

British Patterns in the Development of Polish Sport in the 19th Century

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Abstract

When Poland was deprived of her independence between 1795-1918 her national institutions were suppressed and non-existent while the old Polish patterns of PE and sport were treated as dangerous for Poland's oppressors. Cunning Polish sports activists turned to foreign patterns, which were ... supported by Poland's oppressors (Russia, Germany and Austria) as an additional means for the denationalization of the Poles. In this way under the cover of foreign forms, almost all the ingredients of PE and sport necessary for national goals were transmitted into Polish life. First of all British patterns were consciously used in several areas: organization of sport (clubs, associations), the sporting activities of the elite (horse racing, tennis), for common people (English style boxing, football), artistic influences (paintings on equestrian sports, rowing and tennis). Satirical literature and cartoons, however, criticized excessive pro-English sports snobbery. All these phenomena demonstrate the tremendous impact of British sport in a subjugated Poland of the 19th century. Research has provided large amounts of information about the importance of British sports influences abroad (Poland as an example), influences which British sports historians generally ignore and of which they appear to know very little or nothing at all.

Key words: sports history; Polish sport; sport art; sport literature

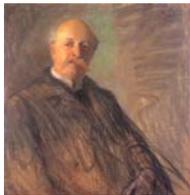


Fig. 1: Juliusz Kossak(1824-1899) One of the best famous painter of horse and sports scenes in the nineteenth century, Poland (date unknown) as painted by another polish artist Leon Wyczolkowski

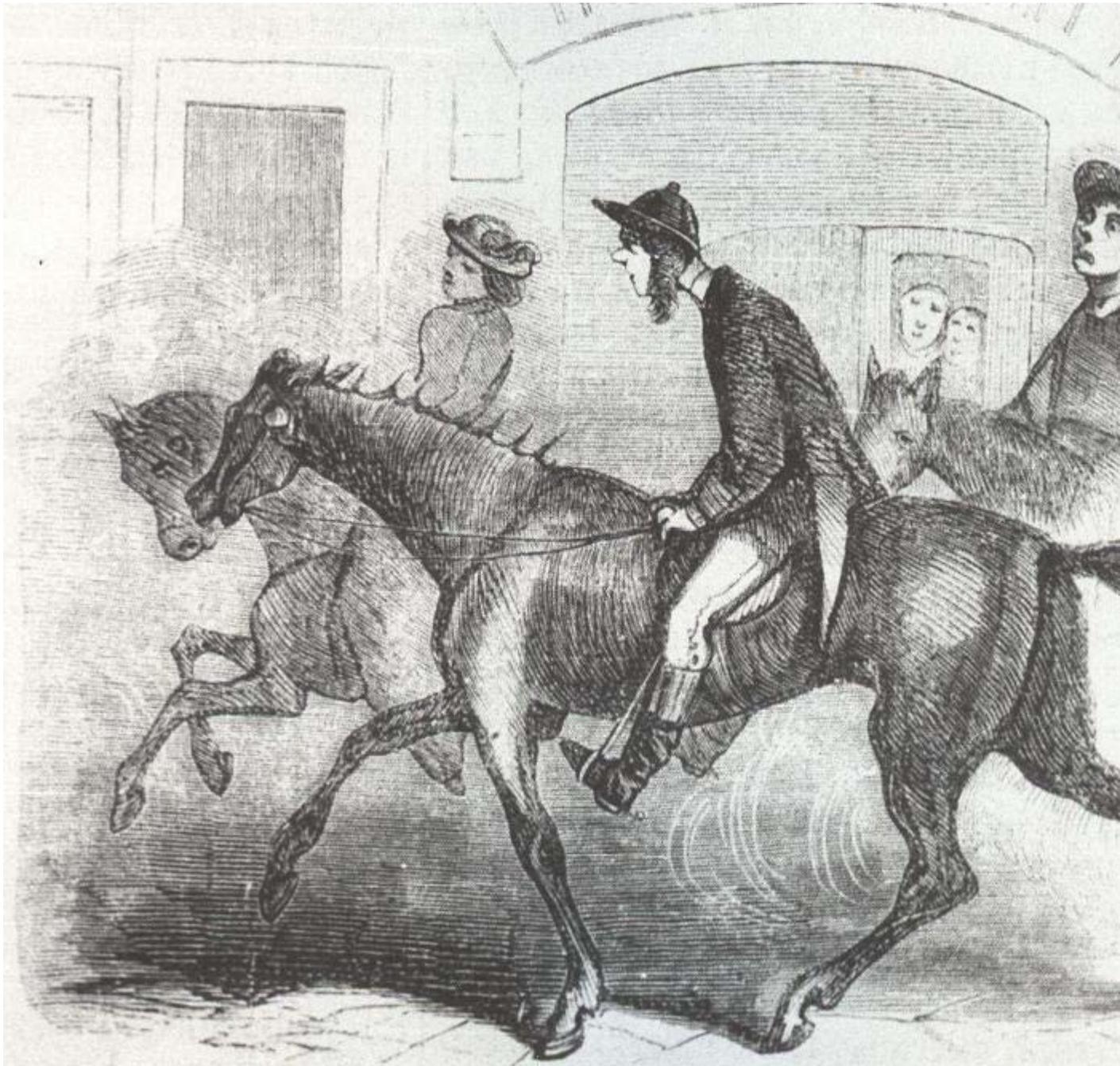


Fig. 2: Cartoon on English horse snobbery titled An English Snob Parading through Warsaw (1860) Franciszek Kostrzewski (1826–1911)

The inhabitants of Great Britain [...] present a paradox, for while to them sport and games are extremely important as sources of pleasure, yet they give little thought to them apart from the actual moments when they are either playing themselves, or watching others play.

P. Mc Bride, *The Philosophy of Sport*,
London 1932, p. 45.

British general histories rarely appreciate the influence of British culture abroad, except possibly in the area of the former British Empire and its colonies. It is surprising to see how the tremendous influence of British cultural, economic and political achievements remain in obscurity where the non-English speaking area is considered. Even

such important books as Niall Ferguson's *The Empire* limit their observations to an evaluation of how Britain influenced the world in areas of former British political domination. In these areas where Britain imposed its political and economic domination - British influences, were and are, of course, important, and as such should be treated by scholarly works. But in my opinion the universal value of any culture can be best appreciated and demonstrated when it was spread, assimilated or adopted abroad without any imposition in an area not remaining under political suppression.

Among the many nations of the non-English speaking area, strongly influenced by British civilization in general and also sport among other fields, Poland occupies a conspicuous position. Poland lost her independence in 1795, partitioned by the three European powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia. Deprived of her independence until 1918 the Poles tried to sustain their national cohesiveness by different means, among them by preserving nationality through culture. Lacking their political institutions the Poles started to build a kind of "spiritual underground state" through patriotic literature, art, music and, to an extent limited by their oppressors, some social institutions. The first half of the 19th century was the first period during which a number of great names of Polish poets, artists and composers started to be read, visible and heard not only on Polish soil, but also in Europe. These are, for instance, the great Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz (whose name my University bears), the painter Aleksander Orłowski or Frederic Chopin. In all these areas (with the exception of music) but especially in literature, Britain played a part through the influences of such great names like Walter Scott and George Gordon Byron. Scott was loved in Poland because his historical novels on Scotland under British rule strongly recalled Poland under the rule of the Russians, Germans and Austrians. It was also a time of which one Polish aristocrat, and at the same time writer, Kajetan Koźmian wrote: "We will never stop loving Byron because he was like from our flesh, he was in us and with us, he fought for freedom like we did, he suffered like us and he wept like us".

In the development of economy, the freedom of which was guaranteed in Vienna's Treaty of 1815 we see then strong influences of British economists, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. In industry it was the British engineers, such as John Founs Pace or William Preacher who laid the foundations of modern Polish industry, which, in great part thanks to them, was until 1830 comparable to that of France. At the same time it was on the Vistula River where the first steamship ordered in British docks and arriving in Poland maintained regular communication. It was probably the first European continental steam ship maintaining inland transportation, just a few years before France developed similar communications on her rivers. Due to the limited or non-existent possibilities to organize national institutions and organizations, British patterns of social organizations, such as co-operatives entered the Polish scene thanks to August Cieszkowski. The British social ideas of John Stuart Mill and, somewhat later, Herbert Spencer were introduced as a positivistic basis for developing a self-organised society. British scientific and medical societies served as a model for similar Polish societies.

In all the above-mentioned cases we can observe a similar, comparatively simple mechanism: while Polish national institutions and organizations were prohibited by the Prussian, Russian and Austrian governments, these same governments hoped that the introduction of foreign models to any institution or organization would contribute to the denationalisation of the Poles. And this is why some of these foreign influences were either supported by Poland's oppressors or at least not prevented! Among all these artistic, cultural and economic efforts, soon sport also became considered an important element of preserving national identity and vitality.

A number of Polish intellectuals and social activists were well aware that physical education and sport could play a conspicuous role in preserving biological strength and a sense of common well-being. Some decades before the final partition of Poland in 1795, a Polish governmental Commission of National Education was established, in fact the very first ministry of education in Europe. This Commission prepared a pioneering scheme of physical education which was planned to be introduced into all primary schools and high schools too, where sports, such as ball games, horse riding and fencing were commonplace as early as the beginning of the 18th century.

Unfortunately after Poland lost her independence all these progressive plans collapsed together with Poland's statehood. All Polish national institutions and the earlier Polish patterns of PE and sport was rightly treated as dangerous for Poland's oppressors in a manner similar to many corners of Europe dominated by different oppressors. It goes without saying how it looked in approximately the same times in the Highlands where, during the following few decades after the Jacobite uprisings in the 18th century, the English prohibited Scottish national customs, including the famous highland games. Any person simply wearing Scottish tartan could be arrested and even executed by the military courts of the British army. In Poland sport was not the main target of the Russian,

Austrian or Prussian police and courts, as long as it was foreign. The exception was when it was modeled on the exercises of other enslaved nations. When, in the middle of the 19th century, the Slavic gymnastic, movement-based Czech Falcon (Sokol) was introduced for the first time it was instantly prohibited in the Russian part of Poland while in the Prussian part it was prohibited for about 20 years, and then prosecuted by the administration and police until the outbreak of World War I. Only in the Austrian sector of Poland, after the dismissal of Chancellor Metternich, some more liberal policies, also towards the Polish branch of Sokol were followed.

In such a situation the cunning Polish gymnastic and sports activists turned to foreign patterns from the West, mostly from England. As I said before such patterns were not only permitted but were to some degree supported by Poland's oppressors as an additional means for the denationalization of the Poles. And in fact when Western-type sports started to be introduced we can simultaneously observe the rapid disappearance of numerous Polish traditional sports and games, such as *rochwist* - a traditional horse race to a pole at the top of a hill, or other such indigenous games as *czoromaj*, *grele*, *chwytki*, etc. Meanwhile the Poles, under the cover of foreign forms, transmitted into Polish life all the ingredients of PE and sport necessary for their national goals. In this way British patterns were developed and consciously used in several areas: the sporting activities of the elite (horse racing, tennis and polo), and somewhat later also for common people (English style boxing, football). Artistic influences were also visible especially in paintings on the theme of equestrian sports and hunting, rowing and tennis. English-style horse racing, substituting older traditional Polish forms was introduced for the first time in 1839 in the Prussian sector, and in 1841 in Warsaw, while shortly after that in some other larger Polish towns. We can compare old Polish and modern English horse racing on the basis of 19th century painting. See how the old Polish art of horse riding looked in the paintings of Juliusz Kossak, and his son Wojciech. Old Polish harnessing and riding dress was much influenced by oriental influences, due to historical Polish contact with the invasions of Mongols and later by the Turkish empire. After introducing the English style both horse harnessing and riders' clothing changed dramatically: harnessing derived from oriental adornment was abandoned and substituted with the spirit of Western practical simplicity, while the dress of the rider, although still colorful, with all its pink jackets and jockey's caps looked incomparably more practical and popular. Tennis was introduced to Poland in the early 1870s by the British staff of the Indian Telegraph Station in Warsaw but within just a few years it was spread first to the residences of the Polish nobility and then among the middle-class in numerous towns where the first English-style clubs were established. English-style rowing was introduced at approximately the same time, first in Warsaw then in Calisia (Kalisz) and Plock, all in the Russian sector. Cycling organizations were modeled more on French and German patterns but it was the British factory Rover which gave its name to the Polish bicycle. While in most European languages name of this vehicle was based on Latin *cyclus* and Greek *bi-* meaning double, in Poland the bike was named in Polonized form as *rower* [Rover]. Why? Simply because the most numerous bicycles available for Poles in the last decades of the 19th century were imported from England.

The word "sport" itself was used for the first time in Polish written text in 1856 in Konstanty Gaszyński's comedy *Horse Racing in Warsaw*, where we read:

*We have horse racing at last, SPORT develops all around,
And if the government allows us, we'll even have a jockey club.*

*[Mamy wycigi konne, SPORT wzmaga się wszędzie,
A jeśli rząd pozwoli i jockey-club będzie].*



Fig.3: Type of Polish horse painting influenced by British art: Painter Juliusz Kossak Hunting in Lancut, 1845

The first Polish encyclopedia which noted the entry “sport” was *Encyklopedia Orgelbranda* (*Orgelbrand’s Encyclopedia*), published in 1866. It was here that one Polish aristocrat, Count Henryk Levestam, who earlier visited England, provided an entry titled just “sport” and explained it in the following way: “It is what in England is called an outdoor play or game such as hunting, fishing or racing [...]. Sport enlarged its original sense of simple play and became a kind of higher art and science, treated carefully and absolutely necessary for the education of any complete gentleman”.

Satirical literature and cartoons, however, criticized excessive pro-English sports snobbery, visible especially in English-modeled clubs and at horse racing. Here [slide] we see some of the many other cartoons on English horse snobbery executed by Franciszek Kostrzewski, probably the best Polish cartoonist of the 19th century.

In literature numerous satirical poems on British horse racing were written. In one of them, criticizing the pro-English snobbery of the Polish elite, we read (I am sorry that I cannot do it in rhymed form as it was written in Polish):

One man, looking nobly
 Displays fashion from overseas,
 Like the British King Edward
 Tries to be an example of smartness and elegance [...]

Oh, my noble pseudo-Lords
 Waiting at the finish line
 He who wins - will gain prestige
 The one who loses - will remain sad and lost.

All those full of sporting vigor
 I would lead to their dreamed end
 If a race of stupidity were started
 All of you could easily win.

[Młodzian, co wyglądam panski,
 W typie zamorskiej urody,

Jak Edward Wielkobrytanski
Jest wzorem szyku i mody. [...]

O milordowie szlachetni,
Którzy stoicie przed meta!
Kto wygra rod swój uświetni,
Kto przegra - smutny jest przeto.

Sportowej pełnych ochoty
Do celu Marzen zawiode:
Urządźcie wścig głupoty -
Weźmiecie wszyscy nagrode].



Fig. 4 : Type of Polish horse painting before era of English influences, Painter Juliusz Kossak, 1876

English sporting language was especially criticised as dangerous for the pure character of Polish. As early as 1856 "Gazeta Codzienna" ("Daily Newspaper"), edited by one of the best known Polish writers and moral authorities, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, wrote with sarcasm about English style horse racing, criticizing at the same time the Anglomania which was visible at the turf:

"No one is able to understand or even read these crazy English words. If all these Anglomaniacs would kindly translate this vocabulary into Polish it would have some sense. Meanwhile we do not understand why they wear upon their hats inscriptions in English when all that can be named in Polish. All these inscriptions, not only on their hats but also in the printed programs of the race prove beyond any doubt that these people are

childishly reckless, that they do not respect their own traditions and that they completely disregard any serious work and care for the welfare of their country”.

The influence of the English language, first on the turf, then on tennis courts and among rowers attracted social criticism, however, regardless of the kind of sport. Its peak can be observed when the principles of association football were brought to Poland in 1892 by the gymnastic activist Edmund Cenar. All the terminology, like *out*, *corner*, *match*, *goalkeeper* were instantaneously polonized in their written forms but remained almost untouched in pronunciation giving Polish *aut*, *korner*, *mecz* or *golkiper*. During the 1890s at least three Polish newspapers announced competitions for Polish terminology of sport, in order to eradicate English influences. But their effects were rather poor and only a few words substituted the English terminology which was entering the Polish tongue in proportion to the growing influences of English sport.

Meanwhile Association Football was growing to the extent that at the beginning of the 20th century some clubs in Cracow were rich enough to import English players, a thing unimaginable today when Polish soccer players are imported to England and Scotland, but not *vice versa*. Among the first British footballers in a Polish club was William Benjamin Calder, who had formerly played for London clubs. Until 1908 he played 48 matches for Cracovia Club. Another Englishman, Dawson (whose Christian name has not been preserved) was not so good as a player but he became an excellent referee, active in Poland for several years before the outbreak of World War I.

All these phenomena, seen in Polish sport and also general culture, like literature (especially anti-sporting satire) and art, especially painting and to some degree in sculpture, demonstrate the tremendous impact of British sport in a subjugated Poland. Research has provided large amounts of information about the importance of British sports influences in Poland, and more generally in Eastern Europe, influences which British sports historians generally ignore and of which they appear to know very little or nothing at all.

The Polish example of British influences in sport is only a small fraction of the more general influences of British Civilization outside the English speaking world. It is quite surprising that numerous histories of British Civilization written by English natives are in most cases unaware how their great civilization affected non-Anglo-Saxon nations and cultures.

Let us go back to sport. I think that as soon as possible a conference of the British Society of Sports History should be arranged devoted entirely to the influence of British sports in the world, outside the English speaking area. This influence has been too important to leave it in its present and long lasting state of neglect.

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