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Stanisław Szozda (1950–2013) – Forgotten Legend of Polish Cycling

Abstract

Stanisław Szozda was born on September 25, 1950 in Dobromierz. During his career he represented the following clubs: LZS [RST – Rural Sports Team] Prudnik, “Legia” Warsaw, LZS “Zieloni” Opole and LKS [RSC – Rural Sports Club] “Ziemia Opolska”. His greatest successes include, among others: twice 2nd place at the Olympic Games in Munich (1972) and Montreal (1976) in the 100-km team race; twice 1st place in the 100-km team race during the World Championships in Barcelona (1973) and Yvoir (1975); 1st place in individual classification of the Peace Race in 1974 and twice 1st place in team classification in Peace Race (1973 and 1974) and 1st place in Tour de Pologne (1971). He died on September 23, 2013. He was buried in the Osobowicki Cemetery in Wrocław in the Alley of the Meritorious.

Keywords: Stanisław Szozda, cycling, Rural Sports Teams.

The aim of this paper is to outline successes of the Rural Sports Team (RST) Prudnik alumnus – Stanisław Szozda.

The basic research method used in writing of this paper was an analysis of historical sources. The method of induction and deduction has also been applied. The following research issues have been put forward:

- What influence did cycling have on Stanisław Szozda’s life?
- In which cycling events; regarding races in the both national and international arena, was he most successful?

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Stanisław Szozda – before start in the Race Around Poland (1974). Source: Private property of Jan Rozmarynowski

Stanisław Szozda was born on September 25, 1950 in Dobromierz (son of Dominik and Elżbieta)¹. For cycling he gave up ice hockey, athletics and football. As he himself admitted, cycling helped him to get rid of habits, find motivation to study, complete Agricultural Secondary School and gain recognition among friends and teachers². However, at the beginning this recognition – especially among friends – had its ups and downs. In one of the interviews he confessed that it all started on February 8, 1967 when he told his friends that he gave up smoking. His father bought him a “Favorita” semi-racer, and he promised that he was through with the company he socialized with. This was his first victory. He survived the period of taunts, mockery and provocation. Half a year later, he signed up for the cycling section run by Franciszek Surmiński in Prudnik³. When he won the first race, 5 minutes ahead of other competitors, he was accused of shortening the route. The organizers did not believe that such

¹ B. Tuszyński, *Polscy olimpijczycy XX wieku (1924–2002) N–Ż* [*Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002) N–Ż*], Warsaw 2004, p. 265.

² “Wiadomości Sportowe” [“Sports News”] 1973, No. 37 (454), p. 3.

³ “Wiadomości Sportowe” [“Sports News”], 50 years of RST, Special issue, no year of publication, p. 10. The publication by Bogdan Tuszyński contains information that Stanisław Szozda represented the team of RST Prudnik since 1964. See: B. Tuszyński, *Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002)*..., p. 265.

a slim competitor was able to perform so well. Unfortunately crying and swearing came to nothing. But he decided to prove all these disbelievers that he was unjustly accused of cheating. Soon after, he won the prestigious Baltic Friendship Race and the greatest honour for him was the appointment to Henryk Łasak's team⁴.

He was a man who liked to complain about himself and when such complaining appeared experts in the subject acknowledged it in the following way: "Oh, Staszek will again be up to something on the route because he is complaining". And so it was indeed. It was with increased effort that he tried to overcome his weaknesses. He cycled against his rivals and himself⁵.

In 1969 he took the 2nd place in the Polish Championships in cyclo-cross in Chełmno⁶. In turn, he won his first title of the Polish champion in 1970 in the pair competition (with Edward Barcik). In the same year he also took the 5th place in the Baltic Friendship Race⁷.

In the years 1971–1972, while doing military service, he was a cyclist at Warsaw "Legia". In 1971 – as a rookie, at the age of 20 – he won the 28th International Cycling Race Around Poland (Tour de Pologne). From among twelve stages, he won three. He put on a yellow t-shirt at the fifth stage and kept it until the end of the race⁸. Another success of Stanisław Szozda was taking the 2nd place in 1971 at the Polish Championships in road cycling in the individual race (the winner was Edward Barcik)⁹ and the 1st place in the team race (as in 1972 "Legia" Warsaw – whose team member was Stanisław Szozda – won the team championship of Poland)¹⁰. Winning in 1971 by the Polish team including Stanisław Szozda, the bronze medal at the World Championships in Mendrisio (Switzerland) in the 100-km team race was also a major achievement¹¹. A year later, at the Olympic Games in Munich – in the same competition (cyclists covered exactly 102.8 km) – he won the silver medal (together with Ryszard Szurkowski, Edward Barcik and Lucjan Lis)¹². Then, in the individual race (182.4 km) he was ranked in the 76th place (with 163 competitors)¹³.

On the last day of March 1973 he won the Race Around Algeria¹⁴. His next victory was in the multi-stage race in France – 30th Tour de Vaucluse¹⁵. In 1973

⁴ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"], 50 years of RST, Special issue, no year of publication, p. 10.

⁵ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 37 (454), p. 3.

⁶ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1969, No. 15 (224), p. 4.

⁷ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 37 (454), p. 3.

⁸ „Wiadomości Sportowe” ["Sports News"] 1971, No. 30 (343), p. 1, 4.

⁹ „Wiadomości Sportowe” ["Sports News"] 1971, No. 34 (347), p. 1.

¹⁰ B. Tuszyński, *Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002)*..., p. 265.

¹¹ „Wiadomości Sportowe” ["Sports News"] 1971, No. 36 (349), p. 1.

¹² Z. Porada, *Starożytne i Nowożytne Igrzyska Olimpijskie [Ancient And Modern Olympic Games]*, Cracow 1980, p. 885.

¹³ B. Tuszyński, *Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002)*..., p. 266.

¹⁴ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 14 (431), p. 1.

¹⁵ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 16 (433), p. 4.

Stanisław Szozda also became a road champion of Poland. In the competition which was played on the route around dams in Porąbka and Tresna near Żywiec, 173 cyclists of 72 clubs participated. The representative of RST "Zieloni" Opole, and originally of RST Prudnik, left his rivals with no illusions as to who was the best¹⁶. Moreover, in 1973, four Polish competitors (Lucjan Lis, Tadeusz Mytnik, Stanisław Szozda and Ryszard Szurkowski), won the team race at the World Championships in Barcelona. They were ahead of the USSR national team by more than one minute and a half. Next, in the individual race Stanisław Szozda won the silver medal¹⁷. In 1973 he was the winner in the Bahamontes Cup in Spain, too. In addition, he twice climbed the podium during the Peace Race. He took the 2nd place in the individual race and the 1st place with the Polish national team in the team classification¹⁸. These successes resulted in Stanisław Szozda's 2nd place in the poll of "Przegląd Sportowy" ["Sports Review"] to choose the best sportsman in 1973.

At the World Championships in Montreal (1974) Stanisław Szozda in the individual race took the 4th place (in the team classification Poles were ranked the 7th)¹⁹. In 1974 he was again the winner of the Peace Race²⁰. At the 1st stage (Jabłonna – Nowy Dwór, 20 km) in the individual time trial he took the 31st place. His performance was much better at the 2nd stage (Płońsk – Toruń, 152 km). He took the 3rd place. Then, at the 3rd stage (Toruń – Poznań, 150 km) he took the 10th place. At the 4th stage (Poznań – Zielona Góra, 126 km) he was the 2nd. Next, at the 5th stage (Międzyrzecz – Gorzów Wlkp., 48,5 km) in the individual time trial he came in the 7th place. His first victory was at the 6th stage (Gorzów Wlkp. – Szczecin, 106 km). From this stage until the end of the race he did not descend from the podium. At the 7th (Szczecin – Neubrandenburg, 145 km) and 8th stage (Neubrandenburg – Berlin 128 km) he took the 3rd place. Then, at the following stages: 9th (Potsdam – Leipzig, 170 km), 10th (Leipzig – Karl-Marx-Stadt, 141 km), 11th (Karl-Marx-Stadt – Sokolov, 164 km), 12th (Sokolov – Usti nad Labem, 158 km) and 14th (Mlada Boleslav – Prague, 160 km) he climbed the highest place on the podium. It was only at the 13th stage (Usti nad Labem – Mlada Boleslav, 138 km) that he came in the 2nd place. Poles also won in the team classification²¹. After this success, the chairman of the Central Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism – Bolesław Kapitan – awarded him a gold medal "For Outstanding Achievements in Sports". It was his third decoration with this medal²². It is also noteworthy that in

¹⁶ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 33 (450), p. 1.

¹⁷ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1973, No. 36 (453), p. 1.

¹⁸ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1974, No. 3 (472), p. 2; B. Tuszyński, *Wyścig Pokoju 1948–1988 [Peace Race 1948–1988]*, Warsaw 1989, p. 352.

¹⁹ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1974, No. 35 (504), p. 1.

²⁰ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1974, No. 22 (491), p. 5.

²¹ B. Tuszyński, *Peace Race 1948–1988...*, pp. 365–368.

²² "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1974, No. 23 (492), p. 4.

1974 Stanisław Szozda won the title of the Polish vice-champion in the road and mountain race, too. Then, with Edward Barcik in the race in pairs they won the Polish championship²³.

The year 1975 was also fruitful in terms of success. In the Polish Championships in road cycling, which took place in Łask, in the team race competitors of the Rural Sports Club (RSC) "Ziemia Opolska" won the bronze medal (the team members were: Stanisław Szozda, Edward Barcik, Piela and Kornafel)²⁴. Stanisław Szozda also stood on the lowest step of the podium at the Polish Championships in the pair competition (with Edward Barcik). In 1975 he won the title of the mountain Polish champion²⁵. He also won a five-stage race in the Kłodzko Valley ahead of national team members from Poland and GDR²⁶. Stanisław Szozda was the winner of one of the five stages of the Race Around Scotland too. In the final classification, however, he took the 5th place²⁷. Then, in the individual classification of the 28th Peace Race he came in the 21st place (in the team classification Poles were ranked just outside the podium – the 4th place)²⁸.

In 1975, the World Championships in Yvoir (Belgium) ended with the victory of Poles in road team race (with the team including: Stanisław Szozda, Ryszard Szurkowski, Mieczysław Nowicki and Tadeusz Mytnik)²⁹. It is worth mentioning that these successes contributed to the fact that in the poll of "Dziennik Ludowy" ["People's Daily"] Stanisław Szozda became the best sportsperson of the RST Association in 1975³⁰.

In the next year (1976), Stanisław Szozda was a triple winner of the cycling race for the Grand Prix of Annaba in Algeria. In the general classification he was ahead of his colleague Tadeusz Zawada. In addition, he was the winner in the competition for the title of the best climber and in the so-called combined classification³¹.

The 29th Peace Race ended with the 3rd place of Poles in the team competition and the 2nd place of Stanisław Szozda in the individual competition³². Stanisław Szozda won the prologue (Prague, 7 km), and at 14 stages he climbed the podium 7 times: 1st place at the 2nd stage (Litomyśl – Gottwaldowo, 165 km), 3rd place at the 5th stage (Tatrzańska Łomnica – Cracow, 151 km), 1st place at the 6th stage (Cracow – Kielce, 118 km), 2nd place at the 7th stage in individual time trial (Warsaw, 7 km), 1st place at the 9th stage (Toruń – Poznań, 150 km),

²³ B. Tuszyński, *Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002)*..., p. 265.

²⁴ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1975, No. 26 (548), p. 2.

²⁵ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1975, No. 28 (550), p. 1.

²⁶ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1975, No. 29 (551), p. 1.

²⁷ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1975, No. 30 (552), p. 1.

²⁸ B. Tuszyński, *Peace Race 1948–1988*..., pp. 381–382.

²⁹ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1975, No. 35 (557), p. 1.

³⁰ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 3 (577), p. 1.

³¹ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 13 (587), p. 1.

³² "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 21 (595), p. 1.

2nd place at the 11th stage in mass start (Frankfurt – Forst, 113 km) and 2nd place at the 13th stage (Leipzig – Magdeburg, 161 km)³³.

During the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976, the four Poles: Stanisław Szozda, Tadeusz Mytnik, Ryszard Szurkowski and Mieczysław Nowicki won the silver medal in the 100-km team race (the cyclists covered exactly 102.530 km)³⁴. They lost just 20 seconds to the national team of the Soviet Union³⁵. Next, in the 180-km individual road race Stanisław Szozda won the 11th place³⁶. After returning home, he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland, as well as a silver medal "For Outstanding Sports Achievements" (it was his fourth decoration with the medal)³⁷.

In 1976, in the challenge of "Sport Review" and the Polish Cycling Association (PCA) Stanisław Szozda was ranked the 3rd³⁸. Next, he was the winner in the 20th poll of "People's Daily", ahead of his club colleague – Benedykt Kocot³⁹.

In April 1977 Stanisław Szozda took the 1st place in the three-stage race "On Trail of Piast Towns", ahead of Czesław Lang from "Baszta" of Bytów⁴⁰. In 1977, he was also ranked in the 2nd place in the final classification of the five-stage Race Around Scotland. Polish team took the 2nd place in the team classification⁴¹. During the World Championship in San Cristobal in Venezuela Polish team won the bronze medal in the 100-km team race (team members: Stanisław Szozda, Tadeusz Mytnik, Czesław Lang and Mieczysław Nowicki). It was bad luck that left the Polish team without the silver medal. A defect of Tadeusz Mytnik's bike was repaired for over a minute, because the spare bike as a result of an unfortunate fall was destroyed by the mechanic of the team. In addition, replacement of wheels in Czesław Lang's and Mieczysław Nowicki's bicycles slowed down the team⁴². In turn, in the individual race Stanisław Szozda took the 51st place⁴³. In the poll of "People's Daily" for the best sportsperson of the RST Association in 1977 Stanisław Szozda took the 2nd place. He lost to Jan Pusty of RSC "Orkan" Poznań⁴⁴.

The last race, which he participated in was the 31st Peace Race (1978), which he did not finish, because during the 5th stage (Gera – Karlovy Vary, 158 km) he suffered a dangerous fall⁴⁵. The next day, when he talked about the

³³ B. Tuszyński, *Peace Race 1948–1988...*, pp. 392–394.

³⁴ Z. Porada, op. cit., p. 899.

³⁵ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 29 (603), p. 1.

³⁶ Z. Porada, op. cit., p. 899.

³⁷ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 32 (606), p. 1.

³⁸ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1976, No. 44 (618), p. 2.

³⁹ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1977, No. 4 (630), p. 1.

⁴⁰ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1977, No. 17 (643), p. 1.

⁴¹ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1977, No. 30 (656), p. 2.

⁴² "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1977, No. 36 (662), p. 2.

⁴³ https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanisław_Szozda [accessed on: 28.07.2016].

⁴⁴ "Wiadomości Sportowe" ["Sports News"] 1978, No. 5 (683), p. 1.

⁴⁵ B. Tuszyński, *Peace Race 1948–1988...*, p. 416.

whole event nobody believed him. He was suspected of making up the entire story. His version, however, was confirmed by Aleksander Awierin, who managed to slow down and saw everything with his own eyes. Stanisław Szozda collided with a fan, who leaned out of the crowd wanting to see how far away the cyclists were. He hit his back against the asphalt and fell into a ditch. Although the fall looked serious he wanted to continue to participate in the race, so he did not simulate, which some accused him of⁴⁶.

After the end of his sports career, which was influenced by the injury during the above-mentioned Peace Race, he took a job – as a mechanic – in the Edward Borysewicz's American group. After returning from USA to Poland he did not become a coach. He dedicated a lot of time to his family: wife Grażyna and two children: Natalia and Radosław⁴⁷. Asked a few years after the end of his career what was the thing that engraved most in his memory of the cycling times was, he replied jokingly: “the front wheel”⁴⁸. He died on September 23, 2013 of stomach cancer. He was buried in the Osobowicki Cemetery in Wrocław, in the Alley of the Meritorious⁴⁹.

To sum up, it must be noted that cycling played a very important role in the life of Stanisław Szozda, primarily it helped him quit smoking and complete his education at Agricultural Secondary School. His talent made him the idol of Polish fans in 1970s, but also a symbol of social advancement of extremely talented youth from rural clubs. After all, he represented clubs under the name of RST (RST Prudnik, RST “Zieloni” Opole and RSC “Ziemia Opolska”). The exception was only the period of military service, when he cycled for “Legia” Warsaw (1971–1972). During his sports career he won several medals at the Polish Championships, but also triumphed in the events of much higher rank, i.e.: Olympic Games (twice 2nd place in the 100-km team race – Munich and Montreal); World Championships (twice 1st place in the 100-km team race – Barcelona and Yvoir); Peace Race (1st place in the individual race in 1974 and twice 1st place in the team race in 1973 and 1974) and Tour de Pologne (1st place in 1971).

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⁴⁷ B. Tuszyński, *Polish Olympians of the 20th century (1924–2002)*..., p. 265.

⁴⁸ “Rzeczpospolita” daily 2013, No. 224, p. A15.

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Stanisław Szozda (1950–2013) – zapomniana legenda polskiego kolarstwa

Streszczenie

Stanisław Szozda urodził się 25 września 1950 r. w Dobromierzu. W trakcie swej kariery sportowej reprezentował barwy następujących klubów: LZS Prudnik, „Legia” Warszawa, LZS „Zieloni” Opole i LKS „Ziemia Opolska”. Największe jego sukcesy to m.in.: dwukrotnie 2. miejsce na Igrzyskach Olimpijskich w Monachium (1972 r.) i Montrealu (1976 r.) w wyścigu drużynowym na 100 km; dwukrotnie 1. miejsce w wyścigu drużynowym na 100 km podczas Mistrzostw Świata w Barcelonie (1973 r.) i Yvoir (1975 r.); 1. miejsce w klasyfikacji indywidualnej w Wyścigu Pokoju w 1974 r. i dwukrotnie 1. miejsce w klasyfikacji drużynowej w Wyścigu Pokoju (1973 i 1974 r.) oraz 1. miejsce w Tour de Pologne (1971 r.). Zmarł 23 września 2013 r. Pochowany został na Cmentarzu Osobowickim we Wrocławiu, w Alei Zasłużonych.

Słowa kluczowe: Stanisław Szozda, kolarstwo, Ludowe Zespoły Sportowe.