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HISTORY

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Activities of the Polish Boxing Association between 1923–1939 – an outline of the problem

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Abstract

Background. In 1923, the Polish Boxing Association (PBA) was established – an organization aimed at coordinating activities related to the development of the sport of boxing on a national scale.

Problem. The aim of this study is a factual description and presentation of the multifaceted activities of the PBA in the period from its establishment to the outbreak of World War II.

Method. The main methods used in the paper, were: analysis of source materials (documents and press); and analysis of the content of the subject literature. The study adopted a problem-based system.

Results. The study complements the existing knowledge of the history of physical culture in the period of the Second Polish Republic, in particular the activities of sports' associations and the organization of the sport of boxing.

Conclusions. The work carried out by the Polish Boxing Association between 1923-1939 was crowned with great achievements. Expansion of the organizational structure of the PBA, both internal (management) and external (districts); the dynamic development of boxing, and the numerous successes of Polish competitors in international competitions, and extensive activity in the training field, are the most clear evidence of the effectiveness of the Association's activities during the period under discussion.

Introduction

Boxing competitions were organized in Poland long before the establishment of the Polish Boxing Association. The first of them took place in 1920 in Poznan. The organizer being the YMCA. However, they were only demonstration bouts. English sailors were among those who took part. A year later, also at the initiative of the YMCA, the "first unofficial Polish championship" took place in Warsaw, in which competitors from Warsaw and Gdansk met. In the same year, the Poznan Club "Zbyszko" organized the Great Poland championship with the participation of competitors from Grudziadz, Inowroclaw and Poznan.

On April 30, 1922, the competition for the YMCA championship was held in Warsaw Dynas. 16 boxers took part, representing Warsaw (11), Poznan (3), Gdansk (1) and Lodz (1). In 1923, boxing competitions were organized in Inowroclaw, Lodz, Poznan and Warsaw. In these meetings, 6, 8 and sometimes even 10 rounds were fought in accordance with the provisions of professional box-

ing ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1922: 5; Jeczkowiak 1939: 51; Wojdyga 1956: 7-8].

The increase in the popularity of boxing in Poland at the beginning of the 1920s resulted in the creation of a number of clubs and boxing gyms throughout the country. This fact did not escape the attention of the authorities of Polish sport at that time. During the Extraordinary General Assembly of Delegates of State Sports Associations convened for October 30, 1921 in Warsaw, a resolution was passed instructing the State Committee of the Olympic Games to undertake an initiative on the organization of state sports associations for the discipline of boxing, which at that time was not yet associated to any organization. During the State Committee of the Olympic Games meeting on January 11, 1922, it was decided to ask all sports and gymnastic associations for information about the boxing sections operating within them. Their aim was to decide about the possibility of establishing a future association [Organizacja ... 1922: 6]. That happened almost two years later.

The PBA was one of the most dynamically developing organizations of this type in the period between the wars. The activities of the Association meant that in the second half of the thirties Poland became the pugilistic power of Europe, reaching the team championship of the Old Continent twice (1937, 1939). The outstanding sports level of Polish boxing is also confirmed by the high positive point balance of fifty official boxing matches, which took place between the years 1928-1939. Boxers representing the Polish Boxing Association were often appointed to represent Europe for boxing contests against the USA. The activity of the Association on the training ground, laid the foundation for the so-called Polish boxing school, with shining triumphs in the world rings for many years after the Second World War. The success of the PBA boxers made boxing, which was initially perceived as a primitive brawl, into one of the most popular sports disciplines in Poland between the wars, attracting thousands of supporters to sports halls [Gorczyca 1983: 7].

Nevertheless, little has been written on the history of Polish boxing. This applies in particular to its origins, including the years between the wars - the period of the formation of the organizational basis of the sport and its dynamic development. The first attempt to describe the history of the sport of boxing in Poland in the discussed period was a collective study published in 1939 by the Polish Boxing Association The history of Polish boxing 1920-1939. However, this was a publication mainly focused on theoretical considerations on boxing, omitting a fair description of the multifaceted activity of the PBA in historical terms. On the other hand, W. Gorczyca [1983] in his jubilee publication on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of PBA focused mainly on the activities of the sports association, omitting other important issues from the historical point of view.

In connection with such a poor state of knowledge about the organization of the sport of boxing in Poland during the peacetime period, taking actions to complete it thoroughly seemed to the authors justified in every respect.

The main aim of this study was to outline the multifaceted activities of the Polish Boxing Association from its inception in 1923 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The detailed objectives of the work are:

- presentation of the development of organizational structures of Polish boxing in the period between the wars;
- 2. demonstration of the organization of boxing training;
- 3. presentation of sports competition of Polish boxers in the most important national events and in the international arena in the discussed period;
- 4. sketching silhouettes of the best competitors of the this period;
- 5. discussion of the role of the Polish Boxing Association in the wide popularization of boxing in Poland.

Methods

It should be emphasized that the state of archival sources concerning this subject is very unsatisfactory. The reason for this state of affairs, is the fact that during the Second World War the Association archives were destroyed, and the only available archives are in the form of statutes, official letters and minutes of the Main Board of the Polish Boxing Association, located in the resources of Polish archives (Archive of New Files in Warsaw, State Archives in Poznan), which come from the years 1934–1939.

Thus, in order to present the history of the Polish Boxing Association, the authors were forced to create an appropriate section of methods that would enable them to recreate and describe the Association's activities in all its multifaceted manifestations.

The main method used in the study was the philological method, consisting of: analysis of sources in the form of statutes, protocols, official letters; analysis of the content of articles published in the press and magazines; analysis of the content of the literature on the subject. The study also used a comparative method, mainly to verify the content contained in individual sources concerning specifically, the same facts and events. The basis of this study was mainly taken from printed sources in the form of magazines and sports press from 1921-1939 ("Piesciarz", Poznan 1932-1933; "Przeglad Sportowy", Warsaw 1921-1939; "Stadjon", Warsaw 1924-1931; "Raz, Dwa, Trzy", Crakow 1932-1939). These source materials were the most widely read Polish titles in the field of physical culture for the period between the two world wars, constituting a compendium of knowledge in every sport discipline. Boxing, as one of the most popular disciplines in Poland during this period, found a prominent place in the pages of all the above-mentioned magazines.

The study uses a problem-based system, presenting in sequence the actions taken by the Association in the field of organization, training and sport. Such a construction of the work is supported by the fact that these activities were the basic and most important manifestations of the activities of the Polish Boxing Association.

Establishment and organizational activity of the Polish Boxing Association

The founding meeting of the Polish Boxing Association took place on December 2, 1923 in Warsaw. The author of the statute of the association and sport regulations, based on French models, was Wiktor Junosza-Dabrowski [Junosza-Dabrowski 1933: 5; Gorczyca 1983: 6]. During the vote, the first management board of the newly formed Association was appointed, composing of: Stanislaw Samborski – president; Henryk Krolikowski-Muszkiet, Jan Strzeszewski – vice presidents; Roman Niewiadomski

– treasurer; Kazimierz Laskowski / Witold Woyno – secretaries [Junosza-Dabrowski 1935: 28; Reksza 1958: 5; Gorczyca 1983: 6].

The Polish Boxing Association was a professional advisory body of the Union of Polish Sports Associations part of the Polish Olympic Committee and the State Office of Physical Education and Military Preparation in the field of boxing sport. The guidelines of the PBA's activities were: in general matters - the Union of Polish Sports Associations of the Polish Olympic Committee and State Office of Physical Education and Military Preparation directives, in sporting matters - directives, regulations and regulations of the International Boxing Federation, established in 1924. All of the boxing clubs with approved statutes, as well as sections of sports clubs and physical education associations could belong to the Association regardless of the religion and nationality of the members, as long as they corresponded to the conditions provided for in the PBA Statute. [Statut... 1934].



Photo. 1. Wiktor Junosza-Dabrowski – one of the founding members of the Polish Boxing Association, author of the first PBA statute [source: audiovis.nac.gov.pl]

In accordance with statutory assumptions, the Polish Boxing Association had a legal entity, which governed its activities in the territory of the Republic of Poland and the Free City of Gdansk. The main goals of the Association's actions were to unite all clubs and sections partaking in the sport of boxing and to support its development in all forms, representing it in Poland and abroad, as well as coordinating and controlling the activities of all entities associated to the Association. [Statut... 1934].

The highest authority of the Polish Boxing Association was the general assembly of delegates. Resolutions were passed at the general meeting, via referendum, with

the participation of representatives of individual PBA districts summoned as necessary to vote on important organizational issues. In the periods between the meetings, the Association was managed by the board. In addition, the Association's authorities consisted of: sports department, department of judges and audit committee.

As part of the board, there was a Permanent executive committee (PEC) consisting of the president, two vice presidents, treasurer, host, chronicler, health clerk, chairman of the sports department (at the same time acting as the third vice president), chairman of the judges' department, union captain and two councillors. The full board was also composed of members delegated by individual constituent boxing unions. Meetings of the PEC were held at least once a month, while the full board met not less than once every six months. [Statut... 1934]. At the beginning of 1924, the Polish Boxing Association had a membership of 36 clubs and boxing sections [March 1993: 7]. PBA delegates met annually at a General Meeting. The Association's authorities were then selected and the strategy for the next term of office was established. The functions of chairmen of the Association after Stanislaw Samborski included: Roman Niewiadomski (1924-25), Jan Baran-Bilewski (1925-28), Tadeusz Saloni (1928-31), Franciszek Baranowski (1931-34), Marian Linke (1934–35), Jan Kuczyk (1935–37), Wladysław Mirzynski (1937–39) ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1924–1939; "Piesciarz" 1932-1933; Pismo... 1936; Pismo... 1936; Pismo... 1937; Protokol... 1937; Pismo... 1938; Pismo... 1939].

Over the years, with the increasing popularity of the sport of boxing, the number of members of the Association increased significantly. At the turn of 1936/1937, the PBA membership was 145 clubs and boxing sections ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1936: 6]. In the structures of the Polish Boxing Association there were delegations in the form of district unions. The first of them was established in 1925 (Poznan, Silesia, Warsaw). A year later, the Lodz and Pomeranian associations were formed, in 1928 Vilnius, then Lublin (1930), Cracow (1931) and Bialystok (1932). At the end of the discussed period, there were a total of 11 regional boxing associations in Poland (apart from those mentioned also in Lviv and Volhynia) [Lipszyc 1936: 3].

Training activity

In the early period of the PBA's activity, training issues remained at the discretion of individual clubs and boxing sections, [Junosza-Dabrowski 1933a: 4]. It was not until the second half of the 1920s that the Polish boxing authorities took action to raise the level of athletes through a rational and professional training organization. Over the following years, a program of pre-Olympic preparations was developed, combining a series of national and international tournaments with training camps [Baran

1927: 7; *Polish wrestling* ... 1928: 3; Gryzewski 1954: 42]. At the end of 1929, the authorities of the Polish Boxing Association decided to hire an Italian coach Edoardo Garzena as a trainer. He began his work with monthly training stays in Pomerania and Vilnius, from where he went to Warsaw, and there for three months he conducted trainings for members of the Warsaw clubs and boxing sections ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1929: 2]. In subsequent years, training camps became one of the basic forms of preparation for the most important sport events and international meetings.

In 1934, Stanislaw Cendrowski became the sporting captain of the PBA, holding a similar position on the board of the Warsaw Regional Boxing Association. As an outstanding expert in the sport of boxing, as well as a great instructor and efficient organizer, he took a number of initiatives aimed at improving the training process, both in terms of training instructors and coaches, as well as in the preparation of boxing staff. He indicated, among others things, the need to establish a regional structure responsible for instructor training at sports departments. Their task was to create a unified boxing school, coordinated centrally by the appropriate units at the PBA headquarters, headed up by the association captain. He was also a strong opponent of engaging foreign trainers. He considered it more purposeful to send instructors and trainers to train abroad [Nowe prady ... 1934: 4].

However, at the beginning of 1935, the subject of foreign trainer's involvement was again raised on the board of the PBA. For this purpose, several foreign boxing unions were contacted. Finally, the decision was made to hire an American of German descent, Billy Smith. According to the assumptions of the PBA, he was to work only with selected boxers of the strongest districts (Lodz, Poznan, Silesia, Warsaw) and provide courses for the local instructors [PBA ... 1935: 5].

In the last years of the discussed period, training camps and international social events became the basic forms of preparation before the most important boxing tournaments. The duties of the head coach were entrusted entirely to Feliks Stamm, who gained the reputation as one of the best trainers in Europe. He enjoyed great recognition among both competitors and the PBA ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1939: 5].

One of the biggest problems of Polish boxing in the period between the wars was the lack of adequate training. On a national scale, these gaps were "patched" by foreign trainers on an ad-hoc basis. However, the language barrier was a serious problem in their work. In addition, in order to obtain the maximum training results, foreign trainers were sent for short stays to many boxing centres, meaning that they could not devote themselves with proper involvement to work in individual districts, as well as training leading Polish boxers. The proper training system for the instructor-coaching staff was developed only in the mid-1930s, introducing a

three-step education path for boxing teachers. The first stage was a course of box leaders, the graduates of which were appointed in turn for a central instructor course. This was intended to familiarize candidates for future instructors with the practical and theoretical foundations of boxing education and to select the greatest teaching talents among them. The most experienced instructors, showing the best training results, were given the title of trainer after several years. Such trained staff would in the future replace "home-grown" boxing teachers, who sometimes were ex boxers themselves, but who did not have any knowledge about the training work [Mirzynski 1939: 34-35].

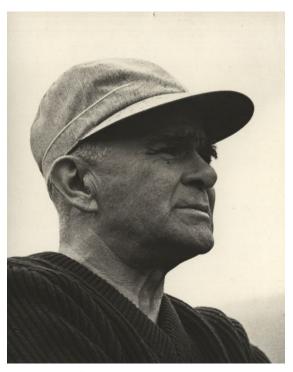


Photo. 2. Feliks "Papa" Stamm – the most outstanding coach in the history of Polish boxing [source: author's collection]

Sports activity

All matters related to the sports activities of the Polish Boxing Association were subordinated to the sports department, elected by the annual general meeting of the PBA delegates. An important function in the activities undertaken by the Association in the field of sport was held by the trade union captain. His main task was to determine the composition of the representative team for international competition. For this purpose, he remained in close contact with the captains of the regional associations, constantly receiving information on the form of individual boxers, their lifestyle, and sports and moral qualifications. If necessary, the union captain was entitled to organize eliminations among the competitors, after prior arrangement of possible costs with the management of the Association [Statut... 1934].

The cyclical event of the highest rank, organized by the Polish Boxing Association from 1924, was the Polish Boxing Championship. The competition was divided into eight weight categories: flyweight, bantamweight, featherweight, lightweight, welterweight, middleweight, light heavyweight, heavyweight. In 1927, a team competition was also introduced. In the years 1924-1939, 16 Polish boxing championships were held. The winners of the largest number of championships were (in brackets the number of championship titles wins was given): Witold Majchrzycki (7); Tomasz Konarzewski, Stanislaw Pilat (6); Jan Arski, Wiktor Moczko, Janislaw Sipinski (5); Jan Gerbich, Jan Gorny; Erwin Stibbe, Franciszek Szymura (4); Henryk Chmielewski, Antoni Czortek, Mieczyslaw Forlanski, Stefan Glon, Feliks Iwanski, Jozef Pisarski, Aleksander Polus, Jerzy Rudzki, Adam Seweryniak, Edmund Sobkowiak, Zygfryd Wende (3) ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1924–1939; "Stadjon" 1924–1932; "Raz, Dwa, Trzy" 1932-1939; Gluszek 1976: 176; Osmolski 1989: 93; Kurzynski 2014: 88; Pawlak 2000: 160; Wryk 2015: 400-403].



Photo. 3. Witold Majchrzycki – seven-time Polish champion in lightweight and middleweight [source: audiovis.nac.gov.pl]

During the first two years of the Polish championship, there was a certain amount of freedom in the issue of selecting the players by individual clubs. This matter was regulated in 1926, by introducing relevant regulations into the competition. From that moment, only champions or regional runners up, had the right to start in the national championships. This was also true for the team competition. In addition, only clubs able to put together a team of at least six boxers were allowed to compete. According to the aforementioned rules, the fights for individual mastery were to take place over three bouts

(two three minutes and one four minutes). In the team category four fights were held [Jeczkowiak 1939: 57].

The official début of the Polish boxing team in the international ring took place in mid-1928. In total, until 1939, Poles participated in fifty official interstate matches, including nineteen games played outside the country (not counting participation in the European Boxing Championships and the Olympic Games). In thirty meetings Polish boxers triumphed, they drew seven and suffered thirteen defeats. Poles competed in the most matches with Germany (10), Hungary (8), Austria (6) and Czechoslovakia (5). In 1938, eleven, Polish boxers fought. In 1934, seven and in 1937 and 1939 six each ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1928–1939; "Raz, Dwa, Trzy" 1932–1939; "Stadjon" 1928–1932].

The first competition for the European boxing championship was organized in 1925 in Stockholm. In the intervening years between the wars, six championships took place in total, not counting the Olympic competitions, during which the European champions were also awarded, claiming titles in individual categories to the best placed representatives of the Old Continent. In the discussed period, a total of 25 Poles stood to fight for European championship belts. The record-breakers were Witold Majchrzycki and Stanislaw Pilat, who competed in the championships three times. The winners of the championship titles (Henryk Chmielewski, Antoni Kolczynski, Aleksander Polus) and two-time the runners up of Europe (Witold Majchrzycki and Franciszek Szymura) were the most successful boxers.



Photo. 4. Henryk Chmielewski (middleweight) – one of the best Polish boxers of the peacetime period, European champion (Milan 1937), 4th place in the 11th Olympic Games (Berlin 1936) [source: audiovis.nac.gov.pl]

In total, during six competitions for the boxing championship of Europe, Polish boxers fought 75 fights, of which 40 won and 35 lost. The most advantageous balance was achieved by boxers of featherweight (10 wins, 3 losses) and middle and light heavyweight (8 wins and 4 losses), the worst – heavyweight boxers who lost all their fights. ["Przeglad Sportowy" 1925-1939; "Raz, Dwa, Trzy" 1932-1939; "Stadjon" 1925-1932].

Polish Boxers took part in the Olymipic games for the first time in the 8th Olympiad in 1924. During the discussed period, they participated in the Olympic Games three times, but never in a full eight-man team. The 10^{th} Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1932 were the only Olympics in which Polish boxers did not attend. Financial problems related to the large cost of the trip, which the Polish Boxing Association was unable to bear, became an obstacle. During their Olympic performances the Poles did not achieve any significant successes. Henryk Chmielewski, the middleweight fighter, finished in fourth place - the highest of all the Polish fighters. This took place in 1936, during the 11th Olympic Games. [Trojanowski 1936: 4; Gryzewski 1936: 3; Grzesik 1976: 47-48; Porada 1983: 811-812, 817, 824; Bogusz 1992: 32; Kurzynski 1995: 124-125].

The outbreak of the Second World War and actions taken by the German occupation in the years 1939-1945 almost completely destroyed the achievements of Polish boxing. The war brought huge losses in people – boxers and activists. One of the repressions was a total ban on association and sports. Many boxers and activists of the Polish Boxing Association were involved in the underground activity and the fight against the invader on the fronts during the Second World War.

Discussion

So far, many works devoted to martial arts and combat sports have been published in Poland. Their authors considered the aforementioned subject in various aspects – anthropological, philosophical, pedagogical, psychological or sociological. Among them, only a few historical studies can be found. These include, in particular, works by such researchers of physical culture as: W.J. Cynarski, R. Grzywacz, L. Sieber, S. Skowron-Markowska, P. Swider [Sieber, Grzywacz 2015; Skowron-Markowska 2017; Cynarski 2018; Swider 2018]. Similar subject areas, also in local terms, were taken by WJ Cynarski, T. Fleming; J. Forrest, B. Forrest-Blincoe, [Fleming 2011; Cynarski 2013; Forrest, Forrest-Blincoe 2018]. In turn, the history of martial arts in a global perspective was discussed by W.J. Cynarski and L. Sieber [Cynarski, Sieber 2016].

Among the works describing martial arts and sports from a historical perspective, there are many studies on boxing. Krzysztof Downing [2010] wrote about the beginnings of boxing in eighteenth-century England.

Problems of organization and coexistence of amateur and professional forms of boxing in the capital of Ghana - Accra in the years 1920-1940, as well as their interpenetration and interaction were the basis for the scientific research of J. Dunzendorfer [2011]. The analysis of the contents of eighteenth-century textbooks of boxing was handled by D. Day [2012]. The birth of professional boxing and the first demonstration of boxing fights in Paris were the basis of S. Ville's research [2015]. The subject of the genesis and development of women's boxing in Norway was taken by A. Tjonndal [2016]. The history of boxing sports in Johannesburg was handled by C. Dixie and J. Sey [2017]. The historical-sociological and economic aspects of boxing sports in Spain in the years 1960-1980 were analyzed by T. Calle-Molina and E. Martinez-Gorrono [2018].

However, among the works dealing with the history of boxing sports, only a part focuses on the problem undertaken by the authors of this study, i.e. the history of boxing sports in terms of its institutionalization. Issues related to the activities of the National Union of Boxers in Great Britain in the 1930s were discussed by M. Taylor [2009]. The beginnings and development of boxing sports in today's South Africa in the years 1924–1959 were described by T. Fleming [2011]. The genesis, origin and activity of the International Boxing Union in the years 1913–1946 were described by J.F. Loudcher and D. Day [2013].

This article deals with a topic that has never been synthesized before in the historiography of physical culture. The authors focused on sketching the outline of the activities of the Polish Boxing Association in its multifaceted manifestations, treating their work as an introduction to future extensive research on the subject.

The role of Polish sport in the tradition of European physical culture has remained unknown for many years. The researcher who first drew attention to this problem was W. Liponski [1996]. One of the ideas of the authors of this study, next to describing the history of a particular sport discipline in the period between the wars, was also to popularize knowledge about the contribution of Polish athletes to the European cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The work carried out by the Polish Boxing Association in the years 1923–1939, related to the organization of Polish boxing on a national scale, was crowned with great achievements, which can be considered in several aspects. The first of them was the expansion of the PBA structure. The good organization of the main headquarters of the Association and the involvement of activists in social work quite fast resulted in the expansion of the network of regional associations. This, in turn, made it possible to significantly improve operations in all regions

of the country, leading to the systematic appointment of new clubs and sections.

Another factor that significantly influenced the development of boxing sports was the concern of the Association's authorities to organize rational training of competitors through cooperation with experienced foreign trainers. Thanks to this, PBA grew up with its own highly qualified instructors and trainers who could face the need to constantly increase the level of training of fighters. This, in turn, resulted in a continuous increase in the number of boxers able to effectively face their foreign rivals.

The growing sports level of Polish boxers was another significant contribution to the growing popularity of boxing sports in the country, contributing to the steadily growing surge of young boxing adepts to boxing sections and clubs. Systematic successes related to PBA boxers ensured continuous increase of financial outlays transferred to the Association by the authorities of Polish sport.

All these mutually reinforcing modes obviously influenced the ever-growing rank of the Polish Boxing Association in the structures of European amateur boxing. The apogee was reached at the end of the 1930s, when Polish boxers were the absolute leaders of Europe.

This fact certainly influenced the decision taken by the authorities of the International Boxing Federation to award the Polish Boxing Association the right to organize the 7th Boxing European Championship, planned for 1941.

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Działalność Polskiego Związku Bokserskiego w latach 1923–1939 – szkic zagadnienia

Słowa kluczowe: sporty walki, boks, stowarzyszenia sportowe, historia

Abstrakt

Tło. W 1923 roku powstał Polski Związek Bokserski (PBA) – organizacja mająca na celu koordynację działań związanych z rozwojem sportu bokserskiego w skali kraju.

Problem. Celem niniejszego opracowania był merytoryczny opis i przedstawienie wieloaspektowej działalności PBA w okresie od jego powołania do wybuchu II wojny światowej. Metoda. Głównymi metodami zastosowanymi w pracy były: analiza materiałów źródłowych (dokumentów i prasy); analiza treści literatury przedmiotu. W pracy przyjęto system problemowy. Wyniki. Opracowanie stanowi uzupełnienie dotychczasowej wiedzy z zakresu historii kultury fizycznej w okresie II RP, w szczególności działalności stowarzyszeń sportowych i organizacji sportu bokserskiego.

Wnioski. Prace prowadzone przez Polski Związek Bokserski w latach 1923-1939 uwieńczone zostały wielkimi osiągnięciami. Rozbudowa struktury organizacyjnej PBA, zarówno wewnętrznej (kierownictwo), jak i zewnętrznej (okręgi), dynamiczny rozwój boksu oraz liczne sukcesy polskich zawodników na zawodach międzynarodowych i szeroka działalność szkoleniowa, są najbardziej wyraźnym dowodem skuteczności działań Zrzeszenia w omawianym okresie.