 Mar. 2010, <http://www.cambridgefencingcenter.com/staff.html>.

guiding MIT to 17 New England Championship titles during his tenure”.⁵¹ In 2002, Koniusz was selected by the USFA to coach the United States saber team in the World Cup competition in Koblenz, Germany. In the same year he was honored by the Polish Fencing Association with a Lifetime Achievement Award.⁵²

Another Polish coach on the MIT’s Cambridge Fencing Center is Andrzej Próchniak, who trained with the Polish Junior National Team in the 1970s and has won numerous saber competitions in Poland and in the United States. He is also coaching at Brand Club and School of Fencing at Harvard University. His son, Evan Próchniak, who is a nationally ranked saber fencer, was chosen to represent the USA in the 2008 World Championship.⁵³

The fencing team from Wayne State University in Detroit is another example of collegiate fencing success achieved by a Polish coach Jerzy Radź. Radź was born in Gryfino in 1949. He earned his degree in physical education from the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw. Between 1973 and 1988 he pursued his coaching career at the Warsaw Sports Club, which was arguably the most prestigious fencing club in Poland.⁵⁴ From 1979 to 1988 Radź was also a member of the Polish Olympic coaching staff, where he coached, for example, Janusz Olech – the silver medalist in men’s individual saber at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988.

In the United States Jerzy Radź first coached fencing at the Washington University of Missouri (1989-1990) and the University of Wisconsin in Madison. In 1990 he became a USFCA fencing master. Since 1991 he has been the head coach of the men’s and women’s fencing teams of Wayne State University.⁵⁵ In his long career at the WSU he has coached eight individual US champions in all weapons. He is also a certified USFA referee.

LESŁAW “LES” STAWICKI AND DEVELOPMENT OF US WHEELCHAIR FENCING

In 1995, the USFA and Wheelchair Sports, USA, the governing authorities for wheelchair sports in the United States, established the first wheelchair fencing programs in the country. A year later the US Paralympic wheelchair fencing

⁵¹ *MIT Fencing*, “The Official Site of MIT Intercollegiate Athletics”, date of access: 2 Mar. 2010, <http://www.mitathletics.com>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “Cambridge Fencing Center”, date of access: 19 Feb. 2010, <http://www.cambridgefencingcenter.com/staff.html>.

⁵⁴ *Jerzy Radz Profile*, “Wayne State Warriors Official Athletic Site”, date of access: 2 Mar. 2010, http://wsuathletics.cstv.com/sports/m-fenc/mtt/radz_jerzy00.html.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

team participated in the Atlanta Paralympics.⁵⁶ It was coached by a famous Polish fencer Lesław “Les” Stawicki, who still continues with his job on the US national team.

Lesław Stawicki was born in 1936 in Lvov, where he later graduated from the National Institute of Sport and Physical Education. After World War II, when his hometown became a territory of the Soviet Union, Stawicki became the head coach of the Ukrainian SSR National Fencing Team. One of his most famous pupils was the World and Olympic Soviet fencing champion Viktor Sidiyak. In 1972 he came to Rzeszów in Poland, where he began fencing in the “Stal” Rzeszów sports club, and until 1975 was a member of the Board of the PZS Regional Division in Rzeszów.⁵⁷ Between 1973 and 1990 he coached the Polish National Saber Team.⁵⁸ In 1975 he moved to Kraków, where for five years he was a coach in the “Cracovia” fencing club.⁵⁹ Between 1977 and 1980 Stawicki was a member of the Council of Coaches of the Polish Fencing Association.⁶⁰

One of Stawicki’s most famous pupils was the Polish fencing champion Ludomir Chronowski, who won the silver medal in team epee at the Moscow Olympics in 1980, and eight years later was also a member of the Polish Olympic Team in Seoul.⁶¹ The members of this Polish team won also silver and bronze medals at both Olympic Games in epee and foil, and Stawicki’s Polish saber team also earned bronze medals at the World Championships in Melbourne (1979) and Sofia (1986).⁶²

After the 1989 World Championships in Denver the USFA recruited Stawicki to start a fencing program in Louisville, Kentucky, where he established the Louisville Fencing Center in 1992.⁶³ Today the LFC is an impressive fencing facility with the state-of-the-art equipment, including eight Olympic fencing pistes. What makes the Louisville center unique is that it caters both to able-bodied and disabled fencers. It is, first of all, one of the leading wheelchair fencing centers in the United States, and it has developed its own state-of-the-art wheelchair frame.⁶⁴ At the Athens Paralympics of 2004 Stawicki’s pupil

⁵⁶ Wheelchair fencing was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1953 by the founder of the Paralympics, Sir Ludwig Guttmann. In 1955 it became an event in the Stokes-Mandeville Games, known today as the World Wheelchair and Amputee Games. Wheelchair fencing has been a Paralympic event since the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960.

⁵⁷ G. Szajna, op. cit., p. 206.

⁵⁸ “Louisville Fencing Center”, date of access: 4 Mar. 2010, <http://www.louisvillefencing.org>.

⁵⁹ G. Szajna, op. cit., p. 206.

⁶⁰ *Sprawozdanie Zarządu Polskiego Związku Szermierczego za lata 1978-1980*, op. cit., pp. 5, 7.

⁶¹ M. Łuczak, op. cit., pp. 260, 287, 299.

⁶² “Louisville Fencing Center”, op. cit.

⁶³ *En Garde! Kentucky Life Program 1016*, dir. B. Wickey, Kentucky Educational Television, 2004, date of access: 3 Mar. 2010, <http://www.ket.org>.

⁶⁴ “Louisville Fencing Center”, op. cit.

Scott Rodgers won the bronze medal in men's B individual epee for the United States.⁶⁵

ED KORFANTY AND THE GREATEST SUCCESSES OF AMERICAN OLYMPIC SABER

Edward Korfanty is the current US National Women's saber coach and arguably the most successful fencing coach in the United States history, who "planted Polish fencing roots on American soil, the fruit of which is now visible in the form of gold medals for the U.S. Olympic Fencing Team".⁶⁶

Korfanty was born in 1952 in Piekary Śląskie. He started practicing fencing in 1965 in the fencing division of the MKS Pałac Młodzieży youth sports club in Katowice. Between 1972 and 1984 Korfanty was a member of the Poland's national saber team and won a number of medals at the national and international level. He was also a finalist at World Cup and international fencing competitions.⁶⁷ After earning his fencing master diploma from the University School of Physical Education in Katowice, under the tutelage of Professor Zbigniew Czajkowski, he became head coach at the Polish Olympic Center in Katowice in 1984, and he worked in the fencing division of the MKS Pałac Młodzieży sports club in Katowice between 1985 and 1990.⁶⁸

In March 1990 Korfanty came to compete at the World Cup in New York City and stayed in the United States. His reasons for emigration were layoffs in the Zagłębie Sosnowiec Miners' sport club, where he had been employed as a coach, due to the post-communist economic transformations in Poland. As he recalls, "I had no job and had nothing to live on".⁶⁹ Initially, Korfanty taught fencing in a number of small fencing clubs. He then moved to Notre Dame, where he was an assistant coach, and until 1993 also coached at the Indiana Fencing Academy. At that time he was offered the job of head coach at the Oregon Fencing Alliance and the Oregon Episcopal School in Portland, Oregon. In 2000, under his direction, the Oregon Fencing Alliance Club became a one-weapon club concentrating solely on saber fencing.⁷⁰ The US Olympic Committee named him Coach of the Year in 2001, 2003 and 2004. In 2008, as the only Polish coach in American history, he was officially inducted into the

⁶⁵ "Wheelchair Fencer, The Official Website of Wheelchair Fencing for US Fencing", date of access: 3 Mar. 2010, <http://www.wheelchairfencer.org/history.html>.

⁶⁶ Z. Borysiuk, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶⁷ M. Łuczak, op. cit., pp. 325-331.

⁶⁸ H. Marzec, op. cit., pp. 34, 79, 99-101; B. Borzęcki, op. cit., p. 65.

⁶⁹ "Ed" Korfanty – najlepszy trener na świecie ("Ed" Korfanty: The Best Coach in the World), "WP.PL/Magazyn Sportowy", 9 Oct. 2009, date of access: 20 Feb. 2010, <http://sport.wp.pl>.

⁷⁰ "Oregon Fencing Alliance", date of access: 20 Feb. 2010, <http://www.oregonfencing.com>.

United States Fencing Hall of Fame.⁷¹ At present Edward Korfanty lives in Portland, Oregon and works as head coach of the Oregon Fencing Alliance, the Oregon Episcopal School, and the US Women's National Saber Training Center.

The accomplishments of Edward Korfanty's fencers have been extraordinary and unmatched, not only in the history of American fencing but in the history of world fencing. His students have won numerous World Championship medals under his tutelage and set an unprecedented marker for others to admire.⁷² In 1996 one of his students was the US national champion in saber at that time Adam Skarbionkiewicz, who is currently an assistant fencing coach at the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.⁷³

The streak of truly international successes commenced for Korfanty with his appointment as the first US National Women's saber team coach and continues until today. His team consisting of Mariel Zagunis, Christine Becker, Nicole Mustilli and Sada Jacobson won the World Championship in 2000, to repeat the same success in 2005 (Mariel Zagunis, Sada Jacobson, Caiylin Thomson, Rebecca Ward). Christine Becker won the Senior, Junior and Cadet World Championships in a single year.⁷⁴ At the Olympic debut of women's saber in Athens in 2004 Mariel Zagunis won the gold medal and Sada Jacobson bronze in the individual tournament. In 2006 Korfanty's pupil Rebecca Ward became the only fencer in history to win three World Cup titles in one season. Finally, the Beijing Olympics of 2008 brought the whole podium for Korfanty's fencers in women's individual saber (Zagunis – gold, Jacobson – silver, and Ward – bronze) and the bronze medal in the team competition. With the USFA appointment of Edward Korfanty as the National Women's saber coach his invaluable coaching skills will surely determine American fencing successes at the London Olympics in 2012. Additionally, Korfanty's US national squad includes three Polish-American saber fencers Dagmara Woźniak, Monika Aksamit and Karolina Vloka, who are the former students of the Polish-American Fencing School in Linden, New Jersey. The editors of the Polish "Magazyn Sportowy" (Sports Magazine) speculate that "It may be that the next US Olympic women's saber fencing team includes one American, three Poles and the Polish coach".⁷⁵

Edward Korfanty's greatest personal success is arguably Mariel Zagunis – only the second American ever to have won a gold medal in Olympic fencing,

⁷¹ "US Fencing Hall of Fame", date of access: 20 Feb. 2010, <http://usfencinghalloffame.com>.

⁷² "Oregon Fencing Alliance", op. cit.

⁷³ H. Marzec, op. cit., pp. 34, 79, 99-101; *Adam Skarbonkiewicz Profile*, "The Official Site of The US Air Force Academy Athletics", date of access: 12 Mar. 2010, http://www.goairforcefalcons.com/sports/c-fenc/mtt/skarbonkiewicz_adam00.html.

⁷⁴ "Ed" Korfanty – najlepszy trener na świecie, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

and the most decorated American fencer in Olympic history ever.⁷⁶ Zagunis started her fencing career with Korfanty in 1995, at the age of 10, and continues under his tutelage.⁷⁷ Her achievements are truly impressive at any level of women's saber competition today. She is an eight-time saber World Champion, including the title won at the FIE World Championship in Antalya in Turkey in 2009, two-time Olympic champion in individual saber and bronze medalist in women's team saber.⁷⁸ She is the first fencer in the world to hold four World Championships titles in one season: 2001 Cadet World Champion, 2001 Junior World Champion, 2001 Junior Team Champion and 2000 Women's Saber Team World Champion.⁷⁹ In Zagunis's own words: "For nine years I have been trained by the best coach in the world".⁸⁰

In one interview for the Polish "Magazyn Sportowy" Edward Korfanty revealed the secret of his coaching success: "In each sport you need to be an astute observer. Thanks to my experience I can easily note the rapid changes on the strip. And besides, I am still fencing myself. I have been the Men's Veteran's Saber World Champion three times. I can still feel the blade, and it really helps me in coaching my fencers".⁸¹

The most remarkable fact is that since the introduction of the women's saber into the Olympic program in 2004 Korfanty's saber fencers still dominate the Olympic and world championship tournaments until today. He is responsible not only for development of this event in the United States but also setting patterns for the new Olympic discipline worldwide.

At the end of the 19th century, the international competitions at foil and epee were dominated by the French and the Italians and those at saber by Hungary. Then, about 1960, Russia became the dominant nation in all three weapons, with occasional successes by Poland and Romania. After 1972, there was another reordering, which included a resurgence of fencing in Italy and later in France, as well as a new flourishing in Cuba and China. At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens President George H. W. Bush, who attended the medal ceremony, observed that "Fencing may not be a big sport in America, but today at the Olympics, it certainly is".⁸²

⁷⁶ Albertson Van Zo Post of the New York Fencers Club won the gold medal in singlesticks and team foil at the St. Louis Olympics in 1904, however, only two national teams took part in the fencing tournament: USA and Cuba (R. O'Leary, *The Best of the Best*, "Bluenadgold.Com", 8 Jan 2010, date of access: 6 Mar. 2010, <http://www.blueandgold.com/content/printversion.cfm?aid=8578>).

⁷⁷ "Oregon Fencing Alliance", op. cit.

⁷⁸ *Mariel Zagunis at the United States Olympic Committee*, date of access: 6 Mar. 2010, <http://fencing.teamusa.org/athletes/mariel-zagunis>; M. Wise, *A Stab at Greatness: Zagunis Wins Gold, Jacobson Bronze for the United States*, "Washington Post", 18 Aug., 2004.

⁷⁹ *Fencing Facts*, "USA Fencing", date of access: 3 Mar. 2020, <http://usfencing.org>.

⁸⁰ "Ed" Korfanty – najlepszy trener na świecie, op. cit.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² R. O'Leary, op. cit.

In 2010 fencing is definitely one of major Olympic sports in the United States. The high international level of American fencing has been an achievement of US fencers but also their coaches, many of whom came to the United States from Poland. Perhaps it is too early to refer to the Polish coaches' contributions to collegiate and Olympic fencing in America as "the Polish coaching fencing school in America", but they clearly left an indelible mark in the history of American fencing.

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Fencing developed as a distinct form of competition in Europe through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as dueling became increasingly subject to criminal prosecution. The thin, specially manufactured dueling swords became the preferred fencing instrument during this time. Women's fencing became an Olympic competition through the inaugural women's foil event in the 1924 Games. International fencing is governed by the Fédération Internationale d'Escrime, or FIE, with member national governing bodies in most countries of the world. Specific attention is paid to the development and enhancement of the athlete's footwork, as fencing requires very fast and explosive movements to occur in a relatively small space upon the piste.