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LOYAL TO TABLE TENNIS – ALOJZY EHRLICH¹

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Wierny tenisowi stołowemu – Alojzy Ehrlich

Streszczenie

Alojzy Ehrlich (1914–1992) – wybitny tenisista stołowy pochodzenia żydowskiego. Pierwszy złoty medal mistrzostw Polski zdobył w 1933 r. (Lwów). Triumfował w Igrzyskach Makkabi (Praga, 1933). Trzykrotny indywidualny wicemistrz oraz dwukrotny brązowy medalista w grze pojedynczej i drużynowej mistrzostw świata w latach 30. XX wieku. Przeszedł do historii światowego tenisa stołowego między innymi po meczu z rumuńskim tenisistą stołowym Farkasem Panethem, z którym walczył o pierwszy punkt przez 132 minuty na mistrzostwach świata w Pradze (1936). Delegat PZTS na Kongresy Międzynarodowej Federacji Tenisa Stołowego (ITTF). Korespondent „Przeglądu Sportowego”. Wybrany do dziesiątki najpopularniejszych sportowców Polski w Plebiscycie „Przeglądu Sportowego” (1934). W reprezentacji Polski rozegrał 46 spotkań. Na stałe mieszkał we Francji. Podczas II wojny światowej wspierał francuski ruch oporu przeciwko Niemcom. Schwytyany i deportowany do obozów koncentracyjnych Auschwitz-Birkenau i Dachau. Przeżył w obozach 10 miesięcy. Po II wojnie światowej kontynuował karierę sportowca, trenera (w siedemnastu państwach) oraz wynalazcy robota pingpongowego i menadżera firm produkujących sprzęt sportowy do tenisa stołowego. Był częstym gościem największych imprez tenisa stołowego w Europie i na świecie. Władał sześcioma językami. Pozostał wierny piłeczce i rakietce do tenisa stołowego do końca życia.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura fizyczna, polski sport, żydowski sport, tenis stołowy.

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Abstract

Alojzy Ehrlich (1914-1992) – an outstanding table tennis player of Jewish origin. He won his first gold medal at the Polish Championships in 1933 (Lviv). He triumphed in the Makkabi Games (Prague, 1933). He was a three-time individual runner-up and a two-time bronze medalist in singles and team events at the World Championships in the 1930s. He made world table tennis history, among other things, after his match with a Romanian table tennis player, Farkas Paneth, with whom he battled for the first point for 132 minutes at the World Championships in Prague (1936). He was a delegate of the Polish Table Tennis Association (PZTS) to the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Congresses. He was a correspondent for “Przegląd Sportowy.” He was selected as one of the ten most popular Polish athletes in “Przegląd Sportowy” (1934). He played 46 matches for the Polish national team. He permanently resided in France. During World War II, he supported the French resistance against the Germans. He was captured and deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Dachau concentration camps. He survived in the camps for 10 months. After World War II, he continued his career as an athlete, coach (in seventeen countries), inventor of a ping-pong robot, and manager of companies producing table tennis equipment. He was a frequent guest at major table tennis events in Europe and around the world. He spoke six languages. He remained faithful to the table tennis ball and racket until the end of his life.

Keywords: physical culture, Polish sport, Jewish sport, table tennis.

Introduction

Table tennis as a competitive sports discipline has a tradition of over eighty years in Poland. In 1931, the Polish Table Tennis Association (*Polski Związek Tenisa Stołowego*, PZTS) was established.² In 1933, the PZTS was accepted into the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). The objectives outlined in the statutes of the PZTS were centred around the popularisation of this sport across age categories. This was sought to be achieved by: 1) organising Polish championships and various forms of sports competitions in all age categories, 2) organising “showcase tournaments”, 3) selecting and appointing the best players to the national team, 4) submitting national teams and individual players to world championships, European championships and other international competitions, 5) making every effort to take care of the good image of Polish table tennis outside the country, 6) cultivating the tradition and history of the sport. Table tennis is one of the sports disciplines where the individual attitude of the player is of great importance. Talent, skills, preparation and playing technique determine the success of a player and the whole team. In the history of this discipline in Poland, individual successes of players at international and national competitions have inspired young people to intensify their training efforts in order to catch up with the best players. Pure sporting rivalry gave birth to champions.

² W. Pięta, *Gramy dalej. 80 – lecie Polskiego Związku Tenisa Stołowego (1931–2011)*, Częstochowa 2011, p. 10.

Outstanding table tennis champions popularised new playing techniques and contributed to the development of the discipline. Alojzy Ehrlich had a prominent place among these champions. As a beginner in my playing career, I had the opportunity to meet this great champion in person. In 1978, he participated in the 18th International Polish Championships organised in Łódź. Unfortunately, I did not exchange a single word with him, because I was too busy preparing for my performance. However, the figure of the legendary champion, who was among the guests invited to the Championships, remained in my memory. For me, as a young athlete, the emotions generated by the sporting competition were so strong that I simply overlooked or forgot many of the events associated with these Championships. Yet, one event left a lasting mark. I played with a racket allocated by PZTS for a specific group of players from Silesia named after Alojzy Ehrlich. It was with this racket that I won the title of Polish junior vice-champion in 1967. The A. Ehrlich racket has a prominent place in my rich collection related to the history of this sport in Częstochowa.

As I started my research with the aim of familiarising contemporary young people with the sporting attitude, achievements and complicated life story of the outstanding table tennis champion, impacted by the turbulent political events of the 20th century, I reached for the literature on this sport, the contemporary press with A. Ehrlich's sporting successes. I also made an in-depth search of national and foreign archives. The article is considerably expanded by the additional sources I learned about. The first step, however, was a thorough search of my own collections.

The following interwar periodicals, own collections and monographs proved to be valuable source material in writing this article: *Table Tennis among Jews in Poland (1924–1949)*; *Gramy dalej. 80-lecie Polskiego Związku Tenisa Stołowego (1931–2011)*; *Od Alojzego Ehrlicha do Natalii Partyki, współzawodnictwo sportowe 1932-2016*; *Tenis stołowy w Polsce w latach 1919–1989*; *Vierliebt in einen kleinen Ball, ITTF 1926–2001*; *Table Tennis Legend*; *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego – tenis stołowy 1900–2014*; *9 Dekad Polskiego Związku Tenisa Stołowego, L'ultima partita*. The best results were delivered by a search of the Lviv archives, the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute and the *Archiwum Akt Nowych*, Contemporary Records Archive within the Polish State Archives. Information obtained from the archives of The Wingate Institute for Physical Education and the International Table Tennis Federation in Rennes near Lausanne was a significant source supplement.

This article addresses the following research question: What influence did Alojzy Ehrlich have on the development of table tennis in Poland?

Life in Lviv

Alojzy Ehrlich was born on 1.01.1914 in Komańcza belonging to the Israeli community in Bukowsko,³ which was under Austrian administration. His father Ludwik Izrael Ehrlich was of Jewish origin and his mother Blina Brand was a Catholic. He received baptism, but was agnostic until the end of his life. At the age of four (when Poland regained independence) he became a Polish citizen. He had an older brother. In search of better living conditions, the Ehrlich family moved to Lviv. He combined his studies at a secondary school in Lviv with playing table tennis at the Lviv Jutrzenko (a club with Polish traditions), which he joined at the age of thirteen. In 1933, he matriculated and left for France to study at the Catholic University (Facultes Catholiques de Lille). The family home (owned by Ludwik Ehrlich) in Komańcza was burnt down during the Second World War. During his early years in France, he had a dilemma regarding the choice between studies and diplomacy or table tennis. In the end, he opted for table tennis. The last time he met his parents was in Lviv in 1939. In a piece of information given by Irena in Birkenau (1944),⁴ his father Izrael, a professor at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, was shot (1942) in the Lviv forest by the Germans, and the mother was deported to Treblinka (p. 183).

Sports career before the Second World War

He made his debut in the tournament at the age of thirteen and won 14th place among 50 players. As a 14-year-old, he began his real sporting career at the prestigious Jewish Sports Club Hasmonaea Lviv (he was given a real table tennis racket with stick-on rubber and celluloid balls). He attended training sessions in ice hockey, football, tennis, and also in the table tennis lounge, located in Lviv on 1/3 Skarbowska Street. The oldest player, and at the same time manager of the section, Mateusz Hoch,⁵ taught him how to play. He played in school games under the pseudonym Alex Dogilewski. At the age of 16, he played in the Lviv championships for the first time (first place with Hasmonaea)⁶ and in the international competition in Łódź, which took place on Christmas Day 1930. These competitions featured, among others, the world champion V. Barna and Nitrau (Hun-

³ In the 21st century Komańcza is located in south-eastern Poland in Podkarpackie Voivodeship, in Sanok County in the valley of the Oślawica River and the Barbarka stream. Until 1914, it belonged to the municipality of Bukowsko. After 1918, it was located in Sanok county, within the Lviv province.

⁴ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 183

⁵ W. Pięta, *Table tennis among Jews in Poland (1924–1949)*, Częstochowa 2008, p. 58.

⁶ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego – tenis stołowy*, Poznań 2018, p. 168.

gary). It was then that A. Ehrlich lost to V. Barna 1:2 (21:18, 9:21, 16:21) but defeated Nitrau 2:1.⁷ A. Ehrlich also competed in the championships of Jewish clubs (Hasmonea Lwów, Hasmonea Łódź, ŻAKS Warsaw). A year later, in the international championships of Silesia in Chorzów, he succumbed to Laszlo Bellak (world champion) in the final, but won in the double game together with Fichtman.⁸ On their way back from Silesia, the Lviv team with A. Ehrlich stopped in Kraków and played a propaganda match against KS Zorza Rudek.⁹

The first Polish team championship was held in Łódź (27 March 1932). Three matches were played in one day. At that time, five-man squads were played, and the first championship title was won by Makkabi Łódź, the second was won by Hasmonea Lwów with A. Ehrlich (with two victories).¹⁰ In the second championship of Poland (1933), which took place in Lviv in the hall in Jabłonowskie Street, A. Ehrlich won two gold medals: team tournament with Hasmonea (A. Ehrlich, W. Lowenhertz, H. Kuehl, Fichtman, Fluk)¹¹ and individually in the final he defeated Fredy Weiss from Austria.¹² After the championships, A. Ehrlich went to Prague for the Maccabiah Games (held between the 1st (1932) and 2nd (1935) Maccabiah. A. Ehrlich did not perform in any Maccabiah Games organised in Israel. He returned from the Czechoslovakian capital with two titles in singles and in doubles paired with H. Kuehl.¹³ After the summer holidays, he left for Lille to study. There, he had excellent conditions for table tennis, as well as a sparring partner – the titled French player Rene Grimonprez.¹⁴ It was in this city that he learned of the World Championships being held in Paris in December 1933.

Together with the Pohoryles brothers, Simon and Hillel (fellow members of the Hasmonea Lviv club) who were in France,¹⁵ he applied for approval to the Polish Table Tennis Association (PZTS) for Poland's participation in the Paris championships, but Warsaw refused. He then began to negotiate with the organiser – Marcel Corbilon, the president of the French Table Tennis Federation (FFTT), who was initially against it. Correspondence between the PZTS and the

⁷ "Kurier Łódzki", 1930, No 352. "Polonia" 1930, No. 2236.

⁸ W. Pięta, *Tenis stołowy na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1929–2004*, Częstochowa 2005, p. 16.

⁹ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego -tenis stołowy*, Częstochowa 2007, p. 119 (typescript prepared for printing).

¹⁰ W. Pięta, *From Alojzy Ehrlich to Natalia Partyka, sports competition 1932–2016*, Częstochowa 2016, p. 13. "Dziennik Łódzki", 1932, No. 68,

¹¹ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego -tenis stołowy*, Poznań 2018, pp. 216–217.

¹² "Sports Review", 1933, No 18. D. Zastawny, *Sto lat w blasku Białej Gwiazdy*, Kraków 2006, p. 265. W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego – tenis stołowy*, Poznań 2018, p. 265.

¹³ W. Pięta, *Tenis stołowy wśród Żydów w Polsce (1924–1949)*, Częstochowa 2008, p. 52. "Przeгляд Sportowy", No. 64, No. 69, No. 70, 1933.

¹⁴ "France Tennis de Table", 2011, No. 866.

¹⁵ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego – tenis stołowy*, Poznań 2018, p. 168. The Pohoryles brothers were already champions of Lviv in 1927 wearing the club colours of Jutrzenka Lwów.

FFTT resulted in no official permission for Poland to play in this competition. Eventually, after a private visit by A. Ehrlich to the FTTT headquarters, President M. Corbilon granted permission and Poland's debut in the championships became a reality. Without financial help from the PZTS (the 8-day stay of the representation in Paris was financed by M. Corbilon), they stayed at the Hotel Edouard VII, each representative had his own room and three meals a day.¹⁶ The Poles were successful, winning fourth place. A. Ehrlich's performance in these championships was impressive: he won 2 games against the Netherlands, in a losing match against Latvia (2 wins), against Czechoslovakia (2 wins) against India (2 wins), England (2 wins), against Hungary (he suffered 2 defeats against V. Barna and M. Szabados), Austria (one match lost to Schedewig and one won).

In an evenly matched match, they defeated France 5:4 with three wins for A. Ehrlich, then defeated Yugoslavia and Belgium (he won two matches in each). In total, he won 21 singles matches and suffered only three defeats. Maybe, with a better organisational approach of the PZTS to the championships and sending at least one more valuable table tennis player to Paris, there would have been a medal, who knows? In the individual tournament, A. Ehrlich advanced to the quarter-finals and lost to M. Szabados 2:3 in the fifth set to 13. In this match he was already leading 2:1.¹⁷ After the world championships, the nineteen-year-old A. Ehrlich became a well-known table tennis player of the world and an authority for young French table tennis players. He also received many invitations to tournaments from England, Switzerland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and India.

He prepared for the next season in Lille, worked as a manager at the Burken Six sporting goods factory and honed his form in tournaments abroad and during a training camp in Tarnów. In the Free City of Danzig (27.10.1934), the Polish table tennis players defeated the Germans 7:2. They looked presentable in the outfits consisting of long grey trousers and navy blue shirts with the national emblem on the chest. Three points were scored by A. Ehrlich.¹⁸ The Austrian press reported that the Germans were beaten by the Judische Mannschaft (Jewish team).¹⁹

Ehrlich had been friends for two years with V. Barna – representing a recognised brand of table tennis in the world. In 1935, with V. Barna, L. Bellak and Raymond Verger, he played a number of showcase matches (for a cash equivalent). The tour of France was a great promotional and financial success. It was ended by V. Barna's car accident (after breaking his right hand, he did not regain his former glory).²⁰ He was suspended in a very inept manner by the PZTS for his

¹⁶ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 97.

¹⁷ "Przegląd Sportowy", 1933, No. 98, 99, 100, "Raz Dwa Trzy", 1933, No. 50.

¹⁸ "Gazeta Gdańska", 1934, No. 247, 248, 249, 1934. "Kurier Łódzki", 1934, No. 288.

¹⁹ *Wiener Judische Familienblatt*, No. 251. 1934.

²⁰ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 109.

participation in paid shows (alleged professionalism). Shortly before the London World Championships, the Germans followed the lead of the PZTS and applied to the ITTF with demands for total disqualification of A. Ehrlich, V. Barna and M. Szabados (the main reason for the intervention was their Jewish background).²¹

Prior to the World Championships in London, he won the English Open Championships and also played in tournaments in Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Doncaster, Leeds, Blackpool and Hull. His victories earned him a contract from Jacques to manufacture the Ehrlich racket. London (1935) hosted table tennis players from all over the world. Polish table tennis players presented themselves successfully: W. Loewenhertz, H. Pohoryles and A. Ehrlich won bronze medals together with Austria ("Gazeta Warszawska" wrote about Polish Jewish players).²² In the team tournament, A. Ehrlich did not lose a game (he won 16), individually he defeated Waerenier and Corton from Belgium, the Lithuanian Duskis, the Czechoslovakian B. Vana, in the semi-final Hungarian – L. Bellak, and after losing to V. Barna in the presence of about 14.000 people he took the third position.²³ In doubles he paired with W. Loewenhertz and lost the advance to the quarter-finals. In London, he also acted as a correspondent for "Przegląd Sportowy". In the 9th edition of "Przegląd Sportowy" poll selecting the ten best Polish sportspeople for 1934, A. Ehrlich was ranked eighth.²⁴ On 25-27 October 1935 he played for the national team in a match against Hungary.

In 1936, the 10th World Championship was held in Prague.²⁵ It was played on six tables in the huge exhibition hall "Lucerna". Poles lost the first match to France 4:5, A. Ehrlich succumbed to M. Haguenuer after two wins, then they defeated Latvia and the Netherlands 5:0 each and lost to Hungary (two defeats by A. Ehrlich). In these championships, the Polish representatives accepted a financial gift of 600 francs from the French (for the 5:0 win against Romania).²⁶ In singles he defeated Fleischner (Czechoslovakia), Lazar (Yugoslavia), Tobiasch and B. Vana (Czechoslovakia), Marschal (USA), and R. Bergman (Austria). In the

²¹ „Nowy Dziennik”, 1935, No. 38.

²² „Nowy Dziennik”, 1935, No 47.

²³ "Przegląd Sportowy", 1935, No. 15,16. In singles A. Ehrlich defeated Carton (Belgium), Duskisas (Lithuania), Vana (Czechoslovakia), L. Bellak (Hungary) in a row.

²⁴ "Sports Review", 1935, No 20.

²⁵ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego -tenis stołowy*, Poznań 2018, pp. 295-296.

²⁶ "Kurier Sportowy" of 12 December, 1936. "Przegląd Sportowy", No. 107, 1936. After explanations and the return of the "financial reward", the Polish team was cleared of all charges. Only Jakub Ajzenberg (sports captain) was suspended as a member of the PZTS for five years. The Poles were also accused of stealing French racquets, as well as smuggling racquets imported from Czechoslovakia. Ehrlich reveals the backstory of this duel in *L'ultima partita*, p. 51. Before the match, he went on a bet with V. Barna, M. Corbilon and M. Haguenuer and A. Ehrlich to win against Romania by causing fatigue to Romania's best player, F. Paneth.

final, he lost to S. Kolar (Czechoslovakia) 2:3 while leading 2:1.²⁷ The duel between A. Ehrlich and F. Paneth (Romania) went down in world table tennis history. In the first set at 0:0 after 132 minutes of play, the first point was scored by the Pole and he won the whole match in two sets.²⁸ Then Austria played the match against Romania for three days (eleven hours in total) and the meeting between V. Golberger and M. Haguenaur lasted 7 hours (the match was interrupted and the winner determined by a draw). Following these incidents, the ITTF Congress introduced a time limit of one set to last no more than 20 minutes. In late September and early October of this year, A. Ehrlich was in Poland enjoying several weeks of leave. During this time, he played in Lviv, Lodz, Silesia (he played, among others, with B. Puquet) and Częstochowa (he played 9 matches).²⁹ At the beginning of November, he returned to France.

Another significant success for A. Ehrlich was winning the English Open Championship. In the Empress Stadium Earls Court he won in three quick sets against M. Szaboados in the semi-final and in the final he gave no chance to M. Haguenauer (France), in the doubles together with M. Haguenauer they won the second place (they lost to L. Bellak and M. Szabodaos).³⁰ He was the double champion of France in 1937 (won again with M. Haguenauer 3:1 in the final and in doubles with Manchiska)³¹ and in 1938.³²

A. Ehrlich arrived in Baden, Austria (1937) after travelling for 24 hours, entering just 10 minutes before his match against Hungary (won 1 point), Czechoslovakia (won 1 game), Austria (3 victories), Romania (3 triumphs), France (3 points), Egypt (2 victories), England (2 wins), Germany and Belgium (2 points each), lost 2 games against Lithuania, won 2 duels with Yugoslavia. In the medal-deciding match Poland lost to the USA 2:5 (1 point). Both A. Ehrlich and S. Finkelstein lost the final points in the third sets to 19 and 20. Thus, out of twelve singles matches, they had nine victories, which gave Poland only fourth place. He started the singles tournament with wins over S. Boros (Hungary) and A. Barenbaum (Austria). In the second round, he defeated multiple world champion V. Barna (Hungary), in the fourth duel he avenged his defeat in the Prague final to S. Kolar (Czechoslovakia) 3:0, in the quarter-finals he defeated T. Hazi (Hungary), in the semi-finals he won outright against F. Soos (Hungary). On Sunday

²⁷ "Raz Dwa Trzy" of 17 March, 1936.

²⁸ M. Schafer, W. Stockmann, N. Wolf, *Ein Spiel fürs Leben- 75 Jahre DTTB*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p.16. "Table Tennis", The Official Organ of the E.T.T.A. (1936) No. 5, 1936; Jerome Charyn, *Sizzling Chops & Devils Spins*, New York 2001, p.59. In this duel, A. Ehrlich changed his racket from right to left hand every ten minutes, and ate a sausage sandwich during the match.

²⁹ "Przegląd Sportowy", 1936, No 92, 94. The Częstochowa press "Goniec Częstochowski" did not record the stay of A. Ehrlich in Częstochowa.

³⁰ "Table Tennis" The Official Organ of the E.T.T.A., 1936 No 4.

³¹ "Table Tennis" The Official Organ of the E.T.T.A., 1937 No 5.

³² Z. Uzorinac, ITTF 1926-2001, *Table Tennis Legends*, Zagreb 2001, p.62.

night he fought in the final against Richard Bergman, leading 2:1 in sets, with a moment of 20:14 advantage in the second lost set.³³ In the doubles, he played with A. Liebster from Austria (they lost in the third round against the American-Austrian pair S. Schiff / A. Berenbaum). In Baden, he was part of the technical committee and voted for the women's world title match between T. Pritzi (Austria) and R. Aarons (USA) to be decided on the table. In the end, both players were disqualified in overtime.

London (1938) proved to be the place where A. Ehrlich's luck ran out, moreover, he played unevenly and on top of that he was sick. A record number of participants came to England despite the prevailing high cost. Performance of the Polish team was mediocre (fourth place in the group behind Austria, the USA and England). A. Ehrlich defeated the Belgian Ewalenko in singles, and already in the second round he fell to Solem Schiff from the USA 2:3.³⁴

Two years earlier, he was invited by a casino owner to the Touquet-Paris-Plage in the north of France, where he was offered to play and teach table tennis for appropriate remuneration. There he met, among others, King Farouk of Egypt, with whom he discussed investments in Egyptian sport and table tennis over lunch. After some time, Sono Hussein Said Bey, the president of the Egyptian Table Tennis Federation, arrived at Marbeuf Street in Paris, where Ehrlich had his training venue. The topic of their discussion was the organisation of the world championships in Egypt. After a week, A. Ehrlich was already in London for talks with Ivor Montagu – President of the ITTF, and after a month Cairo became the official host of the 1939 championships.³⁵ Six months before the championships, A. Ehrlich arrived in the Egyptian capital (to assist with the organisation of the championships and the technical preparation of the men's and women's national teams for the competition).

At a similar time, the ITTF received Palestine's application for the championship. The ITTF Executive Committee faced a diplomatic problem. At the time, Palestine was a British protectorate, Egypt was under British rule and there was a political conflict between the two countries. Thanks to the sporting spirit, a great diplomatic success was achieved. Palestine (with three Polish Jews) performed in the championships. In the match between the two countries, Egypt won 5:2. In this championship, A. Ehrlich was the only Polish player and at the same time manager of the Egyptian national team.

Ehrlich fought his way up to the second place in the Egyptian capital – Cairo (1939). He was the only Polish table tennis player there (the others had already played for Palestine, sending a Polish team would have resulted in winning

³³ "Raz Dwa Trzy", 1937, No 6,7,8.

³⁴ "Raz Dwa Trzy", 1938, No 6.

³⁵ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, pp. 115-123.

a team medal). He competed in singles, doubles and mixed doubles. In singles he decisively defeated his opponents Marcu (Romania), R. Bedoc (France), L. Hexner (Yugoslavia), V. Barna (England), Z. Dolinar (Yugoslavia). In the final held in the hall of the Automobile Club in the presence of King Faruk I and 3,000 spectators, he lost 0:3 to R. Bergman (A. Ehrlich admitted to a very poor performance on the pages of "Przegląd Sportowy"). In the doubles, he was paired with the Egyptian Tawhit Helal and in the medal game they lost to the Czechoslovakian-Luxemburg pair of M. Hamr and J. Tartakower. In the mixed game, the partner of A. Ehrlich was the Greek Constantuinailis. The hosts treated all participants to two trips to the pyramids and a boat ride on the Nile.³⁶

For his outstanding sporting achievements for Poland, he was nominated for the second and third time in the "Przegląd Sportowy" poll (1937 – 11th place, 1938 – 15th place).

After the championships, he left for Romania, and on his way back to France he visited Kraków (to receive the 10th anniversary badge of the Kraków District Table Tennis Association)³⁷ and Lviv (his last meeting with his parents and his beloved Irena). He had a tour planned in the 1939-1940 season (up to the planned world championships in Paris in 1940) in the United States (including a showcase at the national exhibition in New York), India and New Zealand. He intended, together with V. Barna and R. Bergman to travel to the Soviet Union for a series of showcase matches (at that time the Soviet Union was not a member of the ITTF).³⁸ The last plans were not realised due to the outbreak of the Second World War. He was a Polish delegate to the ITTF Congress three times (1933, 1938, 1939).

A. Ehrlich prepared for six world championships in France. Between 1933 and 1939 he played 46 matches for the Polish national team, for which he won 80 duels.³⁹

Activity in the Resistance, arrest and imprisonment in concentration camps

At the outbreak of the Second World War, he was in France at Le Touquet-Paris-Plage at the Atlantic ocean. In 1940, he wrote a letter to Dr Ignacy Schwarzbart (who was a member of the National Council of the Polish Republic

³⁶ "Sports Review", 1939, No 21.

³⁷ Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute sygnn.108,86/1 (Communiqué of the Board of the KOZTS of 20 February 1939).

³⁸ "Przegląd Sportowy" of 27 March 1939

³⁹ W. Pięta, *Table tennis among Jews in Poland*, English Editions – Supplemented, Częstochowa 2009, p. 149.

in exile, first in France and then in England as a representative of the Jewish population) about helping to grant a Polish passport to Richard Bergman, a former world champion (his father was Polish). He also mentioned promotional matches in the USA and in the West and raising funds for former and current Polish soldiers stationed in Western Europe. In this letter, he also mentioned that he had volunteered to join the Polish army at the Polish embassy in France and had undergone a medical examination (A. Ehrlich was declared fit for service and had up to six months to wait for mobilisation).⁴⁰ He was originally preparing for a sporting tour to India, but the ship on which the place was booked never left Marseille. In May 1940, he was at the Eperneau front (near Reims). He then joined the Polish Army of the 3rd Armoured Division in France. He left for Toulouse (with the intention of continuing his studies). There he was in charge of smuggling Polish servicemen across the Pyrenees to England and collecting information for broadcasting stations. During this time, he tried to continue his sporting career yet due to his Polish citizenship, he was not admitted to the French championships in Vichy in 1943. Then the French championship titles were won by Charles Dubouille and Yolande Logelin.⁴¹ Prior to that, A. Ehrlich had won tournaments in the French Cup with Raymond Tringue (in the final). He spent the last years of the war hiding in the Vichy region in the Bourbon village of l'Archambault at the Quillier family. A. Ehrlich reported to the correspondent of the "Evening Express" that he was a supply officer (together with French athletes he was getting food for the South-East resistance group led by Colonel Gorecki).⁴² Unexpectedly rounded up by German policemen, he and his friend Pierre Wildenstein were arrested on 12 June 1944 and imprisoned in a German prison in Moulins. He was suspected of resistance activities (probably betrayed). On that day, the life of A. Ehrlich changed forever. His first encounter with the Nazi officer Schulz was brutal, he was tortured, lost teeth for the first time (despite that he did not betray his colleagues), then was transported to the Gestapo headquarters in Vichy⁴³ and back to Moulins. Here Stefan (an SS officer) took over the interrogation and its style changed dramatically: there was a tray with tea, sugar and cake, the talk was mainly about table tennis as Stefan was passionate about the sport, and was mainly interested in the longest set in history of table tennis, i.e. the 132 minutes-long duel to get the first point between A. Ehrlich and F. Paneth. There, after interrogation by the SS (private sources say he was saved from being shot by being a medallist in the world table tennis

⁴⁰ Collection of Wiesław Pięta. Letter from Aloysius Ehrlich to Dr Ignatius Schwarzbart.

⁴¹ J. Proust, *Berthe de Ping a Pong*, Paris 1990. p.38, p.175; J. Secretin, *Ping du Pong au Tennis de Table*, Paris 1972, pp.202-203. The French championships were not played between 1940 and 1942.

⁴² "Evening Express", 1949 of 21 January.

⁴³ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, pp. 31-36.

championships), they returned his gold watch and wallet with documents and money. As he avoided being shot, he was handcuffed and together with other Jews taken by truck to the Moulins station, and from there by train via a circuitous route (the original line was bombed by the Allies), passing through Paris to the Jewish camp at Drancy (18 July 1944.), where he was assigned prisoner number 25138.

Being told by a railwayman that he was transported to a labour camp in Germany, he was taken to the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in transport 77 from the Drancy camp.⁴⁴ The whole transport consisted of about 1300 people. A. Ehrlich shared the wagon with 100 people including children, infants and the elderly, which gave him a lot of reason to think why children and the elderly would go to work.⁴⁵ The transport left France on 31 July 1944 and arrived at Auschwitz -Birkenau on 3 August 1944. After selection on the ramp at Birkenau, 391 men (A. Ehrlich was given the camp number B-3742 on the outside of his forearm, the B signifying that he was Jewish) and 183 women were moved to Auschwitz. The remaining 826 passengers were sent to die in the gas chambers. The first day consisted of removing lice with white powder, shaving off the hair, bathing and allocation of striped uniforms and clogs. In the camp, together with 40 prisoners, he was assigned to the *Kohlenkommando* (coal commando of Wilhelm Claussen group – one of the camp's most important officers), where he received socks, leather boots, warm clothing and an extra blanket.⁴⁶ He was mainly engaged in digging shelters against Allied air raids. After proving himself in this task, he was transferred to the *Bombenspringkommando* (bombing commando)⁴⁷ that specialised in disarming unexploded bombs (shells dropped by the Allies). His knowledge of languages (French, German, Polish and Russian) helped him a lot. A. Ehrlich said that life outside the camp, mainly in the Ostrava area (today's Czech Republic), was easier because of access to food and rest after work. He worked twelve hours a day throughout September and October 1944. After the two months the work was suspended, he was temporarily sent to *Essenfabres* delivering food to about 1500 Jewish women in Birkenau throughout November and December. There, he met his beloved Irena from Lviv. Meanwhile, the Russians were approaching Auschwitz, more and more unexploded bombs were landing near the camp, which he was supposed to disarm. He remained in Auschwitz until January 1945 (only his stay in the camp hospital

⁴⁴ Drancy internment camp (German camp for Jews from France and Western European countries). Inmates waited there to be transported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp (operated from August 1941 to August 1944). A total of 67,000 people were deported to the extermination camps in 60 convoys.

⁴⁵ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 111–114.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 126–127.

for prisoners is recorded). As a result of the hasty evacuation and removal of traces of the camp, on 28 January 1945 inmates, including Ehrlich and Irena who died in his arms that day, were forced to march 30 km to the railway station, and then were moved by train to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. There his fellow Jews worked at the quarries. They had no food for several days, spend the nights in freezing barracks, and were loaded onto a train in a transport that on 4 February 1945 set off for KL Dachau.⁴⁸ His entire food ration for the five-day journey on the freight train was half a loaf of bread, a piece of margarine and a sausage. Finally he and a group of Jews managed to finish the ca. 600–700 km route to KL Dachau.⁴⁹ In KL Dachau, A. Ehrlich was given the inmate number 1139264 (residence Paris). According to Ehrlich, the number was 63264,⁵⁰ block 19 (fenced with barbed wire). In Dachau there were no Kapos or SS officers with batons, the prisoners did not work but only shovelled snow in the roll call yard. After a while, with a group of prisoners, he was marched to Dachau station and embarked on another stage of the journey, this time to Waldlager V (a camp of dugouts) and another *Freitag-Sonntag* team (they made bricks from sand, water and cement, twelve hours a day, every day). During unit work on the railway tracks Ehrlich was hit with a shovel by an SS officer, was wounded and stayed in hospital in Waldlager V for a week. Then, he returned to Dachau and was deported further, this time towards Innsbruck, but stopped at Seeshaupt (a village in Bavaria on Lake Starnberg), as the railway tracks were destroyed, and there his war journey ended. There was hot milk and white bread served by nurses from the Red Cross. A. Ehrlich felt the months-long fever dropping.⁵¹ Prisoners liberated by American troops were released on 29 April 1945. A. Ehrlich became a free man, which was the happiest day of his rich life. Due to exhaustion, he was admitted to an American hospital, where he remained until 18 May 1945. After a year of daily struggle to avoid death he returned via Austria (hospital in Innsbruck), Switzerland to France, to Bourbon-Archambault, where he had been captured on 12 June 1944. He again found himself in a hospital, this time for two

⁴⁸ Archives of the Auschwitz -Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim. Transport list from Drancy to Auschwitz on 31st July 1944, ref. -RF 3/79, inventory no. 106530, p.76. Record book of the camp hospital for prisoners surgery, ref. D-Aul-5/3a, inventory no: 172898, p.148. List of prisoners transferred from Auschwitz to Gross- Rosen KL on 28 January 1945, ref. D-Daa 3/5, inventory number 161487, vol. 2, p. 65. List of prisoners transferred from Auschwitz Concentration Camp to Dachau Concentration Camp (via Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp) dated 4 February 1945, Auschwitz Transportlisten, ref. D-Aul-3/8/2, inventory number 149702, vol.2, p.37.

⁴⁹ Dachau concentration camp was located near Munich. The camp was built following A. Hitler's decision of 21 March 1933. It was initially intended for communists, Jews and Roman Catholic priests. From 1939 onwards, the Polish elite were sent to Dachau. In 1943, a crematorium was built.

⁵⁰ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 232.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 250.

months in Moulins (Auvergne-Rhodan-Alpes region).⁵² After the necessary hospitalisation, he returned to Paris, where he arranged all the formalities for his stay in France (hotel "Lutetia"). His authentication support was attested by, among others, Pierre Ceccaldi (then working for the Ministry of Justice).⁵³ Query data showed that, at 182 cm tall, he weighed only 37 kg.⁵⁴ After the war, A. Ehrlich managed to return to Lviv for only a week in 1989, at the time the city was within the territory of the Soviet Union, while he remained to live in France.

Continuation of sports activities after 1945

As a result of miraculously surviving the Holocaust and recovering physically and mentally, he gradually began training. He received support from M. Hague-nauer and G. Amoureti, former friends from the table tennis arenas. His exceptionally strong will and the tremendous amount of work allowed A. Ehrlich to make his second debut in the French international championships, which took place on 2 and 3 January 1946 in the Wagram hall. At that time he lost to Michel Lankoy 2:3 despite leading 2:0 (due to poor physical condition). In doubles play, paired with G. Amoureti, he was third.⁵⁵ In the first post-war world championships, held in Paris (1947), A. Ehrlich represented Poland and limited his performance to singles play only. He climbed up as far as the quarter-finals.⁵⁶ He also entered into the mixed game with A. Adelstein (Romania)⁵⁷. A search of the ITTF archives in Rennes near Lausanne revealed that he played in these championships with the permission of the ITTF as a French resident (he was a permanent resident of France).⁵⁸ Poland did not play in these championships. For his participation in these championships he was excluded from the Polish national team by a decision of the PZTS of 2 February 1947.⁵⁹ At the end of that year, A. Ehrlich wrote a letter to the English Table Tennis Association requesting a visa and ac-

⁵² "Evening Express" of 21 January 1949.

⁵³ J. Proust, *Berthe de Ping a Pong*, Paris 1990, p. 38, p. 175. J. Secretin, *Ping du Pong au Tennis de Table*, Paris 1972, p. 48. Pierre Ceccaldi president of the French Table Tennis Federation (FFTT) from 1959 to 1966.

⁵⁴ "Evening Express" of 21 January 1949.

⁵⁵ "France tennis de table" 2011, No 868.

⁵⁶ J. Schmicker, *Das große Buch vom Tischtennis*, Schwalmatal 2000, p.338. In the first round he defeated the Swiss Frel, then won against Hussein (Egypt), defeated unexpectedly I. Andreadis (Czechoslovakia) and Baileul (France), and succumbed 0:3 to L. Pagliaro (USA) in the medal match.

⁵⁷ The Romanian Angelika Adelstein was not allowed to compete in these championships. Neither was Poland.

⁵⁸ ITTF archive in Rennes near Lausanne (Switzerland). Letter from the ITTF dated 1 July 1947 (no ref.). There is also information about R. Bergman and his efforts to obtain a Polish passport.

⁵⁹ "Table Tennis in Poland and the World", 1991 No 2; "Sport", 1947, No 10.

commodation – the only Polish table tennis player in the upcoming world championships. Eventually, in the season of 1947–1948, he opted out of most of the tests in France including the World Championships in London, 1948. He decided to work on endurance and mental strengthening.

In January 1949, after receiving a letter from the president of PZTS – Ryszard Górski, inviting him to participate in the IMP in Lublin, he went on the Orient Express train (carriages to Bratislava, Bucharest, Belgrade and Warsaw) on a 48-hour journey from Gare de l'Est to Poland with some misgivings. He stayed in Warsaw for several hours after nearly a decade away (1939–1949), and after a coffee with pre-war friends and a brief tour of Warsaw, he headed for Lublin. Already on the first day of his stay in Lublin, he had a 7-hour training session (he played about 80 sets).⁶⁰ He participated in the Polish senior championships in Lublin. He qualified for the finals (without preliminaries), in which he won four times (beating J. Krzysiek, H. Wider, W. Gaj, A. Otremba) and suffered one defeat against Witold Kawczyk from Siemianowice.⁶¹ In the direct duel A. Ehrlich was better than W. Gaj (who also had one loss on his account). The PZTS authorities led by Kazimierz Matuszewski disqualified A. Ehrlich as he had no permanent residence in Poland, and stripped him of the champion title. As a result, the gold medal was given to Władysław Gaj.⁶² This was one of the biggest embarrassments of the PZTS in its long history of existence. This championship ended on Sunday at 11.20 p.m. This was Ehrlich's first and last performance in the Individual Polish Championships in Polish People's Republic. He had been entered for these championships by Garbarnia Kraków. On his way back to Warsaw, he played the pre-planned exhibition matches against W. Gaj and Arno Gayer, and held consultations with the 10-member national team. He must have been afraid of restrictions from the Security Office: oral accounts by Franciszek Dobosz given to the author showed that he left the Warsaw consultations unexpectedly and in haste, without even saying goodbye.

In Sweden at the world championships, A. Ehrlich (competed with the permission of the ITTF president – I. Montagu, who, in a letter to J. Olszowski from the PZTS, expressed his disappointment at Poland's absence from the world championships despite its earlier application. In Stockholm, he qualified for the top 16 in singles play and was eliminated from further play by G. Amouretti of France. In doubles play, he was paired with W. Gaj and gave the game a walkover. For his voluntary participation in the championships, he was once again suspended by the Polish Table Tennis Association. After the championships, he played in various open tournaments in France and England.

⁶⁰ "Przegląd Sportowy" 1949, No. 5, 6.

⁶¹ "Życie Częstochowy" of 18 January 1949.

⁶² "Sztandar Ludu" of 19 January 1949. Lublin press reported that A. Ehrlich had the best defence, and was the top player together with W. Kawczyk; W. Pięta (2016) *From Alojzy Ehrlich to Natalia Partyka, sports competition 1932–2016*, Częstochowa 2016, pp. 29–30.

He was still in conflict with the Polish Table Tennis Association. The sports captain Jerzy Czerniachowski did not appoint A. Ehrlich to the national team for the World Championships in Budapest (1950). At that time, letter diplomacy circulated between the ITTF President I. Montagu, the Director of the Polish Embassy in London, A. Słonimski and A. Ehrlich regarding his participation in the World Championships (December 1949). In the end, the mediation failed to produce a compromise. In the Hungarian capital, the three-time world vice-champion sat as a spectator and experienced the biggest defeat of his life (he then doubted his Polish citizenship). Called the Polish Frenchman, he went to India for the world championships in Bombay (1952). In the first game he defeated Dr D. Mauritz of Germany, and in the second game he succumbed to K. Sing-Ning of Honkong. In the doubles game, he was paired with his pre-war friend Stefan Cafiero. Fearing for his safety, he did not travel to socialist Romania. He came to London for the World Championships (1954) for the third time (previously in 1935, 1938), competed in singles only, defeated Sawyer from England and lost to Sebok from Hungary. Three years later in Stockholm, in another world championship, after wins against P. Belanger (Canada), F. Tokar (Czechoslovakia), P. Holusek (Germany) and B. Kennedy (England), he advanced to the best eight, where he succumbed to the later world vice-champion I. Ogimura.⁶³ He represented France at the world championships in Utrecht (1955) only in doubles with R. Bedoc. They recorded a good result, winning against the pairs M. Laine / G. Brandberg (Finland), A. Rhodes / H. Venner (England), P. Holusek / J. Seitz (West Germany) and losing to the Yugoslavs Z. Dolinar / V. Haragonzo. In singles, he won against D. da Motta (Brazil) and then succumbed to Josipov Vogrincovi (Yugoslavia). In singles he also played against L. Giraud (France).

He fought each season with health ailments related to his stay in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Dachau. In French national tournaments, he was still considered a top athlete in 1960s, e.g. in Rennes (1962) and in Paris (1963). At the age of fifty in Evreux (1964), he won a bronze medal in doubles.⁶⁴ He ended his sporting career in Tours (1965) at the French championships. At that time, a defensive table tennis player Vincent Purkart became champion for the second time, and J. Secretin was beginning his world career (first French doubles championship).⁶⁵

A. Ehrlich's international career (world championships) ended in Prague (1963) after losing to the Englishman C. Barnes 1:3. He was still entered by the French Table Tennis Federation for the 28th World Championships (Ljubljana 1965), which he took no part in.⁶⁶ In the early 1950s, he received approvals from

⁶³ "Sport" 1957, No 32.

⁶⁴ "France Table Tennis" 2011, No. 866.

⁶⁵ J. Proust, *Berthe de Ping a Pong*, Paris 1990, p. 175; J. Secretin, *Ping du Pong au Tennis de Table*, Paris 1972, p. 152, p. 209.

⁶⁶ Programme (1965) The 28th World Table Tennis Championships, Ljubljana, April 15-25, p. 39.

the ITTF to play only in singles and doubles (world championships). Then, recreationally as a semi-retired athlete, he enjoyed table tennis until the age of 75 at the AP Aulnay club near Paris, having previously represented the clubs ACBB, PPC Flandres, Roubaix, Cavigal Nice, Balmat de Paris. He visited European and world championship arenas as a spectator. He was the winner of the international championships of England (1953), Germany (Kiel, 1955) defeating K. Freundorfer 3:1 in the final,⁶⁷ and he was the Dutch (1951, 1956) and Swiss doubles champion (1950, 1951, 1953). In the summer break of 1957, he invited the best Polish team, Warsaw Sparta, to France for a preparatory camp for the new season. In Saint Tropez in the tournament he defeated the leading Polish table tennis players Z. Caliński and J. Kusiński⁶⁸.

He first appeared in the world ranking as a 20-year-old in the 1933–1934 season in a high 9th place. The second time was in 1938 when he reached a top 6th position. After the war, he was ranked 9th in 1950 and 10th in 1951. He was last ranked 19th in the ITTF ranking for 1957 (at the age of 43).

Editor, trainer, rationaliser, promoter

He made his debut as a trainer in January 1939. He took up the offer by King Faruk I of Egypt. He acted as a consultant during the organisation of the championships and officially coached the Egyptian national team. His players won the bronze medal in the mixed game (Helal, Fahrny). Before arriving by boat in Cairo (where he had a table tennis table paid for by King Faruk I), he held exhibition matches with V. Barna and L. Bellak in Morocco and Tunisia. In Egypt alone, he stayed for 5 months and played exhibition matches for the elite there, including games with Queen Farida and King Faruk I. He also provided correspondence from these championships for the readers of "Sports Review". From mid-1946, he belonged to the circus group established by professional table tennis players.

At the age of 36, he started his coaching apprenticeship at the Parisian "Banville", and then in Lille. In the 1950s, he wrote for the French magazine "FFTT Magazine". He included tips in the "free opinions" column. He then undertook training work in Germany and Sweden.⁶⁹ In Germany, he published *Tischtennis Tips* (Table Tennis Tips).⁷⁰ This publication consists of an introduction and 16 chapters, chapter topics including: values in table tennis, social values of table tennis, working in a club section, sports equipment, the role of the coach in

⁶⁷ M. Schafer, W. Stockmann, N. Wolf, *Ein Spiel fürs Leben – 75 Jahre DTTB*, Frankfurt am Main 2000. p. 133.

⁶⁸ "Sport", 1957, No. 87.

⁶⁹ "Table Tennis ETTA" of 7 April 1956, p. 11.

⁷⁰ A. Ehrlich, *Tischtennis Tips*, Hannover 1959.

the club, cooperation of coaches in the club, women's table tennis, the organisation of table tennis competitions, training in the early stages of the game and competitive table tennis players, the way of life of a table tennis player. A. Ehrlich wrote, "...never give up – keep on trying..." In the publication, there is an advertisement for A. Ehrlich's table tennis racket, which could be bought in the late 1950s at a price of DM 10.35 (German marks).

He went to Sweden in 1954 to teach table tennis, these were short but cyclical visits. He offered professional training to table tennis players there by systematically improving selected elements of the game such as punch and half-volley backhand control drills, diagonal and straight forehand, and keeping the ball in play on the table for 20 minutes without a break. He also highlighted the footwork of the breakthrough, forehand attack at the table and from the second zone. He also introduced coordination exercises from backhand to forehand into the training methodology. His training philosophy was based on improving stroke confidence (repetition). He strengthened muscles by jumping on a skipping rope for 10 minutes each on the left and right leg and on both legs, he also applied running up and down stairs.⁷¹ The basics of his training methods were based on his own experiences from his extensive sporting career. This was all refined into an offensive style that was undergoing a real evolution in the mid-1950s. He mobilised the trainers to do hard work. Scientific institutes became interested in his training methods. Financial assistance was provided by the Swedish sports authorities. At these institutes he held training seminars aimed at coaches and players. Under the auspices of the sports ministry, he also organised a camp in the countryside (10 miles from Stockholm).⁷² He scheduled daily classes there from 8 a.m. to 5.15 p.m. There was learning and practice, and subject matters of youth psychology, human physiology, modern sports training theory, training with elements of technique and tactics, and conditioning training were dealt with in detail. The classes ended with a visit to the Finnish sauna. 3-6 evenings were devoted to watching films and socialising. A. Ehrlich proved to be an example of reliability and an authority for young Swedish table tennis players (among others Hans Alser, the 1962 European champion). The pioneering ideas introduced by A. Ehrlich into training made a significant contribution to the evaluation of table tennis (until then, training consisted solely of improving the style of play during control games). In 1956, he was already one of 12 regional coaches in France. In 1960 he married Inge Lieselotte-Kuhl, he had no offspring.

In Malmö, Sweden, in 1964, he presented a table tennis robot. This robot was manufactured by a French company. He lent his name to the names of table

⁷¹ G. Osth, *Wie wird man Nr1 im Tischtennis?*, Aachen 1995, p.29 (Schewen und die Entwicklung in Herren-Tischtennis von 1925-1991).

⁷² "Table Tennis ETTA" of 7 April 1956, p.11.

tennis balls and rackets with a bevelled handle; the cost of this racket in 1954 in Sweden was 15 crowns, and in 1965 in Poland – 180 zlotys. The balls and rackets were distributed by, among others, Union Cooperative Sportive from Paris. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was director of a recreational club in Saint Tropez run by the Olympic judo champion Anton Gesing. This centre had, among other things, four table tennis rooms, 22 table tennis tables, four ball-throwing robots and around 50 sparring coaches.

Based on the information provided by Zdenko Uzorinac, A. Ehrlich worked as a trainer and conducted weekly seminars in France, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal, Egypt, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Greece, Spain, Norway, India and England.⁷³ In the late 1960s, he was accepted as a member of the Swaythling Club in France.⁷⁴ In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s he worked for the English company *Jacques*, the German *Gewo*, *Hanno*, the Swedish *Stiga*, and the Japanese *Butterfly*, of which he was the representative for France. He even had a company Mercedes, which he used to travel around Europe (this account was provided by Michał Reterski, an international judge from Poland).

He visited Poland many times. He came, among others, to Warsaw (1974) and Łódź (1978), Wrocław (1981)⁷⁵ for the International Polish Championships. He observed promising young Polish table tennis players: Witold Woźnica, Stanisław Frączyk, Andrzej Grubba and Leszek Kucharski. He pointed out the systematic work of 6-8 hours a day, demanded an increase in the number of training camps, a stationary training centre, proper management with a player's manager (the player should not have to deal with all the organisational formalities), a pure professional in a nutshell.⁷⁶ He was fluent in six languages: Yiddish, Polish, French, English, German and Swedish. In 1991, he wrote down the story of his life and gave it to Arnaldo Morino.⁷⁷

He died of stomach cancer after a long illness at the Saint Denis Hospital, located in a district of Paris, on 7 December 1992, at the age of 78. The sporting and organizational talent and achievements of A. Ehrlich were recalled on the occasions of the 80th and 90th anniversaries of the Polish Table Tennis Association.

⁷³ Z. Uzorinac, ITTF 1926-2001, *Table Tennis Legends*, Zagreb 2001, p. 62.

⁷⁴ SCI Booklet 1967-2011, *Swaythling Club International*, ITTF (2011), p. 100.

⁷⁵ "Gazeta Robotnicza", 1981, No 43. During this competition, A. Ehrlich was awarded the medal of the 50th anniversary of the Polish Table Tennis Association (the only award he received from the Polish Table Tennis Association).

⁷⁶ "Tempo", 1983, of 29th October. Interview with Alex Ehrlich by Witold Wieromiej in the Krakow sports daily paper *Tempo* (...Are there still amateurs...).

⁷⁷ E. Pedemonte, *L'ultima partita*, Milano 2022, p. 257.

Conclusion

He was faithful to table tennis throughout his prolific sporting life. After his successful debut in the Paris World Championships (1933), he gave up his studies at the University and devoted himself exclusively to table tennis (financial problems forced him to give table tennis lessons for money). He became a true professional who worked according to the plan he had set. He left behind an attachment to the Polish flag and eagle, the national emblem, together with great respect for Poland, respect for his opponents and a place in the history of the world table tennis because of the longest exchange and the game for the first point. He popularised table tennis around the world through hundreds of showcase matches and also participated in the Bergman Circus. He also laid the foundation stone for modern training. He introduced conditioning preparation and specialised training on the elements of the game (repetition) as well as playing with a robot into the training cycle. He derived great satisfaction from his many years of training at the Saint Tropez centre.

As a table tennis player, he had a wide arm reach, defensive mind, was able to defend with backhand and forehand. He did not fulfil his biggest dream of winning the world title. In the decisive matches, there was a lack of experience (change of style of play from defensive to offensive) or maybe just sporting luck.

He worked on his equipment brand (rackets bearing his name were played all over Europe, and table tennis balls were used in France) and his personal image (sepia-coloured image cards). As a player, he owned two rackets: one for offensive, the other with a larger diameter for defensive play.

He was one of a small group of Jewish athletes who managed to survive the Holocaust and return to the table tennis salons (quarter-final of the World Championships in 1947). Although he lived a solitary life, he ran an open house, often hosting former players and coaches from Poland who had come to earn their pensions in France. Lively, talkative, comforting, he had a loud voice.

He was forgotten by Poland in the 1950s and 1960s. He did not live to see his compatriots officially revoke his exclusion from the national team, as well as his union and state honours. He left behind valuable tactical tips and records that have been permanently inscribed in the history of world table tennis.

He was never (for political reasons) offered to lead the Polish national team. A. Ehrlich had a huge impact on the development of Polish table tennis (world championship medals, showcase matches at home and in Europe). For the last few years, the PZTS had no idea how to bring the silhouette of this prominent table tennis player back to memory. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth, the author of this article created the Alojzy Ehrlich Gallery of Polish Table Tennis Fame. The work took two years, Prof. M. Mielczarek from Jan Długosz University in Czeszochowa prepared the design of a sculpture-statue

of A. Ehrlich, and its casting was made at Częstochowa University of Technology. The first laureates in 2016 were Adam Giersz, a prominent Polish coach, Fima Borys, former representative of Poland and Israel, and Andrzej Grubba. Currently, the Hall of Fame consists of 32 people. A. Ehrlich did not live to see a tournament named after him in Poland. Thirty years have passed since his death. In Częstochowa (30 Kukuczki St.), in the AZS Sports and Table Tennis History Centre, there is an A. Ehrlich Hall of Fame including his dummy, racket and a ball, his sculpture, and biographies of 32 Polish table tennis celebrities.

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Wiesław Pięta: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, supervision, project administration;

Aleksandra Pięta: formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing, supervision;

Mikołaj Marszałek: visualization.

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