

Historia sportu na tle rozwoju kultury fizycznej (History of sport against the background of physical culture development)

Wojciech Lipoński

Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, pp. 765.

Any work of literature on sport in a historical perspective will always focus on a more or less narrow aspect of this human activity. To cover and discuss the true wealth of the historical legacy of sport in human civilization as a whole is seemingly an impossible task. Authors who face this difficult challenge are often unable to analyze the synchronic and diachronic totality of sport, and tend to concentrate on one area, dimension or historical period, giving an imbalanced and unfair treatment to all other aspects of sport.

In his new monumental work, *Historia sportu*, Wojciech Lipoński accepts this challenge and responds to it with utmost success. Lipoński is a renowned sport and culture historian and arguably one of the greatest sport humanists of the 21st century. He is a UNESCO expert on traditional and indigenous sports and games and the author of the hugely successful *World Sports Encyclopedia* – an encyclopedic attestation of the world sport heritage consisting of more than 3,500 entries on sports, games and pastimes from all known human cultures, translated (so far) into four languages.

Without a shadow of a doubt Lipoński's new publication is the most comprehensive and versatile history of sport to date. It is a fascinating and voluminous book covering the history of sport, physical education, tourism and recreation in relation to the entire history (and prehistory) of humankind. Lipoński takes his readers on a journey through all historical periods, and reveals the crucial developments in physical culture in prehistory, antiquity, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment and the modern era. The book describes the physical culture of the ancient Middle East, ancient and modern Olympic Games, physical activities of peoples of Asian steppes, medieval knight's tournaments and their effects on the development of modern forms of sport and other innumerable examples of the richness of physical culture legacy. Lipoński also discusses all, i.e. absolutely all, imaginable issues that can be linked with sport and physical culture, e.g. illegal doping, Paralympics or propaganda.

Historia sportu is divided into nine broad chapters which follow a regular chronological framework. Lipoński begins his lively narration with the prehistory of physical culture, duly noticing that sport has accompanied man from the earliest stages. Then he moves to the ancient Middle East

with a particular emphasis on Persia and Egypt and their immense athletic legacies. The games and physical culture of ancient Europe are subjects tackled in the third chapter. Apart from the extensive sections on systems of physical culture in ancient Greece and Rome, the author also devotes much time to the forgotten contribution of Celtic peoples – the originators of the oldest European games and the concept of fair play. In the fourth chapter the diversity of physical culture of the ancient Far East is discussed. The next chapter deals with sports of medieval Europe in all its regions: from Byzantium and Slavic areas to Viking Scandinavia. The famous Western European knight's tournaments are also discussed here alongside plebeian pastimes. In the chapter on the Renaissance and the 17th century, Lipoński recalls the significance of *The Declaration of Sports* of James I and Robert Dover's Cotswold Olimpick Games in England. The great humanistic ideas and their role in developing sports are debated in two further chapters. The 19th century is shown as the age of sport in pedagogy, and the period of maintaining ethnic and national identities in subjugated European countries through sport as well as of the Olympic revival. It also deals with issues related to hygiene and tourism, including the achievements of British mountaineers in the 19th and 20th centuries and Thomas Cook's concept of modern tourism. Finally, the last chapter on the 20th century called "The Fascinating Sport Century" deals with all aspects of modern sports such as the Olympic Games, the role of sport in totalitarian states, sports for the disabled as well as racism and illegal doping in sport. In the conclusion Wojciech Lipoński looks into the future of sport. He points to some positive developments in sport such as technological advancements and revival of old sports and games in the 21st century. Finally, he reflects on post-modern dangers to physical culture such as extreme sports and tourism, doping, financial and media pressure and corruption.

The chapters also contain 47 boxes which focus on a number of interesting specifics: lists of games from West Africa and New Zealand, ancient agonistic terminology and disciplines, the Olympic Truce, poetic works on sports from different centuries, descriptions of Old Polish games and pastimes, an amazingly long list of active sport associations before 1914, present-day non-Olympic multi-sport events,

and finally controversies around Lance Armstrong and the phenomenon of Oscar Pistorius. Unfortunately, the boxes are not numbered and there is no index which could be used to locate them easily in the text.

There are 153 illustrations in the volume, all constituting an enthralling visual travel in time. The visual material has been carefully selected to provide evidence of the eternal presence of physical culture in human life. The illustrations show prehistoric rock paintings, ancient Egyptian representations, Greek art with Olympic motives and their historical legacy, medieval and renaissance sports, pastimes from all over the world, founders of sport movements and inventors of games, sport propaganda and sport heroes. An appendix with useful lists of facts, e.g. Oxford Cambridge Boat Race winners in history or miscellaneous summer and winter Olympic statistics, is also included. Highly revealing addenda comprise a list of winners of competitions in Olympic literature, architecture, sculpture, painting and music as well as a similar list of literary laurels awarded by the Polish Olympic Committee.

Wojciech Lipoński has collected a truly impressive bibliography for his book, and the categorization of his bibliographic sources can be of great help to researchers of all aspects of sports studies. Not only are the references grouped according to particular historical periods, but they are also conveniently divided into sport encyclopedias, sport journals, sport bibliographies, general histories of sport, and histories of individual sport disciplines. Additionally, under respective labels, the readers can find bibliographic items on relations between sport and various areas of human life such as religion, literature and the media.

Lipoński abandons the Eurocentric approach to the subject. Instead he peeks into every corner of the world and always finds there amazing elements of physical culture. He also shows how even the most remote and forgotten activities have influenced sports of the modern era. He proves that sports and games of the Maoris, ancient Celts, medieval Koreans 19th-century Victorians, and modern Americans have all equally contributed to the extremely

rich legacy of physical culture. Wojciech Lipoński's attitude to sport history is versatile and holistic. His book reveals how intertwined sport has become with every aspect of culture. One can easily note that such areas of human activity as sport philosophy, sport arts, sports literature, sports architecture, sport cinema and, finally, sport linguistics, constitute autonomous branches of science with their own themes and methodology.

An important premise of *Historia sportu* is Lipoński's bold departure from the common bias in all existing universal sport histories, i.e. from the exaggerated focus on Western, mostly British and American, civilization, and on its global sports products with a simultaneous neglect of minor nations whose participation in the international history of sport – because of that bias – has been less visible. It turns out that the legacies of those neglected countries such as Iranian *zurkhaneh*, Indian *kabaddi*, Icelandic *glima*, or Basque *pelota* are often much longer and more influential than those from the highly publicized English-speaking world. In Wojciech Lipoński's cultural history of sport and physical education all contributors, players, traditions and customs are given equal treatment.

Historia sportu is virtually the ultimate reference work for anyone interested in sport history. The book has been written in Polish and naturally it contains a great number of references to Polish sport history and Polish sports. This does not, however, make this valuable publication less comprehensible to an international reader. On the contrary, the author balances the content with the use of vigorous narration and numerous anecdotes to encourage readers' reflection on the links between sports and human civilization. A prospective translation of *Historia sportu* into English will bring it to the attention of the global audience to which it is, in fact, addressed.

Reviewed by Tomasz Skirecki
Faculty of English
Adam Mickiewicz University
Poznań, Poland