

## **Polish Sports Heroes of the 21st Century. Personal Patterns for Polish Society**

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**Abstract:** The article analyses personal patterns chosen by the Polish society in the most popular athlete poll. The author makes use of the interdisciplinary approach, using the works of scholars in the field of sociology (Ossowska, Billig), history (Münkler), and cultural studies (Barthes, Eco). On the basis of qualitative analyses, it distinguishes 6 applications of the Polish sports hero. They are the virtues (characteristics) which constitute the social image of a hero. The Polish sports hero can be characterised by: /1/ solitude in working on their skills, /2/ cooperation with a charismatic coach and a specialised team of assistants, /3/ participation in a direct competition which takes the form of a duel, /4/ wealth, /5/ attachment to one's family and homeland, and /6/ strong belief in God. Although the analysis is focused on reference persons representing the Polish society, it seems that Sven Hannawald, Franziska van Almsick (2002), as well as Robert Hartig and Maria Höfl-Riesch (2014) are described in Germany by means of the first five characteristics which are also typical of a Polish sports hero. Hard work, a charismatic coach and a team of assistants, sports duels, wealth, family ties and attachment to their homeland are the qualities that describe German sportspeople of the year; the contest final has been broadcast on public television ZDF since 1998.

**Keywords:** personal patterns, Olympic Games, modern nationalities, banal nationalism, myth, heroic and post-heroic societies.

## **Introduction**

In my article, I will present personal patterns associated with athletes who have competed in the Polish and international arenas and later have become winners of the “Przeegląd Sportowy”, award for the best athlete of the year. I will take into account the people who received the greatest number of votes in national polls conducted between 2001 and 2013. Although not all participants in the popularity ratings among athletes represent a discipline included in the Olympic Programme by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), it is because of the importance of the Olympic Games in modern culture that I consider as heroes those sports personalities who competed in different arenas in the period of 2002-2014, in which the seven Olympic events were organized.<sup>2</sup>

## **Polls and heroes**

The “Przeegląd Sportowy” poll is one of the oldest athletic ranking competitions in Europe dating back to 1926. One year earlier, a Swedish daily, “Svenska Dagbladet” established an event which has been conducted ever since, in which every year a jury of experts chooses the best sportsperson in Sweden, granting him or her the “Svenska Dagbladet” Gold Medal. The prize winner in the first poll was a Swedish athlete who ran the 110 meters hurdles, Sten Pettersson. In some other countries, competitions for the best athlete also have a long-standing tradition. In 2013, the British press organized the 60<sup>th</sup> edition of *BBC Sports Personality of the Year*, while for many years the German journalists associated in Sportpresse-Agentur have been choosing the *Sportler des Jahres* – the sportsman and sportswoman of the year – and the viewers have been able to watch the contest final on public television channel ZDF.

In the 2013 edition of the competition in Sweden, the champion in the 50 km ski race, Johan Olsson, was awarded the journalists’ gold medal for achievements in sports. German sports journalists awarded the victor’s palm to Robert Harting (discus thrower) and Christina Obergföll (javelin thrower) for their achievements in athletics, while in the BBC competition, the person chosen as the British sports personality of the year was Andy Murray, a Scottish tennis player, the winner of Wimbledon. In the US, the athletes chosen as best in the “Associated Press” poll were LeBron James, a basketball player, and Serena Williams, a

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<sup>2</sup> XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City (2002), XXVIII Olympic Games in Athens (2004), XX Olympic Winter Games in Turin (2006), XXIX Olympic Games in Beijing (2008), XXI Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver (2010), XXX Olympic Games in London (2012), and XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi (2014).

tennis player. In the same year in Norway, none of the winter sports champions was chosen as the athlete of the year (*Sportsperson of the Year*) – the award went to world chess champion Magnus Carlsen.

In Poland, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cross-country skier Justyna Kowalczyk won the “Przegląd Sportowy” poll five times (2009-2013) and Adam Małysz, the ski-jumper, four times (2001-2003, 2007). Swimmer Otylia Jędrzejczak won the competition three times (2004-2006), while Robert Kubica, a racing driver, won the title once (2008).

My research question concerns the characteristics of a sports hero, i.e. a person chosen in the poll as the most popular athlete in Poland. In the analyses, I will use the theoretical bases of the research into personal pattern and the phenomenon of heroism as presented in the classic sociological and anthropological concepts. Florian Znaniecki, while demonstrating the spread of national awareness and ties in his work *Modern Nationalities. A Sociological Study of How Nationalities Evolve (1952)*, pointed to the important role the cult of heroes played in the process of awakening national solidarity. Znaniecki emphasizes that certain types of heroes were of paramount importance during the period of crystallization of national consciousness, namely legendary folk heroes, saints, and great kings and warriors. With the spread of mass education among societies, the hero types that gained importance were those whom Znaniecki described as leaders in various fields of culture – outstanding creators in the arts and culture.<sup>3</sup>

In his characterization of the figure of hero, Stefan Czarnowski writes that a hero “/.../ is a man who, through the merits of his life or death and in a ritual manner, has won the acting power inherent in the group or cause which he represents and whose fundamental social value he embodies.”<sup>4</sup> Czarnowski points to the paradox associated with the figure of a hero. Although the hero is a human being, due to his distinct personality he is akin to “great gods,” and because of the functions he performs, he is close to “nameless spirits.”<sup>5</sup> The ethnologist writes that in the attitude of society towards eminent personalities one can observe the human desire to come closer to the world of gods.

In modern anthropology, a commonly known work is *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell. Campbell – an expert in mythology, anthropology, and religious studies – deals with the prevalence of myth in societies and, like Czarnowski, draws the figure

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<sup>3</sup> F. Znaniecki, *Modern Nationalities*, 1995, p.125.

<sup>4</sup> St. Czarnowski, *Dzieła (Works)* Vol. IV, *Kult bohaterów i jego społeczne uwarunkowania (The Cult of Heroes and Its Social Determinants)*, PWN, Warszawa 1956, pp. 13-31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem* p. 14.

of hero into the area associated with the sphere of *sacrum*. Campbell treats heroes as bearers of archetypal patterns showing universal truths. Campbell's work was inspiring for many researchers in various fields and for creators of culture. This influence of works dedicated to heroes and works about heroes of popular culture can be shown for example in the work of George Lucas, who admits that he was affected by Campbell's concepts.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of personal patterns was the main subject of Maria Ossowska from her first text, *Wzór demokracji (Model Democrat)* (1944), through the monograph *Etos rycerski i jego odmiany (The Chivalric Ethos and Its Varieties)* (1973). Ossowska writes, "When characterizing a personal pattern as a protagonist who constitutes the object of human aspirations, we have allowed ourselves a considerable vagueness /.../ as it is commonly known – one must distinguish between patterns that are propagated and patterns that are accepted, the imparted and the received."<sup>7</sup> Written at the time when the domination of mass culture has already started, this analysis of a hero's morals and the influence of Communist propaganda in the 1960s and 70s by Ossowska sensitizes researchers to the fact that "/.../ the difference between how people get manipulated and how they actually picture a man whom they value may be significant."<sup>8</sup> For Ossowska, who was likewise the author of *Socjologia moralności (Sociology of Morality)*, a personal pattern is either a fictional character or a real person inspiring individuals or groups to follow suit.<sup>9</sup> Adopting Ossowska's definition, I consider a personal pattern to be a figure which is the object of an individual's aspirations. Further, she recognizes that emulation is a process consisting in imitation, which is caused by the value of the person being imitated.<sup>10</sup> Ossowska referred to studies by such social psychologists as Neal Miller and John Dollard, as well as to Albert Bandura, the creator of Social Learning Theory, and to a precursor of social psychology, William McDougall.

For the history of sports competition, the reference to the chivalric ethos is significant, as the modern term "sportsmanship" derives straight from this tradition. With the words of the first version of the Olympic oath, pledged during contemporary Olympic Games since 1920, the competitors vow that they will take part in the Olympics in the spirit of chivalry, i.e. sportsmanship, and for the glory of country and sport they represent.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> J. Campbell, *Bohater o tysiącu twarzy (The Hero with a Thousand Faces)*, Nomos, Kraków 2008.

<sup>7</sup> M. Ossowska, *Etos rycerski i jego odmiany (The Chivalric Ethos and Its Varieties)*, PWN, Warszawa 1986, p. 11

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> In Antwerp, on behalf of all the competitors, the oath delivered by the fencer Victor Boina was as follows: "In the name of all competitors, I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules that govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our countries."

Among contemporary researchers, the sociologist and psychologist Michael Billig, author of the book *Banal Nationalism*, deals with the area of sports competition through the prism of national ideologies. For Billig, in daily life nationalism is constantly flagged through sports. Additionally, he treats “flag waving” as a safety valve, which drains the energy out of the masses and makes the world more secure, because it is freer of conflicts based on fighting or disputes with the use of physical violence.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of personal patterns is also undertaken by semiology. Important analyses were made by Roland Barthes. He examines figures of heroes in terms of a myth as the central story of any culture. Barthes devoted some texts to great actresses of the cinema (Greta Garbo and Audrey Hepburn), to airmen (Saint-Exupéry and Lindbergh), and clergyman (Billy Graham and Abbé Pierre). However, the work of Barthes that has the greatest significance for the subject of my research is a study entitled *The Tour de France as Epic*, in which he carefully analysed the importance of the oldest and most famous multilag cycling race for the French people and French culture, also taking into account the representatives of other nations.<sup>13</sup> In the race described by Barthes, which took place in the 1950s on the highways of France, there competed sportsmen with names supplemented by patronyms indicating their nationality, who – according to the standard of narrative discovered by the semiologist – functioned in the order of epos and contemporary epic. The race in 1955 was a triumph for a Frenchman and for France in the individual and team classifications. The victory, for the third successive year, was won by Louis Bobet, called Bobet the Frenchman or Louison. According to Barthes: “*Tour de France* expresses and frees the French through the only plot in which traditional fraudulences /.../ mix with positive curiosity and a utopian image of the world, which – through a spectacle – tries to reconcile man with nature fully and clearly.”<sup>14</sup> Despite the already emerging commercialization, which spoiled the spectacle, Barthes believes that still the balance of gains and losses related to the Tour de France generates a reason to regard it as a fascinating national ceremony. “Bobet is a Promethean hero; he has a wonderful combative temperament, keen sense of organization; calculated, he realistically heads towards victory.”<sup>15</sup> Barthes also characterizes the cultural importance of other renowned figures competing in the most popular cycling races, whose popularity is measured in terms of the number of spectators.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Billig, *Banalny nacjonalizm (Banal Nationalism)*, Znak, Kraków 2008, p. 225.

<sup>13</sup> R. Barthes, *Mitologie (Mythologies)*, Wyd. KR, Warszawa 2000, pp. 145-156.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 153.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 154.

Other concepts connected with the issue of myth and heroes, which are very interesting from the cognitive perspective, can be found in the work of a distinguished German scholar, Herfried Münkler. The historian, while characterizing the evolution of Western societies, distinguishes the following stages: pre-heroic, heroic, and post-heroic, the last of which dominates in the modern era. The central question conducive to differentiating stages of development is, according to Münkler, the attitude towards heroes. In post-heroic societies, there is a reluctance to enter into conflicts that may entail military action. In his recently published work *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen (The Germans and Their Myths)* (2009), Münkler writes about political myths associated with Frederick the Great, Emperor Barbarossa, and the Nibelungen. According to him, the contemporary German society is deficient in myths. “We are the Pope,” “Germany is you” – these, according to him, are more of headlines and advertising campaigns than the symptoms of the emergence and impact of new myths.<sup>16</sup>

However, it seems that in the modern history of Germany, we are also dealing with the strong influence of myths and mythical characters, and – using the terms proposed by Münkler – it takes place in a post-heroic society, in which a great myth-making role is played by sport. A modern German myth with a powerful effect could be observed during the FIFA World Cup (2006), and it has been made more objective thanks to a documentary titled *Deutschland – Ein Sommermärchen (Germany – A Summer Tale)*. It was also connected with an earlier version of the German myth, which was institutionalized in the form of films under the common title *Das Wunder von Bern* (feature film, documentary 2003/2004). In 2014, the year of the FIFA World Cup, the premiere took place in Hamburg of a musical version of a play describing events connected with the German team’s unexpected winning of the Jules Rimet Trophy in 1954, which is commonly referred to in the German language as the “The Miracle of Bern.”

The institutional framework of this (post-) heroic myth was strengthened by the German players winning the World Cup final in Brazil. This fourth triumph of Germany in world football is presented through the prism of the team and its heroes – Bastian Schweinsteiger (indestructible), Lukas Podolski (good team spirit), and the coach of the team, who was subjected to almost constant criticism until the moment his team won the title of world champion, and he became a hero.

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<sup>16</sup> H. Münkler, *Mity Niemców (The Germans and Their Myths)*, Wyd. Sic!, Warszawa 2013, pp. 403-414.

In my opinion, the search for basic patterns carried out today – patterns which are associated with the figures of heroes – should expand on the thought drafted by Georg Simmel in his article “Individualismus der modernen Zeit” (“Individualism”) (1917). In times of war, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he described a completely different understanding of the concept of individuality, which – according to him – was created by the Roman and Germanic cultures.<sup>17</sup> I would like to make use of Simmel’s approach to the analysis of social phenomena in search of cultural (ethnic) diversity of individual behaviours in the description of the national heroes – personal patterns chosen and accepted by Poles.

### **Heroization process**

In many societies today the phenomenon of heroizing athletes, or assigning strong heroic qualities to them, can be observed in popular culture. Their struggles in the stadiums and preparations for competitions form the background for the crystallization of national feelings. The national sentiment towards sports unites the patriotic masses and the elite. It is becoming a part of banal nationalism, i.e. the national ideology of everyday life discernible in contemporary Western societies. Billig stated that sports events commented on in the media cause the process of “flagging the homeland daily.” “Our victory” and “our heroes” are indicated. A division is created into the cultural and national “us” and “them.”<sup>18</sup>

Heroization of athletes is done by the audience gathered in sports arenas and professional journalists commenting on the event. In the past, in the times of heroic communities, the deeds of a hero were lauded by poets and writers, i.e., representatives of artistic culture; nowadays, a player’s attributes gain in tone and popularity thanks to sports journalists’ commentary, that is, through the mass culture. A sports talk (as it is called by Umberto Eco), namely a reporter's comment for a mass audience, becomes a value “in itself” cherished by viewers of a sporting spectacle.<sup>19</sup>

Poles raved about the radio commentary by Bohdan Tomaszewski’s that they listened to during twelve successive Olympic Games, and they experienced heightened emotions during football matches and motorcycle speedway competitions commentated on by Jerzy Ciszewski. At present, “live” radio commentaries delivered by Tomasz Zimoch, Włodzimierz Szaranowicz and Marek Józwik, who commentate on the exploits of Polish athletes, have become the interpretive framework for the collective experience. After a competition, the

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<sup>17</sup> G. Simmel, *Pisma socjologiczne (Sociological Works)*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2008, pp. 411-418

<sup>18</sup> M. Billig, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> U. Eco, *Semiologia życia codziennego (Semiologia quotidiana)*, Czytelnik 1999, pp. 215-222.

audience have a chance of recalling the recorded commentaries thanks to online forums, social networking sites, and YouTube. More than 600,000 Internet users exercised the option of reliving their emotions during Justyna Kowalczyk's 30-kilometre run with Zimoch's radio commentary in Vancouver 2010. Włodzimierz Szaranowicz, who repeatedly commented on ski-jumping tournaments in which Adam Małysz took part, delivered a summary of the athlete's career in a breaking voice during his final competition in Planica in 2011. Marek Józwik often commentates on Kowalczyk's performance for Polish TV viewers, who have repeatedly heard his admiration for the achievements of the skier during her struggle with rivals and problems with injuries. Walerian Borowczyk and Mikołaj Sokół – Polsat commentators – often explained to Poles the F1 competition rules and rituals during Robert Kubica's car races.

A similar role in the organization of German collective experience is played by the commentaries of such reporters as: Waldemar Hartmann (football), Jörg Wontorra (football, swimming), Gerd Rubenbauer (skiing), Tom Bartels (ski jumping, football), and Kai Ebel (F1 racing). The British remember commentaries from sports events delivered by Kenneth Wolstenholme (football), Johnny Taylor (rugby), Murray Walter (F1) and David Robert Coleman (athletics), who was the first journalist in history to be awarded a medal for his contribution to the promotion of the ideas of the Olympic Games, granted by the IOC.

### **Virtues of a sports hero**

What are the characteristics of a sports hero? Are there for Polish athletes any specific Polish qualities, i.e. connected with the national culture? Based on the analysis of the collected research material (authorized interviews with sportspeople, biographies, and statements of “experts” and “men in the street” about heroes), it can be stated that the sportspeople admired and approved by Polish people are characterized by /1/ solitude in working on their skills, /2/ cooperation with a charismatic coach and a specialised team of assistants, /3/ participation in a direct competition which takes the form of a duel, /4/ wealth, /5/ attachment to one's family and homeland, and /6/ strong belief in God. I suggest referring to these characteristics I have listed as six applications of a model of the Polish sports hero. I am using the notion of an application metaphorically, referring to one of the meanings of the word “application,” reflecting a pattern or a decorative technique consisting in creating patterns. I am referring to research conducted by the historian Niall Ferguson, who wrote about “Western applications” when characterizing the civilisation model. For Ferguson, the word “application” means

“institutions,” whereas in my analysis, it is, in terms of the meaning, closer to the notion of values.<sup>20</sup> The features I will be analysing in the model of a Polish sports person appear individually or in different combinations in sportspeople models from other national cultures, in other societies. The six characteristics listed above seem to form for the Polish people a coherent whole, allowing them to characterise a competitor as a national sports hero.

### **Solitude**

Solitude is the first feature of a hero. A Polish sports hero works surrounded by trusted mentors, achieves successes and overcomes failures. For a long period of their participation in competitions, Adam Małysz and Justyna Kowalczyk were left alone in their rivalry with champions from other countries. Other Polish representatives lagged well behind their masterly level. In particular Kowalczyk has had to struggle with solitude during trainings and competitions, since she is way ahead other Polish participants when it comes to her athletic ability. Since 2010 Maciej Kreczmer, a Polish representative in cross-country skiing, has been a participant of her training group. Kowalczyk’s Scandinavian rivals work on their individual performance; however, neither do they neglect tactical training, based on team cooperation, in order to work out the finish of individual runs in the company of their own national representation. Kowalczyk, on her run, has to solve tactical dilemmas independently and in solitude.

Małysz was for a long time ahead of other team members in his sports class. Finally, in his last year of competition, he found a strong ally and successor in the person of Kamil Stoch. However, the bonds in the ski jumper team have always been strong. Polish representatives liked one another and the prize-winning competitor was deeply engaged in the rivalry of the representation in order to improve the poor place of the national team in team competitions. The strong commitment of Małysz and his good results were clearly visible in comparison with frequent failures of other ski jumpers when national teams were competing.

“A man in the street,” which means an ordinary fan, has little knowledge about the arcana of racing drivers’ training.<sup>21</sup> Rivalry in motor sports seems to be based on skills formed during trainings on the racecourse or racing roads. But this is only a part of the preparation of drivers. Following the model of Michael Schumacher, Formula One car drivers

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. N. Ferguson, *Cywilizacja. Zachód i cała reszta. (Civilisation. The West and the Rest)* Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2013, pp. 38-39.

<sup>21</sup> I am using the terms “a man in the street” and later “an expert” in the meaning they were given by Alfred Schutz. Cf. A. Schutz, *Światły obywatel. Esej o społecznym zróżnicowaniu wiedzy (Essay on Social Knowledge Differentiation)*, „Literatura na Świecie”, 1985, No. 2, pp. 269-284.

prepare for the season both physically and mentally. They run and swim a lot.<sup>22</sup> The figure of an F1 driver, according to kinetic requirements influencing the speed and stability of a Formula One car, should be slim, even skinny, with well-shaped neck muscles, able to take on the considerable stress that occurs during fast driving. Neck muscle load may exceed 25 kg during manoeuvres. Drivers should not have excessively developed other muscle mass, in particular the muscles of the chest. Muscle mass increase may unfavourably change the centre of gravity of the car. Robert Kubica, during his preparation, used the support of Italian medical centre specialized on services for F1, *Formula Medicine*. In the centre run by doctor Riccardo Ceccarelli, Kubica's operations after accidents were performed and physiotherapy was prepared, and Italian specialists (including doctors, coaches, psychologists and physiotherapists) from *Formula Medicine* prepared a training regimen and the diet of the competitor for the whole season.<sup>23</sup> Kubica says that he does not make use of a psychologist's services.<sup>24</sup> Other F1 drivers get prepared in a similar way; however, some of them employ certified psychologists. Sebastian Vettel won the first two world championship titles in cooperation with a Finnish physiotherapist and psychologist, Thomi Parmakoski.<sup>25</sup> Competitors of numerous F1 racing teams use the services of the Italian medical centre.<sup>26</sup> Kubica's doctor, Dr. Ceccarelli, and his hospital took care of the Toyota team competing in the most expensive and most prestigious racing event in the world. A hero is patient in overcoming his own weaknesses of body and soul in order to succeed. Kubica, shortly after the end of the racing season in F1, took care of his physical and mental training. He was also famous for an efficient diet which allowed him to succeed in races in which drivers should have the physique of jockeys.

Justyna Kowalczyk trains laboriously in the summer period. According to Bernadeta Piotrowska – a former competitor and currently an expert in cross-country skiing for TVP – the break between the end of the season and beginning of preparation for the subsequent championships lasts for the competitors from two to four weeks. Kowalczyk's training involves solitude lasting for many hours, dealing with the weaknesses of her body in order to improve speed and increase stamina. She cycles uphill, works out at the gym with weights, and runs uphill with a backpack full of weights. Working hours are what counts in her

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Giraldo, *Historia Formuły1 (Formula 1 History)*, Publicat, Poznań 2007, pp. 198-199.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. S. Parfianowicz, *Tajemnica F1 - Treningi zawodnika (F1 Secret - Competitor's Trainings)*, "Przegląd Sportowy," 27.9.2006, electronic document downloaded from <http://www.przekladSPORTOWY.PL> [9th March 2014]

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. Sokół, C. Gutowski (eds.), *Robert Kubica moja pasja (Robert Kubica, My Passion)*, Agora Warszawa 2008, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. D. Papadopoulos, Thomi Parmakoski: *The Rainer behind a World Champion*, electronic document, downloaded from <http://www.blogit.mtv.fi> [7th March 2014]

<sup>26</sup> Cf. R. Ceccarelli, *The story of Formula Medicine*, electronic document, downloaded from [http://www.formulamedicine.com/en/riccardo\\_ceccarelli.php](http://www.formulamedicine.com/en/riccardo_ceccarelli.php) [1st March 2014]

individual training. When she was preparing for the World Cup Championships at the age of 23, trainings took her more than 1000 hours of work per year, and before the Olympic Games in Sochi she trained for ca. 900 hours per year.<sup>27</sup> Earlier, Kowalczyk had told her coach, Aleksander Wierietielny, “There is no use training hard and taking places in the middle of the starters. I prefer to work twice as much and fight for medals.”<sup>28</sup> Her coach very often points out that Kowalczyk herself is often the one to demand increased training hours and he, in spite of his long experience as her trainer, encounters new signs of her ambitious attitude in the course of preparations for competition.

Training as a ski jumper requires sticking to a strict diet.<sup>29</sup> After the euphoria that accompanied a series of victories, Adam Małysz thought about ending his sports career, since he started to lose every competition. He said that he wanted to make such a decision after failures in ski jumping just before he won the first Crystal Globe, and even later, when he was a talented sportsman and did not appear in the first ten places for two seasons. “Jumping is still my world” – it is an area of primary value for Małysz.<sup>30</sup> Although he did not manage to win gold at the Olympic Games in Vancouver in 2010, he was twice decorated with a silver medal for successes on the normal-size and large ski jump. Małysz decided to end his ski jumping career in March 2011, when he ended the season in third place in the World Cup general classification. He started to participate in car races and in 2012 and 2013 he became a Polish Off-road Rally Champion. He participated in the Dakar Rally three times.

Finishing a skiing career and starting to race cars is similar to the choice made by a French alpine ski racer Luc Alphand, winner of the Alpine Skiing World Cup in the 1996/1997 season and a winner of the Dakar Rally in 2006. Alphand’s rally career was interrupted by a severe trauma in a motorbike accident in 2010, and the French skiing and driving champion supports Małysz’s participation in rallies.<sup>31</sup> Alphand’s condition does not allow him to race on road and off road, but these days he participates in sailing races in a team composed of friends.

Otylia Jędrzejczak, a triple prize winner of Przegład Sportowy’s sportsperson contest (2004-2006), was preparing for the Beijing Olympic Games and was training in a swimming

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<sup>27</sup> P. Wilkowicz, *Od świtu do zmierzchu (From Dawn Till Dusk)*, “Gazeta Wyborcza,” 7.2.2014, pp. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> J. Pindera, *Już nie muszę się wstydzić*, Rozmowa z Justyną Kowalczyk (*I don’t have to be ashamed any more*, An interview with Justyna Kowalczyk), „Rzeczpospolita,” 4.11.2009.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. P. Wilkowicz, *Lekkie leci dalej, czyli głód skokowy (What Is Light Can Fly Further – Ski Jumper’s Cravings)*, „Rzeczpospolita,” electronic document downloaded from <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/419687.html> [access date: 17th March 2014].

<sup>30</sup> J. Pindera, *Skoki to wciąż mój świat*. Rozmowa z Adamem Małyszem (*Jumping Is Still My World*. An interview with Adam Małysz), „Rzeczpospolita,” 5.11.2009.

<sup>31</sup> Ł. Cegliński *Adam, życzę ci żebyś dojechał do mety*. Rozmowa z Luc Alphandem (*Adam, I Wish You Reached the Finish Line*. An interview with Luc Alphand) 1.5.2011, electronic document, downloaded from [sport.pl](http://sport.pl) [access date: 6th March 2014].

pool at an altitude of 2,300 m above sea level in the Sierra Nevada mountains. She was accompanied by a team composed of a coach, a doctor, massage therapists, a psychologist and the swimmer Paweł Rurak, who was pacing Jędrzejczak by swimming in front of her. However, Jędrzejczak did not manage to win any medals at the Beijing Olympic Games. She finished far from the top. Preparing for the competition, she swam 2,500 km. After finishing her career, she said about her preparations, “I spent 257 days every year at meets. With the coach and with the team. Everyday trainings were added to this, which gives us some 350 days. Well, maybe 345 – there could be some 5 days for breaks.” Jędrzejczak and Kowalczyk would start the training day before six o’clock in the morning and end at ten o’clock in the evening.<sup>32</sup>

### **A charismatic coach and assistants**

A sports hero is accompanied by a charismatic coach and a team of assistants, a hero’s team. According to sports commentators, Małysz, in achieving his first successes, needed the assistance of a small group, composed of the coach of the Polish jumpers, Apoloniusz Tajner, a physiologist, Prof. Jerzy Żołądź, and a psychologist, Dr. Jan Blecharz. He started to succeed after beginning to work with this trio of specialists, which lasted more than a year. Later, Małysz’s cooperation with Hannu Lepisto bore fruit twice. Even when the Finnish coach was dismissed by the management of the Polish Ski Federation from the function of coach of the Polish team, Małysz stated, “I got on very well with Hannu,”<sup>33</sup> and, in the end, he restored cooperation with Lepisto on his own request and started to prepare for the last Olympic Games in his career. The figures of coaches Heinz Kuttin and Łukasz Kruczek may constitute a contrast background for sports comparison of Małysz’s successes and failures. Kruczek was Kuttin’s assistant and, for a long time, he could not win the trust of Małysz, although they had friendly relations with him, having earlier participated in competitions together. Małysz prepared for the Vancouver Olympic Games under the tutelage of Lepisto and achieved a success. At the Olympic Games, Małysz said, “Hannu is a great coach and man. He still believed in me, he was preparing me in such a manner so that this form came for the Olympic Games.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> P. Wilkowicz, *Od świtu do zmierzchu, czyli codziennie są jakieś igrzyska (From Dawn Till Dusk - There Are Some Games Every Day)*, „Gazeta Wyborcza,” sport.pl, extra, 7.2.2014, pp. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> „Dziennik Zachodni,” 19.3.2008, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> PAP, after sport.tvp.pl *Małysz dziękuje Hannu Lepistoe (Małysz Thanks Hannu Lepistoe)*, electronic document, downloaded from <http://sport.tvp.pl/1355876/malysz-dziekuje-hannu-lepistoe> [access date 15.3.2015]

A coach's charisma can wear thin, as in the case of Apoloniusz Tajner, who has been appearing in the roles of superintendent and then president of the Polish Ski Federation. In Tajner's new roles, there have been numerous conflicts between individual elements.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Łukasz Kruczek, a former competitor, who had not spectacularly succeeded in sports competition and a young coach, gained some skill which can mark him out for a charismatic leadership in the team of Polish jumpers. Kruczek's jumpers started to take leading places, not only individually, but also in team competitions during the World Ski Championships and winter Olympic Games.

Justyna Kowalczyk, when asked about the reasons for her success, without hesitation names Alexander Wierietielny, his work, and the confidence she placed in him. After her winning a bronze medal during the Olympic Games in Turin, Wierietielny said: "We fight like cats and dogs, we yell at each other. But one would go through fire and water for the other."<sup>36</sup> A strong connection is formed at work between a charismatic coach and a competitor. Małysz's spectacular successes were connected with the support of the sportsman's preparations by a team of specialised experts. Kowalczyk and her assistants form a team, a small group with strong internal bonds. Apart from the coach, Wierietielny, the team working with Kowalczyk in 2014 includes a competitor, Maciej Kreczmer, a serviceman and coach's assistant, Rafał Węgrzyn, a former competitor, Mateusz Nuciak, Estonian servicemen Are Mets, Peep Koidu and Ulf Olsson, and a physiotherapist, Przemysław Iżycki.<sup>37</sup>

Paweł Słonimski, Bartosz Kizerowski, Robert Białcki, and György Turi – a Hungarian who was advising her before the Beijing Olympic Games – are the names of Otylia Jędrzejczak's coaches. Having ended her sports career, the swimmer strongly stressed the great meaning of her belief, shaped during common trainings that the coach believed in her success, for her results in competition. According to her, frequent changes of coaches were caused by reaching a training routine with no inspiring novelties, or a perceptible loss of the coach's faith in the competitor's skills.<sup>38</sup>

Who is the coach of the Polish driver who stood on the podium of F1? Robert Kubica names his father; however, the roles Artur Kubica plays in his son's life form a rich combination. In an interview published in the book *Robert Kubica. Moja Pasja (Robert Kubica. My Passion)*, the competitor said, "My father, as my mentor and coach, helped me a

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<sup>35</sup> R. K. Merton, *Teoria socjologiczna i struktura społeczna (Sociological Theory and Social Structure)*, PWN Warszawa 1982, pp. 413-415.

<sup>36</sup> R. Błoński, J. Ciasłoń, Na igrzyskach skłamałiśmy. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Wieretielelnym (*We Lied at the Olympic Games. Interview with Alexander Wierietielny*) „Gazeta Wyborcza” 1-2.4.2006, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> P. Wilkowicz, Drużyna Justyny Kowalczyk (*Justyna Kowalczyk's Team*), „Gazeta Wyborcza,” sport.pl extra 24.2.2014, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> O. Jędrzejczak, *Życie po życiu (O Jędrzejczak, Life After Life)*, „Gala,” 14.10.2013, electronic document downloaded from <http://www.gala.pl/wywiady-i-sylwetki/otylia-jedrzejczak-zycie-po-zyciu-12666> [access date: 17th March 2014]

lot. He was never driving himself, but he was a great fan of motor sports. Until 1998 it was my parents who completely covered the costs of everything that was necessary (...). I would never have got to Formula 1 without them.”<sup>39</sup> The father took his son to locations all over Europe where the championships were held and filled him with admiration with his self-control when driving a van.

When Kubica was go-kart racing, Waław Piasecki, the director of the go-karting section at the Krakowski Automobilklub, was his coach. As a teenage driver he won the Polish Championship six times and at the age of 14 he became a professional go-karting driver in Italy. What was necessary for his further success in F1 was the work of the BMW Wauber team: the manager of the team, Mario Theissen, the main engineer, Willy Rampf, the pit-stop mechanics, and more than 700 people working in plants in the Swiss town of Hinwil. Kubica’s small, personal team is formed by the manager, Daniele Morelli and Dr. Riccardo Cessarelli, who met “our driver” when he was a fifteen-year-old boy. Today, he is one of his friends in the paddock.<sup>40</sup> The accident that Kubica suffered during preparations for the F1 season when he was participating in the Ronde di Andora Rally, at the beginning of 2011, later physiotherapy and new traumas and further treatment, have resulted in termination of the work with Dr. Cessarelli, and Kubica’s Polish spokesman and manager, Marcin Czachorski, became the leading character on his team. He is the one who informs the press about Kubica’s participation in various rallies sponsored by Polish concerns.

## **Duels**

A sports hero competes with others in duels, which means in particular struggling in a direct competition with the strongest of the rivals. When the competition starts, several dozen people compete with one another; however, what is most important for the public and commentators are direct duels with the participation of two competitors. The first of Adam Małysz’s successes were seen in light of competition with Martin Schmitt and Sven Hannawald. In the German mass media with the largest audience (among others, RTL and “Bild”) the competition was advertised and later interpreted by commentators as ‘duels’. The convention of a duel is not only a German narrative, and it was particularly exposed during the Four Hills Tournament, since these jumping competitions have their own, specific point of

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<sup>39</sup>M. Sokół, C. Gutowski (red.), *Robert Kubica moja pasja (Robert Kubica, My Passion)*, Agora Warszawa 2008, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem* p. 12.

the rules, which are different from the rules of the World Cup championships: in the first round, the jumpers compete in pairs.

RTL similarly commented on the F1 races with the participation of not only the representatives of other teams, but within one competition stable – Kubica and Heitfeld. The sportspeople's struggle is also presented according to the duel model in documentary films by French directors from the *Arte France et Etap Production* channel, presenting famous sportspeople -- biathletes and pairs competing in ice dancing -- or rugby teams from England and Scotland, and New Zealand and Australia.

Commentators stress the direct competition of participants who are equal in terms of virtues, skills and dignity. The “sports twaddle” casts other sportspeople in the role of extras. The notion of a duel prevails in German commentaries assessing the performances of great figures in contemporary sports. It has been used by Polish commentators reporting the performances of Polish ski jumpers. The competitions on the hills in Vancouver were similar to the ones four years earlier in Salt Lake City. The competitors were once again Simon Amman and Adam Małysz. The competitive spirit was accompanied by friendship. Circumspection could be observed in relations between Sven Hannawald and Małysz. A similar phenomenon, i.e. differentiation of social distances between the sports heroes, could be observed in the rivalry between Justyna Kowalczyk and Marit Bjorgen. The metaphor of a duel was clearly present in the commentaries on Justyna Kowalczyk's efforts. Tomasz Zimoch, observing the competition at the 2010 Olympics during the 30-kilometer run, shouted into the microphone: “Where is Bjorgen? Justyna Kowalczyk can't see her. It would be useful to turn one ski pole into a revolver and take two or three shots, then turn the other pole into some shotgun, and metaphorically, in our thoughts, say ‘Marit, don't run away. Marit, slow down. Marit, have a crisis. Marit, give us a chance.’ But Marit Bjorgen did not give us this chance” (Polish Radio 1).

The swimmers Jędrzejczak often competed against during the Olympic Games and World Championships were Australians Petria Thomas and Jessica Schipper. Their rivalry was exciting, because the time differences in swimming 200 metres were on the order of hundredths of a second and at stake were not only medals, but also the world record.

## **Wealth**

A sports hero is rich. His assets classify him as a millionaire. Winners of the “Przeгляд Sportowy” poll are wealthy, but there are a lot of famous Polish sportspeople who earn much

more, although they have never been at the top of popularity rankings. The annual incomes of Marcin Gortat, an NBA basketball player, Robert Lewandowski and Jakub Błaszczykowski, playing football in the Bundesliga, and Wojciech Szczęsny and Przemysław Fabiański, who have played in the English Premiership, are higher than the earnings of the four athletes who won *Przegląd Sportowy*'s poll in the early years of this century.<sup>41</sup>

Only one person – Robert Kubica – managed both in 2008, namely to gain the highest place in popularity rankings in Poland and, at the same time, earn the largest amount of money of all the Polish athletes.

After the Olympic Games in Vancouver was estimated that Justyna Kowalczyk would become a “złoty millionaire” in 2010.<sup>42</sup> Adam Małysz, during his 10-year ski jumping career, earned 30 million zlotys. Even in his less successful 2008/2009 season, when the first serial victories belonged to Georg Schrirenzauer, Małysz's estimated income was over 2 million zlotys, including a bonus of 200,000 for winning a medal in a competition. Małysz's present high earnings are connected with his participation in off-road rallies.<sup>43</sup> In the two last years he was one of the ten highest paid Polish sportsmen, according to a ranking prepared by journalists of *Super Express*.<sup>44</sup>

After her unsuccessful participation in the Olympic Games in London, Otylia Jędrzejczak decided to end her sporting career. At the time of her triumphs, she was among the 100 best paid athletes in Poland. Her income was not really impressive though, if compared with that of some other athletes. According to “*Super Express*,” with an annual income of 306,000 zł. in 2003 she was at 98<sup>th</sup> place in the earnings ranking. And this was the year when she won three medals: one gold and two silver in the World Championships. Then, in 2004, she was in the first place in the “*Przegląd Sportowy*” popularity poll. Close to the end of her career, before the Olympic Games in London, she appeared together with Usain Bolt and Marek Plawgo in a Visa card commercial. It was a prestigious appearance and meant another high fee.

The divergence between popularity and income rankings among athletes can be observed not only in Poland, but also in other countries. David Beckham – a very wealthy star of Manchester United and other clubs – was chosen as *Sports Personality of the Year* in Great

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<sup>41</sup> Którzy polscy sportowcy zarabiają najwięcej (*Which Polish Athletes Earn Most*), “*Super Express*,” an electronic document, downloaded from: <http://www.stefczyk.info/wiadomosci/gospodarka/najlepiej-zarabiajacy-polscy-sportowcy-2012-roku.6674858060#ixzz2udVJzEeb> [access date: 7th March 2014].

<sup>42</sup> K. Rawa, *Ile za mistrza (How Much for a Champion)*, „*Rzeczpospolita*” Eko+, 26.3.2010.

<sup>43</sup> P. Skwirowsi, M. Samcik, *Ile polski skoczek zarobił w ciągu całej kariery (How Much Did Polish Jumper Earn Throughout Career)*, 28.3.2011, electronic document, downloaded from: <http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/1,101562,9330725>, [access date: 13.3.2014]

<sup>44</sup> *Złota setka 2013 roku: na Gortata nie ma mocnych (A Gold Hundred of 2013. Nobody Equals Gortat)*, „*Super Ekspres*,” 30.1.2014, electronic document, downloaded from: <http://gwizdek24.se.pl/inne/zlota-setka-2013> [access date: 14.3.2014]

Britain only once, in 2001. At the end of his career, when he was playing for Paris-Saint-Germain in 2013, he was in the eighth place on the list of the world's wealthiest athletes, higher than Cristiano Ronaldo and Leo Messi. At the very top of the list of the most wealthy sportsmen for the year 2013 are the golfer Tiger Woods, tennis player Roger Federer, basketball players Kobe Bryant and James LeBron, American football player Aaron Rodgers, and another golfer – Phil Michelson.<sup>45</sup> American snowboarder Shaun White, known also for his skill on skateboard, and Korean skater Kim Yu-na are among the wealthiest winter sport players, who still failed to qualify for the list of the 100 best paid world athletes. The high incomes of athletes come not only from their participation in sports events or financial prizes for their victories, but principally from lucrative advertising contracts.

In Norway a cross-country skier, Therese Johaug, has accumulated the greatest wealth, as she derives profits not only from her sports fees, but also from her own clothing collection and from numerous advertising contracts. Last year she earned a sum equivalent to 7.5 million zlotys.<sup>46</sup> In a film by NHR TV, showing her preparations for a new ski season, this richest Norwegian athlete says, looking straight into the camera, "Happy doesn't mean rich."<sup>47</sup>

### **Family and patria**

A sports hero loves his little homeland and mother country (local and national community), and they love him back. Strong attachment to family, i.e. parents, siblings, wife, and children, is evident in the behaviour of a hero. Although he is seldom at home, and he can be most frequently seen at sports arenas or at trainings when he is preparing for the season, his family constitutes a very important reference of the sports hero's social network (the number of his training days). His family supports him strongly on his route to sports success.

Józef and Janina Kowalczyk (the parents of Justyna), Piotr and Krystyna Jędrzejczak (the parents of Otylia), Izabela Małysz (Adam's wife), and Artur Kubica (Robert's father) are not only people whom we see when the "Przegląd Sportowy" prize is awarded. We learn about their support for the sports hero from the interviews that he gives after a win. Even if there comes a period without any success, they have an impact on the sportsperson's motivation; they make him or her train harder and return on the path of glory. Parents encourage their children to train, and accompany them to the training location. Artur Kubica

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<sup>45</sup> *Lista najlepiej opłacanych sportowców (List of Highest-paid Athletes)*, „Forbes”, electronic document, downloaded from: <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mli45mmlg/the-worlds-100-highest-paid-athletes-4/> [2.3.2014]

<sup>46</sup> P. Wilkowicz, *Niecierpliwa Terese Johaug (Impatient Terese Johaug)*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 29.1.2014, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> E. Lersveen, S. Parfianowicz 'Chodźcie krówki' *Johaug w swoim żywiole ('Common, cows!' Johaug in Her Element)*, TVP 2, date of broadcast: 22nd February 2014.

and Piotr Jędrzejczak drove their children to trainings, and in the latter case the father's engagement was observed by the inhabitants of Kochłowice, a district of Ruda Śląska. Their fathers' support was a great help for both children. The parents of Justyna Kowalczyk, Józef and Janina, thought that their clever daughter would become a lawyer, and Justyna dreamt about studying medicine. They followed the suggestion of a PE teacher, and simultaneously a coach of the Sport Club "Maraton" in Mszana, and agreed to have their daughter train in cross-country skiing, although the final decision was made by Justyna.<sup>48</sup> Kowalczyk began to train skiing regularly when she was 14 years old. Earlier, she played basketball, handball and did cross-country skiing, and represented her school at regional competitions. She has a close relationship with her siblings – an older brother and two sisters.

Małysz was encouraged by his father Jan and his uncle, Jan Szturc, to begin training at a ski jump when he was 6 years old. Prior to this, he jumped from ski jumps made by children on the slopes of valleys in the Beskid Mountains. He jumped first from the small ski jump (K-7) in the centre of Wisła, near the market square, just by the road and railway tracks leading to Wisła-Głębcze. Małysz comes from a family with skiing traditions. His great-grandfather had his own ski jump, from which it was possible to jump several dozen meters. Małysz's family was a multigenerational one. An important role is played by one of his grandmothers, Helena, whom Małysz frequently mentions in interviews. Then it was his wife who supported him strongly when – after his first wins in the individual competitions of the World Cup – there were no spectacularly successful jumps for a few years, and he was demotivated.

The people who live nearest the sports heroes are their most faithful fans – family and neighbours. The towns of Wisła-Kopydło, Kasina Wielka, and Ruda Śląska-Kochłowice constituted a friendly environment for the champions discussed in this paper. "Wisła for Adam Małysz" was the name of a farewell outdoor event prepared by the town in which the jumper was born and lives. A nickname which was given to Małysz, "the Eagle from Wisła," was accepted by Polish fans and journalists. Justyna Kowalczyk said: "I have visited many countries but there is still this village girl inside me. Forests, fields – they are my thing."<sup>49</sup> In the sports pages of newspapers, she is sometimes called "a tough country woman from Turbacz."<sup>50</sup>

Jędrzejczak, like Kowalczyk, left her family home after she graduated from primary school, and moved to the boarding house of the School of Sport Championship. Then she

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<sup>48</sup> See A. Sosnowski, A. Stanowski, *Bieg życia Justyny*, Biały Kruk, Kraków bdw, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> A. Litorowicz-Siegert, *Lubię ostro pod górę*, "Twój Styl," No. 6, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> J. Pindera, *Twarda baba spod Turbacza*, "Rzeczpospolita," 24.2.2009.

returned to the place where she was raised. For Jędrzejczak, this place translated into a yard in front of the apartment block, where she used to play as a child, and the flat near the place where her father worked (the coal mine “Silesia”), and at the same time the area where people use the diminutive form of her name, “Oti,” to address her. When she returned triumphantly from Athens, she flew by helicopter from Warsaw to Nowy Bytom, a central district of her hometown, to participate in an event called “Welcoming Otylia in the City” and to receive the title of Honorary Citizen of Ruda Śląska. She was called in her hometown “the Pride of Kochłowice” or “Rudzianka”.<sup>51</sup> After winning several medals, however, Jędrzejczak commented: “I am the same Otylia I used to be. Adam Małysz is the national hero.”<sup>52</sup>

In the same year, Małysz, in the book-length interview that he gave to Maciej Kurzajewski and Sebastian Szczęsny, just before Poland joined the European Union, said, “I love Poland and respect the national colours.”<sup>53</sup> The jumper also described his mother country from a broader perspective when he remarked, “[...] I am for the European Union and I think that we need a united Europe, and a united Europe needs us.”<sup>54</sup> The heroes describe their special patriotic feelings during the days of sport triumphs. Kowalczyk commented on her feelings during the medal ceremony in Vancouver as follows: “At moments like this, I feel simply great joy. Whenever and wherever the national anthem is played, I listen to it with the same dignity and humility. I just feel happy.”<sup>55</sup>

Among the winners of the contest for the most popular sportsperson organized by “Przegląd Sportowy,” only Robert Kubica seems to speak rather moderately about his feeling of patriotism and his attachment to the mother country. The winner of the 2008 poll has spent most of his life outside Poland. Young Robert went to Italy when he was 13 years old, to take part in go-kart racing. Due to his success, he signed quickly, just after a year of racing, a professional contract. He has permanent residency in Monaco. He does not pay taxes in Poland. He used to race on various continents, in the places where F1 circuits are located. After another car crash which terminated his career in bolide racing, he presently competes for World Rally Championship. A point of reference for Robert is his father Arthur, although he plays a more normative than comparative role for him. His parents separated and live in different towns in Poland. Usually, at difficult moments, the driver’s fiancée since 2003, Edyta Witas, and his father are by his side. Robert Kubica has described his place on the scale

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<sup>51</sup> A Polish term for a female inhabitant of Ruda Śląska (translator’s comment).

<sup>52</sup> “Super Express,” 23.8.2004, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> A. Małysz, *Moje życie*, Wyd. m, Kraków 2004, p. 121.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> A. Sosnowski, A. Stanowski, *op.cit.* p. 154.

of attachment to Poland. He confessed: “I like when my country is doing a good job but I wouldn’t call myself a crazy patriot. On the top, there are crazy people, at the bottom, those who don’t care, and I’m somewhere in the middle.”<sup>56</sup>

Kubica stresses that in relations with others, he does not allow himself to be led by superstition; he evaluates the people he meets not according to their nationality but their personal features. He said, “In the eyes of others, the Poles have various reputations. Some say that they are nice, and for others they are hoodlums. I personally think that they are mostly nice. But nationality doesn’t matter for me. It is the person that matters.”<sup>57</sup> He defined the role he played in an interview he gave to Mikołaj Sokół and Cezary Gutowski. He observed, “I’m lucky to represent Poland in the international arena, competing in one of the most popular sports discipline in the world.”<sup>58</sup> Since the season of 2006, he has usually worn a helmet with a national flag, although the rules do not oblige drivers to manifest symbolically their nationality. Only at the Italian Grand Prix in Monza did he wear a helmet with the dominant colours of the Italian flag. In the years 2006-2009 Kubica also frequently stuck a label reading Jan Paweł II (John Paul II) on his helmet.<sup>59</sup>

## God

Considered to be an introvert, Robert Kubica usually speaks little about his private life. A few times in his career he has suffered serious crashes. After the crash during the Rally Ronde di Andora, which terminated his career in F1, when lying in hospital, he asked cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz for a relic of John Paul II. The driver claimed that he had survived due to the protection of the late Pope, who was later canonized.<sup>60</sup> In a further interview for the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, when he was asked “if faith helped him to recover, recollecting the fact that he had an image of John Paul II on his helmet in Formula 1,” he answered: “Faith has nothing to do with it. I have always respected our pope who did a lot for us, Poles. But it is rather respect for a person, not a cult” (the interview for La Repubblica is quoted here from its version on Polish Radio).

Borderline situations for Robert Kubica were his crashes in rallies, where the motor sports rules of competition were in force. The values of Otylia Jędrzejczak were questioned

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<sup>56</sup> R. Kubica, *Nie jestem wielkim patriotą (I Am Not a Great Patriot)*, “Gazeta Wyborcza,” 11.5.2009.

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>58</sup> R. Kubica, op.cit., Warszawa 2008, p. 48.

<sup>59</sup> See A. Brykier, *Zaprojektował i pomalował kaski Roberta Kubicy (He Designed and Painted Robert Kubica’s Crash Helmets)*, “Gazeta Wyborcza,” 21.9.2006.

<sup>60</sup> See <http://ekai.pl/wydarzenia/sport/x38439> 2011

after her car accident in which her younger brother was killed, and after her biggest success as a competitor at the Athens Olympics, when she lost confidence in her abilities. Four years after the death of her brother, she said: “He is always with me, close, whenever I make a decision... Every evening I talk to him and I enjoy it ... I know that he will always help me. A tragedy happened and we have no influence on certain things. I guess it must be like this. I believe that God chooses tougher people who can survive this. This year, my friend Kamila Skolimowska also passed away. It was very hard for me. Kamila is also with me, keeps her fingers crossed. Every one of us has some little angels up there, who need to be appreciated and cared for, but we can’t give them too many tasks.”<sup>61</sup>

Jędrzejczak presents her hierarchy of values in an evangelical dimension: “As it was written in the Bible: ‘faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.’ I have a key ring with such an inscription. Love makes us smile and we make others smile, too. Faith allows us to make our dreams come true.”<sup>62</sup> In the interviews she gave before and after the Athens Olympics, she spoke about everyday prayer, and making the sign of the cross before competitions. Jędrzejczak is especially linked to the shrine to the Virgin Mary in Licheń.<sup>63</sup> The last event for Jędrzejczak at the London Olympics was a failure. Despite the great effort she had made to get ready for the competition, the result was so poor that it made her cry after she failed to qualify in the semi-final. She ended her swimming career at the age of 30.

The religiousness of Justyna Kowalczyk can be deduced only indirectly, on the basis of accounts of spirituality of her family. We can learn about her taking part in holy masses and church services during the liturgical year, and going on pilgrimages to the shrine in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. There are accounts of the time and place of ceremonies in which Justyna, her siblings and their parents participated when she lived in Kasina Wielka in a house near the parish church. The authors of Kowalczyk’s biography wrote, “Justyna doesn’t really like to talk about religious subjects, about her spiritual experiences. She thinks that they are personal matters which shouldn’t cause interest in others. However, her mother confessed that her daughter ‘pops into’ nearby churches for holy masses during trainings, and still wears the cross she received from her many years ago.”<sup>64</sup>

Unlike, Justyna Kowalczyk, Adam Małysz does not avoid talking about *sacrum*. The ski jumper comes from a Lutheran family. However, his wife and daughter are Catholics.

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<sup>61</sup> Otylia Jędrzejczak: *Żeby tak być dla kogoś całym światem, Wywiady i sylwetki (To Become Someone’s Whole World. Interviews and Profiles)*, ”Gala,” 2.10.2009, No. 41/09

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> Marta Bednarska, *Wywiad z Otylią Jędrzejczak (Interview with Otylia Jędrzejczak)*, ”Gala,” 2.8.2004.

<sup>64</sup> A. Sosnowski, A. Stanowski, *Bieg życia Justyny (Justyna’s Run of Her Life)*, Kraków, bdw., p. 23.

Małysz participates in the life of Lutheran parish, but he says that he often goes to a Catholic church. When, after terminating his career as a ski jumper, he recalled his jumps at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver – during which he trained individually with Hannue Lepistoe to win the Olympic medal – he commented on the competition as follows: “I did my best and I treat the two silver medals as gold ones. I prayed and asked God that angels would carry me as far as possible, that I would manage to win a medal.”<sup>65</sup> During his sports career, even in the most exotic parts of the world, he visited various shrines. He was interested in religious experience and non-Christian spirituality, but it was a quest for the universality of God experienced in different cultures. His comments on religion are systematized and saturated with strong faith, but at the same time with the spirit of evangelical apostleship which reveals itself in the testimony on graces received from the Creator: “I often pray. I ask God mainly for protection and health, and not only for myself, but most of all for my whole family”<sup>66</sup> Małysz recalls episodes from his own life which can be called borderline situations, which allowed him to experience divine protection, and which strengthened his faith. He affirmed, “In my life, there were many situations, of which I think that something happened thanks to God’s help.”<sup>67</sup> An evangelical, apostolic dimension of his experiences as a competitor has been clearly manifest since the season 2000/2001, and it is a new phenomenon among Polish sports heroes, which began at the beginning of the 21th century. It is also evident in the attitude of Kamil Stoch, who won the poll for the Polish Sports Personality of the Year in the year of the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

## Summary

Will all their sports achievements give Adam Małysz, Otylia Jędrzejczak, Robert Kubica, and Justyna Kowalczyk places in the national pantheon? Only Jędrzejczak was finished her sporting career. Małysz has got a racing licence, and he participates in cross-country rallies. Kubica, after an accident which made participation in F1 impossible, races in the WRC series. Kowalczyk has not announced that she will be finishing her career in cross country skiing yet, though she has been in this sport for several years now. The decision to stop participating in competitions takes our most famous Polish athletes some time – it is made gradually, after much thought and a lot of hesitation.

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<sup>65</sup> R. Lenarski, P. Wilkowicz, *Alfabet olimpijski (The Olympic Alphabet)*, “Gazeta Wyborcza,” 24.2.2014, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Adam Małysz, *Moje życie (My Life)*, Wyd. M, Kraków 2004, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Op. cit., p. 84.

In the times of the formation of national communities, the national ideas were the objects of the activity of saints, kings, warriors, and – not least – brilliant artists. The cult of heroes was described in Florian Znaniecki's book *Współczesne narody (Contemporary Nations)*. Although in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after World War II, the impact of heroic patterns began to lose its importance, in the historic memory some personal patterns were strongly rooted, and the emergence of new heroes was an obvious consequence of the recent history of nations. In Poland, at the turn of the 21st century, Pope John Paul II was an object of national pride. The deeds of Józef Piłsudski and Tadeusz Kościuszko also command respect. The authors of a report entitled *Spoleczeństwo polskie wobec przeszłości (Polish Society in Regard to the Past)* note that in assessing the behaviour of heroes, the importance of values associated with personal virtues, religion, extolling Poland in the world, and acting in favour of democracy has grown significantly.<sup>68</sup> The role of the characteristics associated with the military successes has diminished, although there are military leaders in the national pantheon.

For the time being, there are no sports heroes in the Polish pantheon. They belong to the sphere of mass culture – they appear and disappear on the front pages of newspapers, or are invited onto popular TV programmes after they achieve success. They have the status of idols, stars; they display personal patterns that impress the public, but before long they are gone. First they sparkle, but soon they fade.<sup>69</sup>

Referring to the growing importance of sport (political, economic, and cultural) in the societies of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, one can put forward the thesis that outstanding modern athletes are a social group “acting in favour of societies with national cultures” (Florian Znaniecki). Their impact on the social environment is best seen during periods of national euphoria associated with victories, regardless of whether they are German athletes returning aboard a luxury ship to Hamburg after their success at the Olympic Games in London, or whether it is a Ugandan marathon runner, who won the only gold medal for his country starting in the same Olympics, and is greeted by crowds in the capital of Uganda, Kampala.

National sports heroes may become part of the national identity if the process of heroization leads to their patterns of behaviour becoming rooted in national mythology and

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<sup>68</sup> Barbara Szacka, Andrzej Szpociński, Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, *Spoleczeństwo polskie wobec przeszłości (Polish Society in Regard to the Past)*, PAN ISP – Pentor, September 2004, pp. 21-22. Research report made available by its author.

<sup>69</sup> *Nowa Polka idolka (New Polish Female Idol)*, „Polityka” 7.3.2009., p. 1.

mass culture, which are inscribed in the set of fundamental characteristics that constitute the national sense of distinctiveness.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p. 14.

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