

# Chess in Poland

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*POLSKI ZWIĄZEK SZACHOWY*  
*POLISH CHESS FEDERATION*

*1926-2006*

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# Szachy w Polsce

w wiekach XII - XX

Geneza powstania szachów nie jest znana, nieznane jest też imię twórcy tej gry. Prawdopodobnie szachy powstały mniej więcej 1500 lat temu w Indiach, na kanwie gry wojennej, jako prototyp gier symulacyjnych.

Łatwiej można oszacować okres pojawienia się szachów w Polsce. Wykopaliska figurek szachowych pochodzących z X-XIII, które znajdowano w Szczecinie, Międzyrzeczu, Gdańsku i Sandomierzu wskazują na to, że w Polsce grano w szachy już w XII wieku.

Królewska gra stała się popularna w Polsce w XVI wieku, gdy obszar naszego kraju rozciągał się od Bałtyku do morza Czarnego. Grano na zamkach, w klasztorach i na dworach wielkopańskich. W 1564 roku poeta Jan Kochanowski pisze wspaniały poemat „Szachy”, unikatowe dzieło w literaturze szachowej, a w wieku XVII wojewoda poznański Jan Ostroróg wydaje pierwszy polski podręcznik szachowy.

Szachy ćwiczą koncentrację, podzielność uwagi, systematyczność, przytomność umysłu, umiętność podejmowania decyzji i odpowiadania za nie, wyobraźnię, pamięć, zdolność analitycznego myślenia i syntezy rozważań. Uczą maksymalnego skupienia uwagi nad zagadnieniami abstrakcyjnymi i to jest niezwykle przydatne w życiu. Szachy zawsze przyciągały artystów i uczonych, intelektualistów i ludzi czynu, bowiem łączą w sobie elementy gry, sztuki, nauki i sportu. Nasi wybitni pisarze i poeci Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Bolesław Prus i Henryk Sienkiewicz gustowali w grze w szachy.

Królowie Stefan Batory i Jan Sobieski też interesowali się grą, a Marszałek Józef Piłsudski był nie tylko zamiłowanym szachistą, ale też patronował wielu turniejom, fundował cenne nagrody i przyjął funkcję honorowego członka Związku.

Wielu patrzyło na szachy, jak na grę wojenną - wyładowanie instynktu walki, samodzielne kierowanie małą armią, strategiczne rozważania, analityczna

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# Chess in Poland

ages XII to XX

We know neither the origin of chess nor the name of its creator. Chess has probably been born some 1500 years ago in India on the basis of a war game, as a prototype of simulation games.

It is easier to estimate when chess first appeared in Poland. Excavations of chess pieces from ages X-XIII, which were found in Szczecin, Międzyrzecz, Gdańsk and Sandomierz, would suggest that chess was played in Poland already in the XII century.

The royal game became popular in Poland in the XVI century, when our country spread from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. It was played at castles, monasteries and manor houses. In 1564 Jan Kochanowski, a poet, created his awesome poem called "Chess", which is by all means unique in the chess literature, while in the XVII century a first chess book is published by Jan Ostróg, governor of Poznań.

Chess is a great exercise of focus, multi-tasking, regularity, mind-alertness, decision-making and taking responsibilities, imagination, memory, logical thinking ability and synthesizing. It teaches to stay totally focused on abstract issues, which is extremely useful in real life. Chess always attracted artists and scientists, thinkers and men of action, because they combine elements of game, art, science and sport. It is no doubt that our outstanding writers and poets, such as Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Bolesław Prus and Henryk Sienkiewicz were fond of chess.

Kings Stefan Batory and Jan Sobieski were also interested in the game, while Marshal Józef Piłsudski was not only a keen chess player, but he also was a patron of many chess competitions, funded precious prizes and accepted a dignity of honorary member of the Association.

Many people considered chess to be a war game - a way to vent one's combat instinct, to lead a small army by oneself, to ponder strategically, to assess positions

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and enemy's traits analytically in key moments of the combat. The enormous number of combinations is delightful, especially taking into account the weight of single moves, which can be decisive in a great variety of positions, lost or winning. For a war strategy it is also significant to keep faith until the very last moment to overturn the outcome of the combat, the problem of carelessness or treating one's opponent lightly in positions with supposedly predetermined outcome.

In the land of Poland, current and historical, in the XIX and XX centuries, many outstanding chess players were born, among them: S. Rosenthal, Sz. Winawer, G. Salwe, D. Janowski, J. Zukertort, A. Rubinstein, D. Przepiórka, A. Flambert, J. Perlis, G. Rotlewski, Em. Lasker, S. Reshevsky, M. Najdorf, S. Flohr i Abe Yanofsky, which was noted by the creator of the FIDE ranking, professor Arpad Elo, in his book.

The first chess clubs were organized in Warsaw and Poznan in the thirties and forties of the XIX century. A correspondence match was held between Berlin and Poznan in 1839, while a similar correspondence match between Warsaw and Moscow was held in years 1879-1882. The Cracow Club of Chess Players was established in 1893 in Cracow and.

The history of Polish chess is opened by an awesome accomplishment of the Warsaw chess players Szymon Winawer, who finished second in the International chess tournament in Paris in 1867, behind Kolisch but before the future official world champion Wilhelm Steinitz.

In that times a couple of extraordinary Polish chess players, especially Akiba Rubinstein and Dawid Janowski, wandered around Europe with significant successes among the world's elite. Dawid Janowski even played a world championship match in Paris in 1909 against Emanuel Lasker, but he was defeated 2-8.

The most prominent Polish chess player Akiba Rubinstein was truly passionate about the royal game: "300 days a year I work on chess for 6 hours a day, 60 days I spend in chess tournaments and I rest for 5 days." He won, together with Lasker, a great tournament in St. Petersburg in 1909, and in 1912 he won the first prize five times, in to-



urnaments of San Sebastian, Piszczany, Wrocław (together with Duras), Warsaw and Vilnius, finishing ahead of a complete line-up of the world's strongest players.

He became the first candidate for the world championship title and his match against world champion Emanuel Lasker was awaited. The world champion talked in superlatives about his opponent, but at the same time he prolonged the negotiations. After two years it was finally agreed that a match of 20 games would be played in different cities of Europe and would start in September, 1914. Unfortunately, the I World War started and after the war conditions changed drastically. There were no more rich sponsors, while financial dire straits and daily worries left permanent scars in the mind of Rubinstein. His iron health and exceptional psychological endurance started to fall him. At this time Rubinstein decided to make a very memorable, fair and noble move. He cancelled the challenge of 1912 against La-

sker and he released Lasker from the promise to play a match for the world championship. In a letter to the world champion he mentioned that Capablanca would deserve more to fight for the chess crown. Rubinstein's prophetic words very quickly proved to be true. In 1921 Capablanca defeated Lasker and became the world champion!

Max Euwe, the world champion between 1935-1937 and FIDE president between 1970-1978, included Rubinstein among the classics of the royal game: "When I was a young boy, Rubinstein was my role model. Rubinstein was so much more than just a gifted and strong chess player. He was one of the most talented architects, building the chess temple. His research in the field of chess was significantly deeper than in case of his predecessors. His thesis were binding also for his successors. Rubinstein is a father of modern positional play. Without Rubinstein there would be no Flohr, Euwe, Smyslov..."

Even though there were many chess clubs and associations in the beginning of the XX century, Poland was divided into annexed territories, which rendered it impossible to establish one organization, representing interests of chess players throughout entire Poland.



## *Establishment of the Polish Chess Federation Warsaw, 11th April 1926*



*Kazimierz Makarczyk i Dawid Przepiórka  
Sują - standing: Orlański, Żabiński, Regedziński, Appel, Kończyński, Pittz*

Poland regained independence in 1918 and chess life revived, initially in cafes and subsequently in clubs.

In 1924 two regional organizations came to life: Związek Towarzystw Szachowych (Association of Chess Societies) in Poznań and Polski Związek Szachowy Województwa Śląskiego (Polish Chess Association of the Silesian Region).

Poland's representatives went in 1924 to Paris to participate in the chess Olympiad, which took place along the VIII Olympic Games. Only amateurs were allowed to participate.

Polish Chess Federation has been established on April 11, 1926, during a meeting of delegates from clubs, societies and regional chess associations from Warsaw, Łódź, Cracow, Poznań, Upper Silesia, Lviv, Vilnius, Białystok, Gdańsk and some other cities, who represented about 1600 registered chess players. The meeting took place in the headquarter of the Warszawskie

Towarzystwo Zwolenników Gry Szachowej in Warsaw.

Józef Żabiński became the first President of PCF, with Dawid Przepiórka as vice-president and Bogdan Domosławski as secretary general. The accepted statute provisioned that PZSzach was to organize chess life in Poland and to represent the Polish chess players in the International Chess Federation. But officially it was not until 1927 that PCF became FIDE member.

### *Championships of Poland*

On the very next day after PCF was established, the first championship of Poland was held (Warsaw, April 12-30, 1926). Dawid Przepiórka came first with 13 points (out of 17), ahead of Paulin Frydman 12 and Stanisław Kołm 11.5.

Polish championships were always the highest priority events for PCF. Participants of the finals

were invited from among the best players in Poland, nominated by a sports captain or selected in the semi-finals, which were held already on the brink of 1925/26 and starting from 1947 they have been held every year.

All top Polish players took part in the next Championship held in Łódź in 1927. Akiba Rubinstein remained himself the best youth years and won scoring 11.5 points (out of 14), ahead of Ksawery Tartakower 10.5, Kazimierz Makarczyk 9 and Teodor Regedziński 8.5.

The 3rd Championship was held in Warsaw in 1935 and was at the same time the preliminary tournament before the 1935 Chess Olympiad in Warsaw. Ksawery Tartakower was the winner 12 points (out of 16), ahead Mieczysław Najdorf and Paulin Frydman 11. Tartakower came also 1st in the Championship in Jurata in 1937 scoring 17 points (out of 21), ahead Gideon Stahlberg (Sweden) 16 and Mieczysław Najdorf 15. It was the only Polish championship with foreign participants.

The II World War in 1939 and German occupation in 1939-1945 caused a break in the Polish championships, which lasted for a few years.

It was resumed in 1946 and has been continued until today. The 63rd championship of Poland was held in Cracow in 2006.



*Ksawery Tartakower*

*Izaak Towlin, representative of the Warszawskie Towarzystwo Zwolenników Gry Szachowej (Warsaw Society of Chess Fans) was also present in Paris. He was one of the 15 signatories of the incorporation document of the International Chess Federation (Fédération Internationale des Echecs), signed on July 20, 1924.*