



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CYCLE RACING IN THE OPOLSKIE REGION: THE PRUDNIK AREA CLUBS IN THE YEARS 1948-1990

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### **Abstract**

*The article describes the early years of cycle racing in the Opolskie, primarily the history of the post-war Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sports Club. The origins and the efforts of the local clubs to promote this discipline in the difficult post-war period are outlined. From the very beginning of their existence, the enthusiasm and resourcefulness of sports activists, the majority of whom became involved as volunteers in all initiatives aimed at the promotion of cycle racing in the area of Prudnik and the whole Opolskie region deserves appreciation. The very fact that from the very beginning special attention was given to the youth, which later translated into very good results of juniors and seniors, is of special importance. Black and white photos supplement lists of keen activists, committed athletes and their scores to commemorate the contribution of the local clubs to the greatest achievements in the history of road cycling in Poland.*

**Key words:** *cycle racing teams, competitors, road racing, cycle racing season, criterion, cross-country racing*

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### **The early cycle training teams in the Opolskie region**

The first cycle training teams were established as early as in 1948 in the Opolskie region. By the Act of 28 June 1950 on administrative division of the state, 5 new provinces [1].

were established, including the Opolskie province. Notably, this administrative change led to the establishment of the Social Cycle Racing Team under the Provincial Physical Education Committee (Wojewódzki Komitet Kultury Fizycznej), regarded as a starting point in the development of the local cycle racing. One of the most committed activists of the then People's Sport Clubs (Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe) was Hubert Kampa from Dąbrówka Górna People's Sport Club. For many years, Kampa chaired the Social Cycle Racing Section of the Provincial Physical Education Committee. Other devoted pioneers of cycling included Marian Żużalek and Antoni Wyrwicz from the Włókniarz Niemodlin People's Sport

Club, Erwin Swoboda from Zabełków People's Sport Club, and Karol Kuhn from Grabie People's Sport Club.

The first spectacular success of the cyclists from the People's Sport Clubs in the Opolskie province was to win the gold medal in a 30-km team race on touring bikes by Karol Kuhn, Alfred Mróz and Mikołaj Wąsik (Grabie People's Sport Club). The team won during the first Central Athletic Meeting of the Rural Areas held in Kraków on 4-7 September 1952. Participation in that athletic event can be considered as a starting point for road bicycle racing in Poland.

In the early 50s in the Opolskie region, bicycle racing instruction was provided by the then Włókniarz Niemodlin People's Sport Club, established by Marian Żużalek, the first president of the Opole Cycle Racing Federation established on 10 March 1957, later a commissaire at international cycle races. Keen to teach entry-level cycle racing, he was always

glad to refer young athletes to other coaches for further training.

Among his trainees were Zbigniew Głowaty, a two-time participant of the Peace Race in the years 1958-1959, and Zbigniew Krzeszowiec, (later competing for Legia Warszawa, Piast and Kolejarz Gliwice). Żużalek was the first cyclist from the region to participate in the Road World Championships (Leicester, UK) and then four times in the Peace Race between 1970 and 1973 [2].

Other notable achievements include the victory of Norbert Sartowski, the winner of the first 3-stage race in the Association Championship and the success of Władysław Rudawski, who came first in the 1954 Athletic Meeting of the Rural Areas, the cross-country Poland Championships held in Nysa. They were the first cyclists from rural areas to enter nationwide road cycling competitions [3].

### Cycle racing in the Prudnik area

The origins of cycle racing in the Prudnik area can be traced back to the establishment of a cycle racing training team within the Łąka Prudnicka People's Sport Club back in 1955, an initiative by Andrzej Trybuła and Horst Treimer. The team and the People's Sport Club - Community Association in Prudnik co-organized many cycling events. Those events were aimed at promotion of cycle racing in the Prudnik area. The top cyclists in those days were: Erwin Chmiel, Jan Kubal, Antoni Knichnicki, and Fryderyk Til. It was in Łąka Prudnicka that Franciszek Surmiński, one of the most prominent figures in the Polish cycle racing, started his great career in 1955.

The cycle racing team in Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club was established in 1955. From 1958 on, cycle racing in the Opolskie province saw dynamic development with 16 teams associating 131 cyclists with cycle licences, which were introduced by a decision of the Polish Cycling Association in 1957.

The cycle racing team of Łąka Prudnicka People's Sport Club was taken over by Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club. The cycle training team was a leading sports team in Zarzewie in the years 1965-1969, functioning alongside the motor cycle, artistic gymnastics, sports acrobatics and weight lifting sections [4].

The club's management board comprised: Józef Szymczyk (president), Jerzy Grzeszkiewicz (tourism and sports vice-president), Maria Kowalska (women's affairs vice-president), Bolesław Folipowicz (executive vice-president), Franciszek Ryszkiewicz (financial affairs vice-president), Karol Koziarowski (treasurer), Maria Mielnik (secretary), Stanisław Mielnik (member), and Janusz Radziwnowski (member). The review panel comprised: Piotr Stanisław (chairman), Józef Wrzeszcz (member), and Wanda Żądło (member).

Out of the twelve athletes in the cycle racing team at that time, the best ones were: Franciszek Surmiński, Erwin Chmiel, Jan Kubal, Jerzy Wiśniewski, Józef Paradowski, Jan Genteman, and Fryderyk Til. They were the first cycle racers who proudly and successfully represented Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club, in local, national and international races. From the very beginning, rural clubs competed with such city clubs as: Start Olesno, Start Kłodnica, Unia Kędzierzyn and Piast Brzeg. Cyclists from rural clubs, such as Prudnik People's Sport Club, Zabełków People's Sport Club and Włóknierz Niemodlin People's Sport Club, frequently won or were ranked high.

In the years 1955-1962 the Opolskie region hosted a number of races ranked as province championships or mass cycling races, organized by the Provincial Council of the People's Sport Club Association, Trybuna Opolska daily, and the Provincial Physical Education Committee. In addition to road cycle racing events, city and cross-country races were held in towns like Prudnik. The city road races were especially attractive for spectators gathered in the streets as cyclists repeated the same laps many times in fierce competition for the finish line and top scores.

However, the popularity of cycle racing in the Opolskie region in the 50s was used for communist propaganda. One example was an event known as a peace cycle race, organized by Polish Cities Association (Związek Miast Polskich) both in rural and urban areas. The one held on 8 May 1955 was mismanaged, poorly-organized and largely improvised, compromising the safety of the participants. Apart from the stages in Prudnik and Głuchołazy, poor organization was evident in

Opole and Nysa, which met with a lot of criticism. In Opole, the races started with a considerable delay, the route was not marked appropriately, there were no starter and pilots and the race secretary office could not manage the whole situation [5].

On 24 July 1955 another race around Racibórz was organized. It enjoyed high interest, with 76 competitors representing 17 teams appearing on the start line. The route crossed Tworków, Racibórz, Rudnik, Wodzisław, Zabelków and Tworków.

The Opolskie region was represented by its top cycle racers, including Próba, Leszczyk (Unia Kędzierzyn), Głowaty (Włóknierz Niemodlin People's Sport Club), three of whom stood on the winners podium: Mr Kapusta (Włóknierz Niemodlin PSC) was the winner, Mr Staniak (Zabelków PSC) was the runner-up and Mr Preis (Unia Kędzierzyn) finished third [6].

As to the participation and successes of the Prudnik cyclists, it is worth mentioning the Cross-Country National Championships which took place on 11 February 1962 in Łódź. A hundred and fifty-two cyclists, first and second licence holders, took part in the race, which

meant no Polish representatives who had been preparing for the Peace Race. The competitors were to complete two laps, each 13 km long. Mr Wawrzko (Budowlani Łódź) came first, Mr Franciszek Surmiński (Prudnik People's Sport Club) second, and Ściborek (Społem Łódź) third [7].

The 1962 province track cycling championships, held on 29 July, were another event which took place on the Piast track in Brzeg. The Opolskie region racers were reported to show considerable progress. The weekly "Cycling Thursdays" attended by cyclists from the whole province played a major role in promotion of this discipline. As far as the sport results are concerned, Mr Leśniak (Piast Brzeg) won a third category race which covered a distance of 22,000 meters. The same distance was covered by first and second licence holders. Two of them, Franciszek Surmiński (Prudnik People's Sport Club) and Janek Chtiejem (Start Kłodnica), competed in a nick-and-tuck race. Finally, Mr Franciszek Surmiński had the highest point total and was declared the winner [8].



**Figure 1.** The Polish national cycling team at a training session in Warsaw before the Peace Race. Place: The Academy of Physical Education (1961). From the left: Andrzej Piechaczek, Wiesław Jarzębski, Józef Beker, Stanisław Królak, Stanisław Gazda, Bogusław Fornalczyk, Franciszek Surmiński and Henryk Kowalski. Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection

An intense 1962 cycling season in the Opolskie province culminated in a race on 14 October with an 81-km route starting in Opole, crossing Otmęt, Góra Św. Anny, Izbicko and

finishing in Opole. The event was to a certain extent a fitness test for the representatives of particular districts in preparation for next year's Provincial Athletic Meeting. Several factors

prevented the local club from achieving success: adverse weather conditions, the absence of the representatives of Brzeg, Głubczyce, Namysłów and Olesno clubs, the absence of Zbigniew Głowaty and Jan Chtiej, both members of the national cycling team. Out of the total of 56 participants, Franciszek

Surmiński (Prudnik People's Sport Club) came first, followed by Mr Chmura (Kozle) and Mr Radziej (Racibórz) [9]. Franciszek Surmiński was the first Prudnik resident who, as a Polish representative, successful in races abroad. Irreplaceable in team racing competitions, Surmiński also won stages in individual races.



**Figure 2.** The Polish team champion in a 100-km race: Zieloni Warszawa Team (1965) From the left: Eugeniusz Pokorny, Józef Beker, Bogusław Fornalczyk and Franciszek Surmiński, the captain (1961). Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection

At the peak of his career, which began in 1967, Franciszek Surmiński considered retiring from competition and continuing his sporting career as a coach. Originally an instructor, Surmiński later became a second-class coach and conducted training sessions for two groups:

- advanced seniors training six times a week between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm,

- juniors and youngsters training six times a week between 3:00 and 5:00 pm who routinely covered either of the two routes: (1) Prudnik – Łąka Prudnicka – Pokrzywna – Głuchołazy – Nysa – Prudnik (65 km), (2) Prudnik – Opole – Prudnik (100km)

Twenty-five cyclists altogether trained in the club at that time.



**Figure 3.** The Polish national cycling team at a Round Mexico Race (1965). From the left: Jan Kudra, Stanisław Gazda, Henryk Kowalski, Polish flag held by a Mexican, Franciszek Surmiński, Kazimierz Gazda and Antoni Palka. Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection



**Figure 4.** The Round Morocco Race: triumphant Franciszek Surmiński at the finish line of one of the stages (1965). Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection



**Figure 5.** Franciszek Surmiński during a training session at home on home-made rollers (1965). Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection



32 Wyścig Pokoju - motocyklem na trasie kieruje Franciszek Surmiński łącznik prasowy polskiej ekipy (1971)

Źródło: zbiory prywatne Franciszek Surmiński

**Figure 6.** 32nd Peace Race – motorcycle driven by Franciszek Surmiński – press representative of the Polish team (1971). Source: Private collection of Franciszek Surmiński



Reprezentacja Opolszczyzny na II Ogólnopolską Spartakiadę Młodzieży (1971)  
Pierwszy z prawej trener Franciszek Surmiński

Źródło: Zbiory prywatne Franciszek Surmiński

**Figure 7.** Representation of the Opolskie region to the 2nd Youth Athletic Meeting (1971).  
The first from the right, Franciszek Surmiński, the coach. Source: Franciszek Surmiński's private collection

In 1967 one of amateur races was organized in Lubrza near Prudnik. The route was 18km long and crossed villages around Prudnik. An unknown boy enrolled in the race and proved unbeatable. The newcomer far outstripped the runner-up, three years younger Henryk Jagielski, by almost 5 minutes. That dark horse was called Stanisław Szozda.

Referring to the beginnings of Stanisław Szozda's career, the first race he took part in was one organized by Bolesław Filipowicz in a series of competitions for amateurs held yearly on the RailwayMan Day in Łąka Prudnicka. In his debut race, Szozda was only 15, yet came second. The methods for organizing amateur cycling races proved successful: Prudnik activists were able to find talented young cyclists. In those days, the most outstanding competitors were: Erwin Chmiel,

Stanisław Szozda (Youth Olympics gold medalist), Józef Baran and Józef Paradowski.

Stanisław Szozda's progress was impressive and his father, seeing his son's great commitment, bought him a Huragan bicycle, the dream of many young boys in Poland in those days. A few months later, Szozda was given an even better bicycle, a Jaguar. At the beginning of 1969, he made his name in a series of races. Merely 19, Szozda was a runner-up in a cross-country race in the Polish Championship in Chełmno. He also won:

- first place in the Golden Circle (junior) race, a name for the Polish Championship of the People's Sport Clubs Association in road cycling.
- first place in General Walter race in Lublin.
- second place in the National Youth Athletic Meeting in Wrocław.



**Figure 8.** Stanisław Szozda at the early stage of his career (1970s). Source: Jerzy Stemplewski's private collection

In the 1968-1969s, Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club organized races for keen children cyclist, regardless of whether they owned a racing bike. At that time, the club's board member and the head of the Sports and Recreation Centre in Prudnik, Tadeusz Niebylski, was the manager of the racing club.

During the 1969 Opolskie cycling championships, the senior group won the team race, the juniors earned fifth place, and the younger juniors were ranked third in the competition.

Although, successful seniors, Erwin Chmiel, Jan Kubal and Zbigniew Pałagan, ended their sporting careers in 1969, the team continued its successful run with 34 competitors, 10 seniors, 7 juniors and 17 under-juniors trained by Franciszek Surmiński and Fryderyk Til in separate sessions for each age group. In 1970,

cyclists of Zarzewie achieved a series of subsequent wins locally and at the national level. The most notable achievements included:

- Stanisław Szozda and Edward Barcik's victory in a dual cycle race in the national championships in Elbląg,
- Franciszek Surmiński's fourth place in national cross-country championships in Kędzierzyn,
- Stanisław Szozda's fifth place in the 6th Baltic Friendship Race,
- Stanisław Szozda's first place at the 4-stage General Walter Battle Route Race.

From 1971, Stanisław Szozda, Emil Łysek, Józef Paradowski, Stanisław Babula and Józef Surmiński participated in the national-level training programme, followed by a series of victories.



**Figure 9.** Founders of the professional cycle racing in People's Sporting Clubs in the Opolskie Region. From the left: Witold Danel, the secretary of the Provincial Committee of the PZPR in Opole, Władysław Czaczka – chairman of the Provincial Council in the National Association of the People's Sport Clubs. Source: Jerzy Stemplewski's private collection

In 1971, Stanisław Szozda won the Tour de Pologne, the prestige of which grew with the streak of success by the Polish racing team members. As a result, it was classified 11 times in the AIOCC scoring system in one season and Włodzimierz Gołębiewski was a high-ranking activist in the organization.

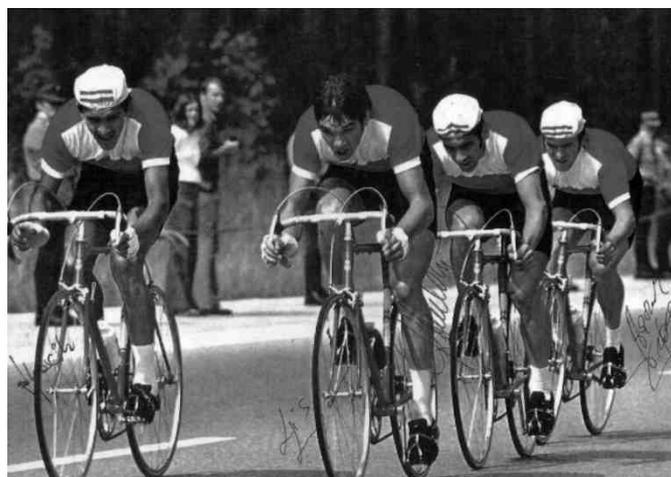
In every town along the route of the immensely popular Tour de Pologne race, local races were held (25km for under-juniors and 50km for juniors). In the 28th Tour of Poland, celebrated Ryszard Szurkowski, a four-time winner of the Peace Race, finished the stage in Dzierżoniów with a 16-minute loss, which was an opportunity for Stanisław Szozda as a representative of the young generation. Henryk

Łasak, his coach, was satisfied with the performance of his trainee and praised the high level of the race. He believed that Szozda, as a well-rounded athlete, deserved to win [10].

Following the spectacular success, Stanisław Szozda joined the WKS Legia Warszawa team.

While in Legia, Szozda won:

- the bronze medal in team racing with Edward Barcik, Jan Smyrak and Lucjan Lis in the World Championships in Mendrisio (Switzerland),
- a silver Olympic Medal in a 102.5 km team race in the Olympics in Munich in 1972 with Edward Barcik, Ryszard Szurkowski and Lucjan Lis on the team.



**Figure 10.** Olympics in Munich '72. Silver medalists in a 102.5km road race. From the left: Edward Barcik (Zieloni Opole), Lucjan Lis – without a cap (Ruch Radzionków), Ryszard Szurkowski (Dolmel Wrocław) and Stanisław Szozda (Legia Warszawa, soon to return to Zieloni Opole). Source: Eugeniusz Wasyliszyn's private collection



**Figure 11.** Stanisław Szozda, a two-time silver Olympic medalist in 102.5 km races (Munich '72 and Montreal '76). The 1974 Tour de Pologne winner. Source: private collection, Jerzy Stemplewski

Stanisław Szozda's achieved a spectacular success the Tour de Pologne held between 8 and 22 May 1974 by winning stages and equalled the record by Vesely, Pietrow and Lichaczew. In 1976, Stanisław Szozda won

another silver Olympic medal (Montreal), in a 102.5km team race with Tadeusz Mytnik, Mieczysław Nowicki and Ryszard Szurkowski on the team.



**Figure 12.** Munich '72 medalists outside the OKS Odra Opole headquarters, accompanied by sport assistants, coaches, press and media representatives. From the left: Stanisław Szozda, Władysław Czaczka, chairman of the Provincial Council of the National Association of People's Sport Clubs, Zbigniew Gut, gold medalist in football, Ryszard Brożek, the club secretary, Edward Barcik, a silver medalist, Benedykt Kocot, a bronze medalist in dual cycle racing, Jan Gwoździewicz, a sports journalist for Trybuna

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Opolska, Franciszek Surmiński, the coach in the People's Sport Club in Opole, and Wincenty Soppa, a sports reporter for Opole Radio. Source: Władysław Czaczka's private collection

Another milestone in the history of cycling in the Opole region was the foundation of a club by the Provincial Association of the People's Sport Club in Opole in 1971. The newly founded Zieloni Opole club intended to provide the People's Sport Clubs cyclists in the Opolskie province with good conditions for training and competition. The cyclists transferred to Zieloni Opole were Józef Surmiński, Andrzej Oszust, Stanisław Babula, Józef Paradowski, Emil Łysek and Wiktor Kruszelnicki from Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club [4]. That was a heavy loss for the club in Prudnik, followed by heated disputes among its activists. The local authorities were involved too and the discussion resulted in reactivation of the cycle racing team in Zarzewie Prudnik People's Sport Club. Recommended by Franciszek Surmiński, Henryk Jagielski was employed part time in the club, which now had 22 competitors. Kazimierz Mazepa was an outstanding cyclist in the senior group, winning regional cross-country cycling and dual cycling events with Emil Łysek. The most talented competitor was Marek Kuglin participating in the national level training program for the Tour de Pologne race and the world championships. At the same time, the club struggled with serious equipment shortages, yet despite them, the results in the years 1979-1980 were satisfactory at the regional level. The most successful competitor, Marek Kuglin, was even considered for participation in the Moscow Olympics, which he eventually failed to enter, but in the Polish Championships in 1979 he took 10th place. In the same period, Sławomir Szczepanowski took the championship of the region twice, the first in a mass start race, the other in mountain cycling championships; Zbigniew Kuglin became the regional vice-championship in cross-country races. In the competition among seniors in dual races, Marek Kuglin and Henryk Jagielski won the vice-championship of the Opolskie region in 1980. Sławomir Szczepanowski took the championship of the Opolskie region among seniors in a mass start race. Juniors had their share of success too:

Bogdan Surmiński won the title of the Opolskie region champion in a long distance race and mountain biking championships [4]. The Opolskie region was ranked among top cycling provinces in Poland, and the continual achievements at the local level were of great sporting value. In the years 1980-1984 two coaches were in charge of the training programme in the club: Henryk Jagielski and Józef Paradowski, supported by Emil Łysek as a volunteer coach. After Marek Kuglin left the club, the remaining top were Kazimierz Mazepa, Mariusz Trojanowski and Edmund Stilleroku, who boasted good results in regional events and those held elsewhere in southern Poland, yet failed to achieve considerable success in national events. The club continued to struggle with equipment shortages, which directly translated into its mediocre results.

However, in the years 1984-1986, the cycle racing team did enjoy notable success, largely due to the establishment of a brand-new Prudnik cycle racing club by coach Jerzy Wiśniewski. Soon afterwards, in the Opening of the Season race in 1984 along the route from Prudnik across Dębowiec, Pokrzywna, Moszczanka, and back to Prudnik, gathering 208 cyclists from 25 clubs, the competitors from Prudnik showed good performance. In the under-junior category (44 km distance) Dariusz Paściak ranked 5th, Ryszard Bigos was 6th and Wiesław Wer was 7th. In the younger junior group (66km distance), Ryszard Marciniak, Marek Wojciechowski and Robert Pulit ranked from 7th to 9th place with the same times. In the junior category (88km distance), Zbigniew Stec was ranked 29th and in the senior category, Tadeusz Licznar was 10th [4]. Also in 1986, several other achievements were recorded, and the new club was ranked 6th in southern Poland, an area combining Opolskie, Katowickie, Częstochowskie and Bielskie provinces. Dariusz Paściak was among outstanding competitors who, while in the junior team, obtained a number of good scores, such as 5th place in the mountain bike championships of the 13th Youth Athletic Meeting. Mariusz Łysek, as the vice-champion

of cross-country races in southern Poland in 1985 and the champion in the subsequent year (1986), also deserves a mention. Another success in the southern Poland championships was achieved by the road cycling team of Robert Kubala, Ryszard Bigos, Wojciech Nierobisz and Wiesław Wer, who were ranked 2nd.

On 17 March 1987, the club's management board decided to suspend the senior and junior cycling teams and on 1 April 1987 the training cyclists and the equipment were transferred to the Ziemia Opolska People's Sport Club. That painful decision was incredibly difficult to make and was not unanimous. The club's financial deficit was

serious and made further operation impossible without compromising the standards of instruction and training. Only the under-juniors remained on the cycle racing team. Following Jerzy Wiśniewski's resignation, Emil Łysek, a former Zarzewie cyclist, replaced him as a part-time coach. In the years 1988-1990 the limited team, concentrated on training work with under-juniors participated only in local cycle racing events. Despite having a promising talented competitor, Krzysztof Szafraniec, the decision to dissolve the club was inevitable in the light of a major blow: the only technical vehicle was damaged in an accident, depriving competitors of participation in competitions [4].

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