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Achievements of Poland's national team in the European Women's Basketball Championships in the years 1938–2021

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Osiągnięcia reprezentacji Polski w Mistrzostwach Europy w Koszykówce Kobiet w latach 1938–2021

Streszczenie

Początki koszykówki na świecie datuje się na 1891 r., kiedy Kanadyjczyk James Naismith wymyślił grę dla studentów ze Springfield. Po niedługim czasie rozegrano mecze na kontynencie europejskim – w Paryżu (1893 r.) i w Londynie (1894 r.). W Polsce pierwszy mecz pokazowy rozegrały kobiety – w 1909 r. we Lwowie. Upowszechnienie dyscypliny w Europie nastąpiło po I wojnie światowej. W latach 20. XX w. powstały organizacje państwowe i międzynarodowe, które ujednoliciły przepisy gry. Umożliwiło to rozegranie pierwszych mistrzostw krajowych, a następnie organizację meczów międzypaństwowych. W 1935 r. odbyły się I Mistrzostwa Europy w koszykówce mężczyzn, a trzy lata później w zawodach tej rangi zadebiutowały kobiety. W latach 1938–2021 odbyło się trzydzieści osiem edycji mistrzostw, w których reprezentacja Polski uczestniczyła dwudziestodwukrotnie. Najczęściej medale zdobywały zawodniczki ze Związku Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich (ZSRR), Czechosłowacji, Francji, Bułgarii i Hiszpanii. Największym osiągnięciem Polski

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był złoty medal wywalczony w Katowicach w 1999 r. Ponadto Polki zdobyły dwa medale srebrne (1980 r., 1981 r.) oraz dwa medale brązowe (1938 r., 1968 r.).

Słowa kluczowe: Mistrzostwa Europy, koszykówka, sport kobiet.

Abstract

The beginning of basketball in the world dates back to 1891 when a Canadian, James Naismith, invented the game for students in Springfield. After a short time, matches were played in Europe, in Paris (1893) and London (1894). The first demonstrational game in Poland was played by women in 1909, in Lviv. The discipline spread throughout Europe after World War I. In the 1920s, some state and international organizations were established to standardize the rules of the game. They allowed to play the first national championships and afterwards to organize interstate matches. In 1935, the First European Men's Basketball Championship was organized, and three years later, women made their debut in the competition of this rank. Between 1938 and 2021, there were thirty-eight editions of the championships, in which the Polish national team participated twenty-nine times. Most medals were won by athletes from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Czechoslovakia, France, Bulgaria, and Spain. Poland's most outstanding achievement was the gold medal won in Katowice in 1999. What is more, Polish women won two silver medals (1980, 1981) and two bronze medals (1938, 1968).

Keywords: European Championship, basketball, women's sport.

Introduction

Numerous historians of physical culture have studied the subject of team games in Poland. Among the researchers who have been involved in exploring this area with regard to basketball are Kajetan Hądzelek, Edward Janik, Paweł Lenik, Krzysztof Łaszkiwicz, Czesław Michalski, Janusz Płaczek, Artur and Roman Pyjos, Maria Rotkiewicz, Michał Skalik, and Ryszard Wryk.¹ Their work resulted in national and regional publications. The literature listed does not limit the possibilities for further academic research on basketball. This publication attempts to present the European Championship's history from the standpoint of medal-winning matches of the Polish women's national team, shown against the

¹ Among others: E. Janik, *Rozwój koszykówki w Polsce w latach 1945–1973* (doctoral dissertation), AWF Poznań 1971; P. Lenik, *Koszykówka w Polsce w latach 1973–2004* (doctoral dissertation), ZWKF Gorzów Wlkp. 2008; K. Łaszkiwicz, *Polska koszykówka męska 1928–2004*, Wydawnictwo Pozkał, Inowrocław 2004; C. Michalski, *Akademicki Związek Sportowy w Krakowie 1945–2009*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2012; J. Płaczek, *Rozwój koszykówki w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym* (doctoral dissertation), AWF Poznań 1989; A. Pyjos, R. Pyjos, *Pod wiślackim koszem kobiet i mężczyzn 1928–2006*, Wydawnictwo GiT, Kraków 2006; M. Rotkiewicz, *AZS-AWF Warszawa 1949–2009*, Wydawnictwo Estrella, Warszawa 2014; M. Skalik, *Zespołowe gry sportowe kobiet w Polsce w latach 1945–1989*, UJD, Częstochowa 2020; R. Wryk, *90 lat Akademickiego Związku Sportowego w Poznaniu*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2009.

background of other teams' achievements participating in tournaments of this rank. The study includes all previous editions of the championship (38). This work presented this way, apart from its central aspect, i.e. the analysis of the Polish national team's contribution, is a compendium of the results of the European Championships between 1938 and 2021.

Research methods and problems

The following research methods were adopted in developing the publication: synthesis, analysis of historical sources, induction, deduction, and a comparative approach. The following research problems have arisen:

- What was the course of the European Championships tournaments in which Poland won medal positions?
- Which players and coaches have contributed the most to the national team's success?
- What results did the Polish national team achieve in the European championships between 1938 and 2021?
- How did the results of the Polish national team relate to the level and achievements of the other participants in the European Women's Championship between 1938 and 2021?

Results and discussion

Women's participation in sports before World War I was relatively moderate. Women did not participate in the first Olympic Games of the modern era organised in Athens, in 1896. Women's participation in the 1900–1912 Games was also prudent (about 2% of the total number of competitors).² Women made some successful efforts to gain the right to play sports in the 1920s. Emphasizing women's quest for equality in sports was the First International Women's Sports Congress held in Paris in 1921. The International Women's Sports Federation was established to organize the Women's World Games, held from 1922 to 1934.³ During this time, national organizations were also formed to cover team sports games. The establishment of the Polish Sports Games Association in 1928 enabled the first Polish women's basketball championship to be held in 1929. A year later, in the first historical interstate match, the Polish women defeated

² M. Skalik, *Zespołowe gry sportowe...*, p. 11.

³ T. Drozdek-Mafolepszka, *Women's World Games*, "Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Kultura Fizyczna" 2014, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 59–60.

the Swedish team in Kraków.⁴ In the 1930s, academic sports were an important factor in activating women to play basketball. Polish women's basketball players made a strong mark in this aspect, triumphing twice in the Academic World Championships, in Budapest (1935) and Paris (1937).⁵ Given the growing popularity of women's basketball, the International Basketball Federation (established in 1932) decided to organize the First European Women's Championship (EWC) in 1938, which took place three years after the men's inauguration in the competition of this rank.

Medal performances of the women's national team in EWC 1938–2021

1st EWC, Rome (Italy), 12–16 October 1938

Poland (bronze medal): Irena Brzustowska, Halina Bruszkiewicz, Zofia Filip, Jadwiga Głazewska, Helena Gruszczyńska, Edyta Holfeier-Kozłowska, Irena Jaśnikowska, Irena Jaźnicka-Kamecka, Zdzisława Wiszniewska, Helena Wojnarowska i Zofia Wojewódzka-Wardyńska. Coach: Mieczysław Piotrowski.

The Polish team arrived in Rome on 10 October 1938 by rail. Teams from France, Lithuania, Poland, Switzerland, and Italy participated in the tournament. The matches were played on an open court in the evening (in artificial lighting). The Polish basketball players faced the hosts in the first game, the Italians, yielding 19 : 27 after a fierce duel. As it turned out later, this match deprived Poland of a chance for the gold medal of the championships. In the games to come, Poland defeated Switzerland (34 : 6), France (24 : 19), and Lithuania (24 : 21). In the final classification, three teams had the same number of victories, but the ratio of small points was the most unfavorable for the Polish team. At the end of the day, Poland won the bronze medal. Players standing out in the team were: Irena Brzustowska, Halina Bruszkiewicz, Zdzisława Wiszniewska, and Helena Gruszczyńska, whose accurate throws at the end of the match led to the victory with Lithuania. The Italian won the championship.⁶

11th EWC, Messina (Italy), 5–15 July 1968

Poland (bronze medal): Mirosława Budyń, Aniela Kaczmarow, Jadwiga Korbaśńska, Krystyna Likso, Maria Łuczyńska, Halina Maliszewska, Renata Pier-

⁴ "Przegląd Sportowy" 1930, issue 58, p. 3; "Stadjon" 1930, issue 27, p. 10.

⁵ M. Skalik, *Zespołowe gry sportowe...*, p. 30.

⁶ "Przegląd Sportowy" 1938, issue 83, p. 1; "Przegląd Sportowy" 1938, issue 84, p. 4; *75 lat łódzkiej koszykówki 1925–2000*, Wydawnictwo Wograf, Łódź 2000, p. 13; <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

nitzka, Elżbieta Ptasińska, Barbara Rogowska, Irena Sokuł, Ludwika Szymańska, Janina Wojtal. Coach: Andrzej Pstrokoński.

Polish women went to Sicily under the supervision of their coach, Andrzej Pstrokoński. Poland was placed in a group with European vice-champions, Czechoslovakia, and strong Romanian and Bulgarian teams. Two teams qualified for the final pool. The Poles started the competition from the match against Czechoslovakia, in which Krystyna Likszo, Barbara Rogowska, and Janina Wojtal imposed their style of play from the very first minutes. The Polish players went off for a break with an 11-point lead. In the second part, they managed to keep the rivals at a safe distance, mainly thanks to the throwing fitness of Irena Sokuł. Poland defeated Czechoslovakia 72 : 58, which was entirely unexpected. A day later, the Polish women fought a vital battle with Romania. Until the thirtieth minute, the score oscillated around a draw, then came a series of successful actions by Irena Sokuł, and the Poles confidently won 55 : 44. Despite two crucial wins, the fate of advancing to the finals was not decided. Czechoslovakia won against Bulgaria, which meant that the ranking table was to be determined by the matches played on the third day of the championships. In the last group game, Polish women lost to Bulgaria (47 : 56), which caused three teams to have the same number of wins. Poland had the most favorable balance of points and qualified to the final round together with Bulgaria.

Six best teams from heat rounds and the tournament hosts – the Italians – played in the finals. Poland started with a defeat against Yugoslavia (47 : 59) and a clear win against Belgium (61 : 30). The following two games, against East Germany and Italy, were very close, but the ends belonged to the Poles (58 : 50 and 38 : 37). On the tenth day of the championships, Poland and Bulgaria played a decisive match for the bronze medal. This time the highest level was presented by Janina Wojtal, who played one of the best games in her career (24 points). The Poles quickly gained a high advantage. The Bulgarian players were making up for the loss but determined Poles (Renata Szeib gave valuable substitutions) kept the promising result (64 : 57) on their last legs. Poland had lost the previous game, which did not affect the arrangement in the table, to the unreachable basketball players of the USSR (55 : 92), who by clearly winning all the games gained the title of the best team in Europe for the ninth time.⁷

17th EWC, Banja Luka (Yugoslavia), 19–28 September 1980

Poland (silver medal): Barbara Gertchen, Ludmiła Janowska, Małgorzata Gliszczyńska, Halina Iwaniec, Aleksandra Komacka, Teresa Komorowska, Irena Linka, Mariola Marzec, Wiesława Piotrkiewicz, Grażyna Seweryn, Bożena Sędzicka, Małgorzata Turska. Coach: Ludwik Miętta.

⁷ "Dziennik Polski" 1968, issue 162, p. 2; "Dziennik Polski" 1968, issue 165, p. 2; "Dziennik Polski" 1968, issue 168, p. 2; <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021]; Interview with Krystyna Likszo.

In the first phase of the tournament, twelve teams competed in three groups. The two best teams qualified for the quarterfinals (participation was guaranteed to the hosts, Yugoslavia, and the then European champions, the USSR). Poland ended up in Group A, which, apart from weak England, featured two strong teams, i.e. Hungary and Italy. In the inaugural match, Poland distinctly won with England (80 : 56), and coaches Ludwik Miętta and Zbigniew Fel-ski could introduce all the basketball players to the game. In the second meeting, the Italians, who put all the eggs in one basket (they lost in the first match with the Hungarians), approached the duel with great determination. The Italians dominated the first half and won this part by seven points. In the second half, after the accurate throws by Irena Linki, the Polish players came out on top, and they kept that position until the end (69 : 63), thanks to the successful actions by Bożena Sędzicka. In the last group match, the Poles, with their promotion already guaranteed, gave way to the Hungarians (68 : 88).

They played the first match of the next phase against strong Bulgaria. A superb performance of the Bożena Sędzicka – Ludmiła Janowska duo allowed to defeat the Olympic vice-champions (69 : 59). Observers unanimously agreed that it was one of the best Polish matches ever. The Polish women faced the favored Yugoslavian women in the semifinals thanks to this win. The central tactical assumption was to make the game difficult for the most effective opponent – Djurkovic, and Ludwik Miętta entrusted this task to Ludmiła Janowska. Despite the hot atmosphere in the arena, the Poles went for the break with a one-point lead. At the beginning of the second half, Bożena Sędzicka left the floor for five offenses, but the loss was fully compensated by a fantastic game of Teresa Komorowska (27 points). With two minutes to go, the scoreboard showed a tie. The uproar of the Yugoslavian fans did not bemuse Teresa Komorowska, who scored 6 points consecutively and sealed the enormous success in the history of Polish basketball at that time (79 : 72). After the final whistle, all Polish players, including the substitutes, threw themselves at our captain, Halina Iwaniec, and the Yugoslavian were going to the locker room crying.

In the final match, the Poles once again lost to the USSR (49 : 95). A notable distinction was given to Ludmiła Janowska, whom the coaches nominated to the “Stars of Europe” team.⁸

18th EWC, Ancona (Italy), 13–20 September 1981

Poland (silver medal): Małgorzata Gliszczyńska, Halina Iwaniec, Ludmiła Janowska, Teresa Komorowska, Halina Kosińska, Irena Linka, Mariola Marzec, Wiesława Piotrkiewicz, Grażyna Seweryn, Bożena Sędzicka, Marta Starowicz, Małgorzata Turska. Coach: Ludwik Miętta.

⁸ “Przegląd Sportowy” 1980, issue 184–190; “Dziennik Polski” 1980, issue 210, p. 8; <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

Polish opponents in the group stage of the 18th EWC were Germany, Yugoslavia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Italy. The draw was considered very favorable as Group B featured strong teams from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. For Poland, the tournament began with a sensational defeat against Germany (67 : 71). In the second game, Polish women faced the strongest team of the group – Yugoslavia. The match was extremely even. The Poles showed team defense that resulted in their winning (59 : 56). The most significant part in the victory was held by Bożena Sędzicka (83 percent accuracy of shots from the game) and Halina Iwaniec, who led the game. In the following matches the Polish players showed some excellent performance, namely – they defeated Finland (82 : 65), the Netherlands (76 : 35), and Italy (77 : 55). Mariola Pawlak deserved special praise in these three meetings. These results gave the Poles the first place in group A, which meant a semifinal match with Czechoslovakia. This meeting had a double value because the winning team was guaranteed a trip to the World Championships in Brazil in 1983. Małgorzata Kozera and Irena Linka started the match well and easily beat their opponents. Halina Iwaniec, who conducted the game skillfully, did not fail, and the Polish players reached a five-point advantage by the break. The first minutes of the second part, when Bożena Sędzicka and Mariola Pawlak threw accurately, turned out to be crucial for the outcome of the match. The Poles reached a 12-point lead, which they did not give up until the end of the game (72 : 60). After the final whistle, the players tossed their coach Ludwik Miętta up in the air, rejoicing over the defense of the runner-up title. There was still a final match, but the USSR's basketball players were beyond the reach of other teams, beating them by an average margin of thirty-eight points.⁹

27th EWC, Katowice, Poznań, Pruszków, 28 May – 6 June 1999

Poland (gold medal): Beata Binkowska, Dorota Bukowska, Joanna Cupryś, Patrycja Czepiec, Katarzyna Dulnik, Katarzyna Dydek, Małgorzata Dydek, Agnieszka Jaroszewicz, Ilona Mądra, Krystyna Szymańska-Lara, Elżbieta Trześniewska, Sylwia Wlazlak. Coach: Tomasz Herkt.

EWC in Poland was at the same time an Olympic qualifying round – the four best teams qualified for Sydney. The Polish national team included several outstanding players at the peak of their sporting form. The leader was Małgorzata Dydek, who gained experience playing for four seasons in European leagues (France, Spain) and on the floors of the WNBA. The first playmaker was Sylwia Wlazlak, who knew how to lead the team. Krystyna Lara and Elżbieta Trześniew-

⁹ "Przegląd Sportowy" 1981, issue 177–182; "Dziennik Polski" 1981, issue 187, p. 6; L. Miętta-Mikołajewicz, *Widziane z ławki trenerskiej*, Wydawnictwo MC Media, Warszawa 2021, p. 19; <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

ska scored points. The starting lineup was completed by high winger Joanna Cupryś, who had played in the French league after her studies in the USA. Poland started the competition in Group B, including teams from Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four teams qualified for the quarterfinals. In the first meeting, the Poles faced the European champions of that time, the Lithuanians, and after a fierce battle lost 72 : 79. The team led by Tomasz Herkt had to rebuild in the meeting with Yugoslavia. Until the break, the match was tight, but in the second half it was the Polish team who took the initiative and triumphed 81 : 74. In the third duel against the Czech Republic, Małgorzata Dydek left the court for misconduct in the twenty-fifth minute. The Polish team couldn't win without its leader (75 : 78), and the players found themselves in challenging circumstances, having one win in three games. The fourth game, against Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the easiest of the tournament (75 : 53). The last group match was crucial. A potential win against Italy gave Poland the second position in the group, which meant avoiding confrontation with solid teams of Russia and France in the quarterfinals. A defeat could have pushed us down to the fifth place, signifying the end of dreams for the Sydney Olympics. The Italian players, fighting for identical goals, led until the fifteenth minute, but Poland recovered before the break. In the second half, the advantage of our midfielders, Elżbieta Trzeźniewska and Małgorzata Dydek, came to light. Their play and counters by Krystyna Lara allowed the Poles to distance themselves safely and win nervelessly 80 : 71.

The decisive matches of the championships took place in "Spodek," Katowice. The quarterfinal battles were of great importance as the winning teams received Olympic qualifications. Poland faced a robust Croatian team, which managed to defeat Slovakia, the vice-champions of Europe, in a group match. From the beginning the match went in favour of Poland that led by eight points at halftime and then increased the advantage. The final score of 72 : 51 meant a historic promotion to the Olympic Games and further struggle for the championship medal.

The Polish basketball players approached the semifinal against Russia in good moods. No one expected them to beat the world vice-champions, and their lack of pressure allowed them to pull off a big surprise. The Russians, who have five Olympic champions from Barcelona on their roster, started with a 16:6 lead. Tomasz Herkt rotated the lineup and finally "hit" with Beata Binkowska. Her dynamic drivers to the basket caused the Polish players to stroke a tie just before the break at 29 : 29. In the second half, Krystyna Lara's time came. Wisła Kraków playmaker started to hit in the tantamount moment, leading Poland to a 57 : 47 score. The ambitious Russians made up for the loss, but a series of three hits by Joanna Cupryś and a good performance of tall Dydek-Trzeźniewska duo made the Poles win 66 : 61 and advance to the final of the tournament.

In the finals, the Polish team's opponents were the French, who had out-classed Slovakia the day before. Sylwia Właźlak and Krystyna Lara started the match very bravely, and the score was 12 : 2 after five minutes. The French players were making up for losses diligently, and to cap it all off, Małgorzata Dydek had four fouls before the break. Despite their poorer performance, the Poles went to the locker room with a minimal lead. In the thirtieth minute, Małgorzata Dydek fell on the floor, and medical intervention was needed. The score oscillated around a tie, with the Polish women's leader still sitting among the reserves with a head wrap. Finally, the priceless pivot player rose from her chair, and... at the same time, a few thousand spectators in Katowice "Spodek" stood up to motivate her to play. Małgorzata paid back for this beautiful gesture with three successful actions in attack, and two minutes before the end of the game, the Poles were leading by 58 : 50. The French players did not give up and stood pressing all over the court, which allowed them to reduce the loss to one basket (58 : 56). Krystyna Lara had the critical action at the end of the game, when she was fouled while driving to the basket. Although the desperate French players gave a missed shot from a distance, the Pole used one free throw and set the game score at 59 : 56. The European Championships gold medal – the most considerable success in the history of Polish basketball became a fact!¹⁰.

¹⁰ "Tempo" 1999, issue 103–108; "Przegląd Sportowy" 2000, issue 10, p. 1–2; M. Cegliński, *Złote Dziewczyny*, Wydawnictwo MC Media, Pruszków 2019; <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

Table 1. Classification of the EWC 1938–1991 (cont.)

European Women's Championships 1938–1991	1938 (1 – Italy)	1950 (2 – Hungary)	1952 (3 – USSR)	1954 (4 – Yugoslavia)	1956 (5 – Czechoslov.)	1958 (6 – Poland)	1960 (7 – Bulgaria)	1962 (8 – France)	1964 (9 – Hungary)	1966 (10 – Romania)	1968 (11 – Italy)	1970 (12 – Netherl.)	1972 (13 – Bulgaria)	1974 (14 – Italy)	1976 (15 – France)	1978 (16 – Poland)	1980 (17 – Yugoslav.)	1981 (18 – Italy)	1983 (19 – Hungary)	1985 (20 – Italy)	1987 (21 – Spain)	1989 (22 – Bulgaria)	1991 (23 – Israel)	NUMBER OF MEDALS
SWEDEN	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	13	–	11	10	–	7	–	–	–
FINLAND	–	–	11	–	11	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	10	12	–	–	12	–	–	–
DENMARK	–	–	–	10	13	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	13	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
SCOTLAND	–	–	–	–	16	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
ISRAEL	–	11	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	8	–
ENGLAND	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	12	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Based on the website: <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

Table 2. Classification of the EWC 1993–2021

European Women's Championships 1993–2021	1993 (24 – Italy)	1995 (25 – Czech Rep.)	1997 (26 – Hungary)	1999 (27 – Poland)	2001 (28 – France)	2003 (29 – Greece)	2005 (30 – Turkey)	2007 (31 – Italy)	2009 (32 – Latvia)	2011 (33 – Poland)	2013 (34 – France)	2015 (35 – Hun./Rom.)	2017 (36 – Czech Rep.)	2019 (37 – Latv./Serb.)	2021 (38 – Fran./Spain)	NUMBER OF MEDALS
SPAIN	1	–	5	–	3	3	3	2	3	9	1	3	1	1	7	10
FRANCE	2	–	–	2	1	5	5	8	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	10
RUSSIA	7	3	6	3	2	1	2	1	2	1	13	6	9	8	6	8
SERBIA	–	–	–	–	–	–	9	11	13	–	4	1	11	3	1	3
CZECH REPUBLIC	–	7	9	5	9	2	1	5	9	4	6	11	13	15	15	2
SŁOVAKIA	3	4	2	4	8	7	–	–	8	13	11	9	8	–	13	2
TURKEY	–	–	–	–	–	–	8	9	9	2	3	5	5	14	14	2
BELGIUM	–	–	–	–	–	6	–	7	–	–	–	–	3	5	3	2
POLAND	5	–	–	1	6	4	7	–	11	11	–	18	–	–	–	1
UKRAINE	–	1	10	–	11	11	–	–	13	–	13	16	10	16	–	1
LITHUANIA	–	5	1	6	4	–	4	6	11	7	13	8	–	–	–	1
ITALY	4	2	11	11	–	–	–	9	6	–	8	15	7	9	9	1
BELARUS	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	4	9	5	4	15	13	4	1
GERMANY	–	–	3	12	–	–	11	11	–	13	–	–	–	–	–	1
LATVIA	–	–	–	9	–	–	6	4	7	8	13	13	6	11	–	–
GREECE	–	–	–	–	10	9	10	13	5	13	–	10	4	–	16	–

Table 2. Classification of the EWC 1993–2021 (cont.)

European Women's Championships 1993–2021	1993 (24 – Italy)	1995 (25 – Czech Rep.)	1997 (26 – Hungary)	1999 (27 – Poland)	2001 (28 – France)	2003 (29 – Greece)	2005 (30 – Turkey)	2007 (31 – Italy)	2009 (32 – Latvia)	2011 (33 – Poland)	2013 (34 – France)	2015 (35 – Hun./Rom.)	2017 (36 – Czech Rep.)	2019 (37 – Latv./Serb.)	2021 (38 – Fran./Spain)	NUMBER OF MEDALS
HUNGARY	8	–	4	–	7	10	–	–	13	–	–	17	12	7	–	–
MONTENEGRO	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	9	7	16	12	12	–
GREAT BRITAIN	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	11	9	20	–	4	–	–
SWEDEN	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7	14	–	6	8	–
SLOVENIA	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	14	10	10	–
CROATIA	–	8	–	8	–	–	–	13	–	5	11	12	–	–	11	–
YUGOSLAVIA	–	–	8	7	5	8	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
BOSNIA AND H.	–	–	12	10	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	–
ROMANIA	–	–	–	–	12	–	12	13	–	–	–	19	–	–	–	–
ISRAEL	–	–	–	–	–	12	–	11	13	13	–	–	–	–	–	–
MOLDOVA	–	6	7	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
BULGARIA	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Based on the website: <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

Table 3. Medal classification of the EWC 1938–2021

Medal Classification European Women's Championships 1938–2021	PARTICIPATION	NUMBER OF MEDALS	GOLD MEDALS	SILVER MEDALS	BROWN MEDALS
USSR	22	22	21	1	—
CZECHOSLOVAKIA	22	15	—	7	8
FRANCE	31	11	2	8	1
SPAIN	20	10	4	1	5
BULGARIA	21	10	1	5	4
RUSSIA	15	8	3	3	2
HUNGARY	22	7	—	2	5
YUGOSLAVIA	20	6	—	4	2
POLAND	29	5	1	2	2
SERBIA	8	3	2	—	1
ITALY	32	3	1	1	1
CZECH REPUBLIC	14	2	1	1	—
SLOVAKIA	12	2	—	1	1
TURKEY	9	2	—	1	1
BELGIUM	13	2	—	—	2
LITHUANIA	11	2	1	1	—
UKRAINE	9	1	1	—	—
GERMANY (E.)	6	1	—	—	1
BELARUS	8	1	—	—	1
GERMANY	5	1	—	—	1

Based on the website: <https://archive.fiba.com> [access: 9.11.2021].

Conclusion

Summarizing the Polish national team achievements and the results of other teams in EWC, we should distinguish a period whose border was marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The number of twenty-one gold medals in twenty-two European championship appearances between 1950 and 1991 proves the phenomenon of Soviet basketball. Supreme performances at that time were associated with basketball players of Czechoslovakia (15 medals) and Bulgaria (10 medals including gold in 1958). Until 1991 also Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and East Germany presented a high level (18 medals altogether). In comparison to the abovementioned teams Western countries performed poorly and only the results of Italy and France deserved attention (a total of 3 medals). The other participants in the championships until 1991, i.e. the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, West Germany, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Israel, Scotland, and England, finished the tournaments at distant places.

Analyzing the Polish team's performances, it should be noted that starting in 1950, the national team took places 4–6, in eight consecutive tournaments (until 1964). The Polish team's performance should be considered exemplary in this period, but not enough to win a championship medal. The women's basketball team lost the battle for the podium, finishing after the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The breakthrough was the performance of the Poles during the championships in Yugoslavia in 1968. In this tournament, Poland won the bronze medal, beating the teams of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in direct matches. Credit should be given to the great experience of the team's primary players led by coach Andrzej Pstrokoński. For Krystyna Likszo, the team leader, the 1968 tournament was the sixth event of this rank. Nevertheless, other players who defined the team's strength were Aniela Kaczmarow, Irena Sokuł, and Janina Wojtal. In the first half of the 1970s, Poland's position in European women's basketball weakened. Meanwhile, significant progress was made by the representations of Western European countries, mainly France and Italy. Polish women began achieving better results in the second half of the 1970s when coach Zygmunt Olesiewicz led the team. In 1976, Poland came close to gaining Olympic qualification after a good performance at the tournament in Canada. Poland lacked a better (by one point) balance of "small" points to be promoted. Poland's greatest successes until 1991 fell at the beginning of the 1980s when the team won silver medals at championships in Yugoslavia (1980) and Italy (1981). The success of the team led by Ludwik Miętta was supported by the play of experienced playmakers, Halina Iwaniec and Ludmila Janowska, and basketball players of the younger generation (born 1958–1961), who in 1975–1977 won the silver medals of the European Junior Championships: Barbara Gertchen, Małgorzata Gliszczyńska, Teresa Komorowska, Irena Linki, Ma-

riola Pawlak, Grażyna Seweryn and Bożena Sędzicka. A good performance during the European Championships in 1981 allowed Poland to participate in the World Championships in Brazil in 1983 where the Polish women reached the seventh place. Beginning in 1983, there was a decline in the sporting level of the national team. In 1987, Poland finished tenth in the European Championships in Bulgaria. It was the weakest performance of the Polish women in the history of participation in the tournaments of this rank. Two years later, Poland failed to qualify for the main tournament, losing to the Netherlands, Israel, and Sweden in the preliminaries (Table 1).

In the 1990s, Europe saw significant geopolitical changes. The USSR broke up into fifteen states, the most notable of which, in the context of women's basketball, were: Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine. Starting in 1993, the European champions in three consecutive editions were: Spain, Ukraine, and Lithuania, and in addition, the championship podium was occupied by: France, Germany, Russia, Slovakia, and Italy. Such results meant the alignment of Eastern and Western European forces. Yugoslavia and Hungary had weaker performances, and Bulgaria did not appear in the EWC after 1993.

The historic tournament for Poland was the 27th European Championship, which took place in 1999 in Poland (Katowice, Poznań, Pruszków). After unsuccessful qualification rounds and absence from the championships in 1995 and 1997, the Polish women performed superbly in front of their home crowd, winning gold medals and gaining promotion to the Olympic Games for the first time. Very strong starting five of the team led by Tomasz Herkt (Małgorzata Dydek, Joanna Cupryś, Krystyna Lara, Elżbieta Trzeźniewska, Sylwia Wlazlak) were complemented by valuable substitutes. Compared to the 1999 championships, Poland demonstrated average performances (places 4–7) in three consecutive editions of the European Championships (2001, 2003, 2005), followed by a marked decline in the sports level of the national team. Between 2007 and 2021, there were eight editions of the championships, in which the Polish women appeared only three times, settling on places outside the top ten.

In the first decade of the 21st century, only five teams won the European Championship medals (five editions): Belarus, the Czech Republic, France, Spain, and Russia. Starting from 2011, the top European teams were joined by Belgium, Serbia, and Turkey (medal performances), while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Greece, Latvia, Sweden, and Great Britain also performed well (places 4–6). What was puzzling was a weaker performance of Italy, which, unlike France and Spain, failed to keep its high level (it ranked 6–15 between 1997 and 2021). Noteworthy is the excellent disposition of Serbia, which continued its basketball tradition after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Serbia won gold medals at the 2015 and 2021 European Championships (Table 2).

In the thirty-eight European Championship tournaments held between 1938 and 2021, twenty countries won medals, eleven of which stood on the podium's top step. Considering the number of participations in the tournaments, it should be concluded that the national teams for which the geopolitical events of the early 1990s did not significantly change the level of their sports performance were: the USSR (later Russia) with 37 editions, Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic) with 36, Italy with 32, France with 31 and Yugoslavia (Serbia) with 28 editions. Poland, with twenty-nine participations ranks high in this classification. Still, the results obtained after 2005 clearly show a decrease in the potential of the Polish representation versus the leading European teams (Table 3).

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