

A short biography of Olympian Leszek Beblo

Bartłomiej Tworek¹ 

¹ University of Physical Education in Krakow, Poland

Original article

Abstract

Sport is one of the forms of participation in physical culture. Marathon runner Leszek Beblo is an example of participation in physical culture through sport. The track and field athlete has left his mark on the history of Polish athletics through his participation in two Olympic Games, the World Championships in Stuttgart, and as a winner of many prestigious foreign races, including being the only Pole to win the Paris Marathon, which has been held since 1896.

Introduction

The text introduces physical culture as a set of integrated and established behaviors aimed at developing the human body and the results of these behaviors. According to H. Grabowski, there are four forms of participation in physical culture: physical recreation, physical rehabilitation, sports, physical education.¹ Sport is one of the specialized forms of participation in physical culture.² Participation in physical culture provides the opportunity to utilize the values of creative self-development and improve control over one's body.³ The word 'sport' comes from the Latin word 'disporto,' where 'sporta' means gate and the prefix 'dis' means beyond. The word originally meant moving away from one's place of residence for the purpose of entertainment and relaxation.⁴

Sport manifests itself in many aspects of human activity. There are three main types of sports: amateur, competitive, and professional. Amateur sports bring together people who engage in physical activity to improve their physical condition, develop interpersonal relationships, or for recreation. Competitive sports involve people who participate in sports for the purpose

Keywords

- sport
- physical culture
- Olympians

Contribution

- A – the preparation of the research project
- B – the assembly of data for the research undertaken
- C – the conducting of statistical analysis
- D – interpretation of results
- E – manuscript preparation
- F – literature review
- G – revising the manuscript

Corresponding author

Bartłomiej Tworek

e-mail: tworek558@gmail.com

Article info

Article history

- Received: 2023-03-28
- Accepted: 2023-05-24
- Published: 2023-05-31

Publisher

University of Applied Sciences in Tarnow
ul. Mickiewicza 8, 33-100 Tarnow, Poland

User license

© by Authors. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License CC-BY-SA.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

Financing

This research did not received any grants from public, commercial or non-profit organizations.

of competition and achieving results, and these are often associated with sports clubs. Professional sports are practiced by athletes for financial gain as well as for the continuous improvement of their results. Sport often constitutes one of the most important areas of human life and plays a significant role in many aspects of human culture. In some countries, sport is considered synonymous with physical culture, and in popular belief, it is its most important element.⁵

Nowadays, there are frequent discussions regarding professional athletes. This refers to a group of people who treat sport as their main source of income. They earn money from winning competitions and from sponsorship and advertising contracts. The article highlights the figure of marathon runner Leszek Beblo, who undoubtedly belongs to the sphere of professional athletics as its exemplary member. The source of information about the athlete was research conducted using the historical method described in the book by K. Toporowicz.⁶ An interview was conducted with Leszek Beblo and his family, colleagues and coaches.

Sport in the life of Leszek Beblo

Leszek Beblo began his adventure with sports in primary school in Sokolniki. At the age of 14, he played football for the "Stal Stalowa Wola" a local football club, but he had already participated in athletic quadrathlons and football tournaments before that.

After completing primary school, Leszek Beblo continued his education at the Józef Sarna School Complex in Gorzyce. The school organized cross-country races annually, and in 1981, Beblo won such a race and discovered his talent for running. He was noticed by his physical education teacher and subsequently qualified for higher-level competitions, representing the school in Stalowa Wola. There, without any preparation, he won the cross-country race against already accomplished runners. He was then spotted by coach, Stanisław Anioł, who quickly convinced Beblo's teachers to transfer him to a different school and commence his education and training in Stalowa Wola.

Leszek Beblo's first international appearance took place in Lisbon on March 24, 1985, at the World Cross Country Championships over a distance of 8 kilometers. The young 19-year-old boy, with a short training experience, placed 20th. It was one of the best results in the history of the Junior World Championships achieved by a Pole and a great surprise for the coach. Poland

achieved 19th place in the team rankings. In Portugal, there were 141 athletes from 35 countries competing at the event.

In 1985, after finishing high school, against the recommendations of his coach Stanisław Anioł, and thanks to the urging of Colonel Wiesław Kiryk, the coach of the sports club WKS Oleśniczanka, Leszek Beblo changed his sports club and started his military service, which did not hinder his further athletic development. The sports club and the military unit provided him with suitable conditions for training at an increasingly higher level of international mastery.

In 1989, Leszek Beblo terminated his contract with the military and went to Paris for further development in the field of sport. He changed his sports club to Racing Club de France and mainly trained in the Bois de Boulogne forest. He mostly competed in commercial races but still came back to Poland to win championship events. In 1987, in Poznań, Leszek Beblo won his first medal at the Polish Senior Championships at the age of 21. He competed in the 5000 meters race and finished in third place. The following year, he decided to compete again in the Polish Championships in Grudziądz, also in the 5 000 meters race, and returned home as the vice-champion of Poland. The year 1989 was Leszek Beblo's best year in terms of medals won at the Polish Championships. He began the athletics season by winning a gold medal at the 61st Polish Cross Country Championships in Ostrów Wielkopolski in the 6 kilometers race. He then won another gold medal at the Krakow Academy of Physical Education in the 5 000 meters race. A week after the championships in Krakow, he became the Polish champion in the 10 000 meters race.

In 1990, Leszek Beblo decided to resign from track running and focus on longer distances. In early September, he won his first championship title in the half marathon with a time of 59:58 in the town of Brzeszcze. He also competed in the Palermo and Berlin marathons, but without much success, finishing in 9th place in both races with times of 2:17:17 and 2:13:13, respectively. In April, he won the half marathon in Milan, where he achieved the second-best result in the history of Polish athletics with a time of 1:01:56. This result still ranks as the third-best in Polish athletics history. Having competed in many road races, Leszek Beblo decided to participate in the 10 000-meter race in Barcelona in 1990. He finished 9th in the race, but he set a new personal record with a time of 28:34:47, which is currently the 20th-best result in Polish athletics history.

The year 1991 was a breakthrough in Leszek Beblo's career, as he reached the Olympic qualifying standards set by IAAF and PZLA in London. He finished in the

8th place with a time of 2:11:32, which earned him an Olympic scholarship to prepare for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. A year before the Olympics, Leszek Bebło won three medals at the Polish Championships. He became the vice-champion of Poland in the 5 000 meters race in Kielce, losing only to Michał Bartosz. Then, for the second time in his career, he won the gold medal in the cross-country race over 12 kilometers. Despite an Achilles tendon injury and a longer break from training, he also won the gold medal in the 10 000 meters race at the Polish Championships. At the end of the 1991 athletics season, he won the Second Independence Race over a distance of 11 kilometers distance in Warsaw. Towards the end of the year, Leszek Bebło received an Olympic nomination for the Barcelona Olympic Games.

Before the Olympics, Leszek Bebło won the Polish Cross Country Championships in the 6 kilometers race in Kędzierzyn Koźle. Ultimately, he finished 20th in the marathon with a time of 2:16:38 in his first Olympic appearance in Barcelona, just ahead of his compatriot Wiesław Perszke. Shortly after the Olympics, he won the Reims marathon in the Champagne region with a time of 2:11:42.

In the spring of 1993, Leszek Bebło began his next season at the Polish Cross-Country Championships in Płock, where he won the silver medal in the 12 kilometers race. He then decided to run the Beppu Marathon, where he finished second with a time of 2:13:35. Undoubtedly, one of the most prestigious races in the world that Leszek Bebło has won is the Paris Marathon. As of today, Leszek Bebło is still the only Pole to have won the Paris Marathon since it was first held in 1896. He later competed again in Reims, finishing second with a time of 2:10:22. His next race was at the beginning of September 1993 at the World Championships in Stuttgart, but he did not finish the race. Over the next 3 years (1994–1996), Leszek Bebło did not compete in the Polish Championships, nor did he finish the marathons in Tokyo and Paris due to numerous injuries.

Despite persistent injuries that hindered regular training, Leszek Bebło made it onto the list of representatives for the Atlanta Olympic Games. During the race, Leszek Bebło became exhausted and finished the marathon in 17th place with a time of 2:17:04. He did not participate in the next Olympics in Sydney in 2000 because he did not meet the increased minimum requirement set by the Polish Athletics Association at that time.

Activities of Leszek Bebło after the end of his sports career

In 2005, Leszek Bebło ended his professional career due to a recurring Achilles tendon injury that prevented him from running at a championship level. However, he did not end his involvement with sports after retirement. He decided to found the “Gminny Międzyszkolny Lekkoatletyczny Klub Sportowy Sprint Gorzyce” with his club teammate from “Oleśniczanka,” Wojciech Zieliński, and local physical education teachers who shared his passion for running. They intended to promote a sporting attitude among the local youth.

In 2014, the “Sprint” Gorzyce Inter-School Athletics Club, founded by Leszek Bebło and his club colleague Wojciech Zieliński, organized its first significant initiative – a 5-kilometer street race called “Gorzycka 5” through the streets of Gorzyce. Leszek Bebło was the guest of honor and the face of the first edition of the race. In the following years, the organizers invited notable athletes and marathoners, including Jacek Wszola, Artur Partyka, Izabela Zatorska, and Henryk Szost. In 2015, Leszek Bebło was elected president of the “Sprint” club but resigned shortly after and distanced himself from the club’s activities. Thanks to Leszek Bebło’s initiative in 2014, the sports club continues to operate actively in the Gorzyce municipality. In 2017, the “Fartlek Go” Gorzycki Sports Club organized the I Leszek Bebło Cup Cross-Country Race, which takes place annually, except in 2020.

In 2017, the organizers of the PHILPHS half marathon in Piła decided to feature the image of marathon runner Leszek Bebło on the commemorative medal for all the participants of the half marathon. Since 2006, the medals have featured the silhouettes of athletes who have left their mark on the history of Polish long-distance running.

The most important sports achievements of Leszek Bebło

Personal bests:

- 3000 meters – 7:52:58 (18 June 1989, Warsaw)
- 5000 meters – 13:34:30 (24 June 1989, Saarijärvi)
- 10 000 meters – 28:34:47 (10 August 1990, Brussels)
- Half Marathon – 1:01:56 (7 April 1990, Milan)
- Marathon – 2:09:42 (22 October 1995, Reims)

National competitions:

In the years 1987–2003 he won:

- 8 titles of Polish champion
- 7 titles of vice champion of Poland
- 2 bronze medals of the Polish Championships

International competitions:

- 1990 Marathon Palermo – 2:17:17, 9th place
- 1990 Marathon Berlin – 2:13:13, 9th place
- 1991 Marathon London – 2:11:32, 8th place
- 1992 Marathon Reims – 2:11:41, 1st place
- 1992 Marathon Beppu – 2:13:35, 2nd place
- 1993 Marathon Paris – 2:10:46, 1st place
- 1993 Marathon Reims – 2:10:22, 2nd place
- 1994 Marathon Now York – 2:13:13, 7th place
- 1995 Marathon Pyong Ju – 2:14:41, 12th place
- 1995 Marathon Reims – 2:09:41, 1st place
- 1996 Half Marathon Las Vegas – 1:02:29, 2nd place
- 1993 European Marathon Championships in Stuttgart (did not finish)
- 1985 World Junior Cross Country Championships in Lisbon – 20th place
- 1992 Olympic Games Barcelona – 2:16:38, 20th place
- 1996 Olympic Games Atlanta – 2:17:04, 17th place

Conclusion

Leszek Bebło is one of the best Polish long-distance runners. He participated in the Olympic Games and won numerous medals at the Polish Championships. Bebło's career is an example of participation in physical culture through sport. It required not only hard work

but also perseverance and determination in pursuing his desired goals. By practicing the sport at a high level, Bebło promoted values such as health, competitiveness, and fair play. Sport may be entertainment for some, a passion for others, and a way of life for people like Leszek Bebło. Despite ending his sports career, Leszek Bebło continues to promote sport values among young people by organizing mass runs in his hometown and co-creating a local athletic sports club.

References

- [1] Grabowski H. *Teoria fizycznej edukacji*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne; 1999.
- [2] Krawczyk Z. *Filozofia i socjologia kultury fizycznej: wybór tekstów*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe; 1974:211.
- [3] Marcinkowski M. Cultural and educational determinants of physical activity and concern for the body. *Dialogi o Kulturze i Edukacji*. 2012;1(1):237–256.
- [4] Zabolotna O, Skalski D, Formela M, Nesterchuk N, Grygus I. Sport jako element kultury a edukacja zdrowotna [Sport as an element of culture and health education]. *Rehabilitation & Recreation*. 2019;(4):62–69. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.3383746.
- [5] Dziubiński Z, Krawczyk Z, eds. *Socjologia kultury fizycznej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo AWF; 2011:60.
- [6] Toporowicz H. Elementy metodologii badań historycznych w naukach o kulturze fizycznej. In: Grabowski H, ed. *Metody empiryczne w naukach o kulturze fizycznej*. Kraków: Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego im. Bronisława Czecha; 1996:121–135.