The American YMCA and its physical education program – first steps to world expansion

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Summary
This paper looks at the first steps taken by the American YMCA to expand its physical education program across various countries in South and Central America, Asia and Europe. The YMCA was established in 1844 in London. However, it particularly flourished in the United States of America, building large physical education facilities, setting up its first physical education institute and developing new sports. Their schools were attended by people from all over the world, who went on to promote the organization’s physical education program. Due to cooperation with the US army, the organisation saw further expansion and its secretaries began to operate in other countries. They were instrumental in establishing the first local YMCA groups, often provided with material and financial support by the United States. Local groups began to build their own physical education facilities and adopt new ‘American’ sports. Elwood S. Brown was a pioneer in the promotion of the American YMCA’s physical education program. He worked for the organisation on several continents, significantly assisting the organisation of big sporting events which were always attended by sportsmen from several countries. Unfortunately, many of the national YMCA groups were later paralysed by the Second World War. Despite that, the YMCA has become the largest voluntary youth organisation in the world.

Keywords: YMCA; the spreading of physical education and sport; sport facilities; officials

Introduction
The YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) is an international youth organization with a Christian ethos, established in London by George Williams in 1844 [Konečný 1930, pp. 30-32].

Its symbol is a straight-sided red triangle which symbolizes the three main directions which it focuses on – balance of mind, soul and body. Physical education and sport have always formed only part of the whole association’s program, which has always tried to encourage the all-round development of its members. However, it must be emphasised that the various parts of the YMCA program have never been separate entities but coincide with each other. Hence, if we are to pinpoint the role physical education and sport has played within the YMCA, we should always consider relationships between the various parts of the overall program [Protein 2006, No. 1, p. 8].

In its first few years of existence, the YMCA restricted its activity to spiritual instruction for all members. However, the organisation gained popularity in London and began to expand rapidly to other parts of England, Great Britain, France (1852), the Netherlands (1853), Germany (1883), or to the area now known as Hungary (1883). It became most widespread in the United States of America, though, with the first groups to appear in North America being established almost simultaneously in Boston and Montreal in 1851.

Associations were first housed in humble rooms in churches, rented properties or other buildings designed for a completely different purpose. These cannot have been suitable for physical education and sport [Johnson 1979, p. 31]. By 1860, YMCA members and secretaries had been making efforts to get physical education included in the organization’s program and in 1870 YMCA buildings became equipped with the first gyms and swimming pools. [Constable 1999, pp. 127-128].

Physical education and sport flourished throughout the YMCA between 1880 and 1885, when the first “International Young Men’s Christian Association Training School” was established in Springfield, Massachusetts1 by Jacob I. Brown [Gustav-Wrathall 1998, p. 13]. The organisation soon established a similar school of physical education in Chicago – “Training School of the YMCA”.2 However, they were initial-

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1 In the course of time, this school changed its name several times. In 1912 it was renamed International YMCA College and in 1954 Springfield College.

2 The official name of this institution changed several times – Training School of the YMCA (1890-1896), Secretarial Institute and Training School (1896-1903), Institute and Training School of the YMCA (1903-1913), YMCA College or Association College
ly attended by very few pupils, each school enrolling about a hundred.

Year after year, there was a gradual increase in the number of people who wanted to devote themselves to physical education at one of those schools. By 1925 the situation had changed and both schools were full, with around 500 enrolled pupils. This was a time of rapid development in the YMCA schools. The organisation greatly benefited from sufficient funding, acquiring a large number of generous financial gifts [YMCA atospi... 1926, No. 1, p. 7-9].

It did not take long for physical education and sport to expand across the North American YMCA. By 1890, the organisation owned and used around 400 gyms in the United States of America and Canada.

After such achievements in promoting physical education and sport in the United States of America, there is no wonder that other states asked the YMCA to do the same for their countries.

By 1900, the organisation was working in every continent (except Antarctica), with 16 YMCA centres in South America, 19 in Africa, 20 in Australia and 270 in Asia [McComb 2012, p. 76].

The American YMCA and physical education in Asia

By the second half of the 19th century, the American YMCA had expanded its activity to Asia, particularly to India, Japan, China and the Philippines.

The YMCA entered the Philippines, and many other countries, alongside American soldiers. They had come to the Philippine Islands, which were a Spanish colony, to fight during the Spanish-American war (25th April – 12th August 1898).

By 1907, the YMCA was coaching the Philippines’ best swimmers in the Fort William McKinley YMCA swimming pool in the province of Rizal. The Manila YMCA swimming pool was opened four years later. Credit for such achievement is owed to Elwood Stanley Brown (see Fig. 1). He is considered to be the most significant figure in the Philippines’ YMCA physical education program in the early 20th century. In 1910 (at the young age of 27) he began to organise physical education in Manila, where he became national YMCA physical education director [Johnson 1979, p. 136].

With its growing influence, the YMCA began to promote physical education in local schools and build gyms and swimming pools for the Philippine people. In 1916 the YMCA was instrumental in setting up the first official Philippine scout group [Protein 2003, No. 4].

Within three months of being appointed, E. Brown had prepared the Philippine YMCA’s new physical education program, which included volleyball, basketball (see Fig. 2.), swimming, light athletics, football and baseball. In addition, Elwood Brown also prepared a program for 10 thousand national police officers and 8 thousand members of the US military based in the Philippines. His proposals also led to the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation being established [Con- stable 1999, pp. 129-133].

By 1914 there were projects to build more than 5 thousand courts and sports grounds in the Philippines and building work had begun in schools, city sports grounds and private clubs [Johnson 1979, p. 161]. There were initial teething problems, though, as local people rejected the new “American” sports.

E. Brown’s work in the Philippines was a great achievement. He was soon offered work in another two countries where a YMCA presence had been established – China and Japan. Elwood Brown did subsequently begin working on programs for them, but from a distance - via his YMCA colleagues.

Elwood Brown’s work in these three countries led to the idea of organising the Far Eastern Championship Games, where Philippine, Chinese and Japanese sportsmen were to compete against each other. He

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3 Elwood Brown did not establish the local YMCA group in Manila, though. This had been set up in 1907. His work did significantly improve it, though.

4 The first ever Games were called “First Oriental Olympic Games”. In 1915 the Games were renamed Far Eastern Championship Games.
managed to win recognition for this idea and the first ever Games were held in Manila in 1913. The whole event lasted for ten days, during which the six participating states\(^5\) competed in eight sports. Having been fairly critically acclaimed, E. Brown decided the event should be repeated and the following games were held in Shanghai in 1915 [http://www.ocasia.org/Game/GamesL1.aspx?9QoyD9QEWPfemU/arvY96w==, Accessed 28th October 2015].

However, even E. Brown’s influence was not enough to increase the popularity of the YMCA and its preferred sports in China. Like Japan, China had a very long tradition of physical culture and new “western” sports were initially rejected by the local people. Despite that, in the course of time he had great success in promoting basketball in China. This new “American” game was first mentioned at the beginning of 1896 in Tientsin, where the local YMCA published its “gazette” [Johnson 1979, pp. 190-191].

YMCA physical education director Max J. Exner, who arrived in Shanghai in 1908, did bring certain changes to the organisation of physical education and sport though, introducing the association’s new physical education program to the country. He began by introducing two-year physical education studies for potential local sports directors. He also offered first aid courses to those who were interested. In 1910 he also managed to acquire athletics grounds for the YMCA’s needs. However, a year later, he was replaced by Canadian J. Howard Crocker [Guttmann 2007, pp. 206-208].

Crocker was actually the mastermind behind China’s participation in the first “Oriental Olympic Games”. He went about choosing 36 sportsmen to represent China at this event, forming the first ever Chinese team to compete abroad [Morrison 2004, pp. 20-25]. Between 1916 and 1918 his successor, David K. Brace, worked hard to have a physical education department established at Tsinghua University in Beijing. This was the first modern physical education department of its time in China [Johnson 1979, p. 148].

The YMCA’s early work in Japan was hindered even more than in China. In the second half of the 19th century, Japan still took great pride in its own traditions, although it did slowly begin to accept western models. The first Japanese YMCA was opened in Tokyo in 1880. Two years later, another YMCA was established in Osaka. The year 1908 represented a turning point for the YMCA in Japan, when local director of physical education Hyozo Ohmori returned from physical education training at the International YMCA training school in Springfield. Unfortunately, Ohmori’s support for the YMCA did not last for long as he died after contracting tuberculosis. The problem was that the Japanese did almost nothing but combat sports [Constable 1999, p. 137].

However, they did come to like one collective sport promoted by the YMCA - baseball. This was played at the YMCA building in Tokyo along with tennis, basketball and softball. However, the building there was found to be insufficient and a new one was opened in 1917 [Johnson 1979, pp. 147-149]. It became home to the first indoor sports hall and the first indoor swimming pool in Japan. Three years later the Osaka YMCA organised the first ever summer youth camp in Japanese history [Protein 2002, No. 12].

The Japanese love of baseball greatly contributed to it being included in the first Oriental Olympic Games. But the Japanese sent only a baseball team and two runners to participate in the Oriental Olympic Games.

Two years later the Japanese were still not particularly interested in participating in the Oriental Olym-
pic Games. Only 20 sportsmen were sent to compete, as against 90 Philippine and 100 Chinese. However, the few Japanese were relatively successful, achieving victory in tennis, the marathon and swimming. In 1917 the Games were held in Tokyo (see Fig. 3.) [Constable 1999, pp. 140-145].

At that time, two of the YMCA’s physical education directors for Japan - Elwood Brown and his successor Franklin H. Brown⁶ - tried hard to get the local government to support the expansion of their physical education program. This was achieved, representing a partial breakdown of barriers, and a new physical education base was built near Tokyo. This became the training camp for Japanese sportsmen focusing on team games.

Franklin H. Brown subsequently came up with the idea of introducing basketball and volleyball to Japanese schools and forming a national basketball team that would begin to play matches against Korea. This was achieved as well. Later the YMCA in Tokyo began to serve as a sports training centre where, for example, swimming was very popular [Johnson 1979, pp. 149-150].

The Japanese became much more enthusiastic about participating in the following seven Far Eastern Championship Games [Constable 1999, pp. 145-146]. The sixth Games, held in Osaka, Japan in 1923, were reported to have attracted 40,000 spectators.⁸ Their tradition continued up to 1934, when the last Games were held in Manila.

The YMCA was also active in India. Elmer Berry from Springfield School became the first YMCA director in India, taking charge of physical education and sport in 1901 and 1902. He was subsequently replaced by Canadian T. Duncan Patton who brought basketball to India. Although physical education directors never stayed long, they still managed to have volleyball adopted in the country. They also helped to establish local physical education institutions [Johnson 1979, pp. 153-155].

The director of the Indian YMCA in the twenties was A. G. Noehren. He and the Anglo-Indian businessman Dorabji Tata worked together to assemble an independent Indian team for the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. India’s participation in these VIII Olympic Games was preceded by the All-India championship in New Delhi, which the YMCA had been responsible for organising. Tata and Noehren subsequently chose eight winners to take part in the Olympic Games. Three years later, the YMCA provided financial resources to support establishment of the Indian Olympic Association [Majumdar & Mehta 2009, pp. 13-14].

The YMCA opened a school of physical education in India too – the National YMCA School of Physical Education – in the city of Chennai (Madras). Teaching commenced in 1920 and students were introduced to sports like basketball, volleyball, badminton, softball, baseball, football and hockey. Athletics disciplines were also popular there. Its central figure was Harry Buck. The YMCA’s physical education program gradually made its way into other Indian schools [MacAlon 2013, p. 64].

The American YMCA and physical education in Central and South America

YMCA presence in South America dates back to the second half of the 19th century. Between 1870 and 1874 there was a YMCA in Buenos Aires that had been founded by English and Scottish immigrants. However, the American YMCA began its activity there later. In 1891 Myron Augustus Clark came to Sao Paulo, moving to Rio de Janeiro two years later. The first YMCA physical education director sent to work full time in South America was Maurice C. Sallasa in 1911 [Dyreson, Mangan & Park 2013, p. 185].

Despite being in Brazil for only a year, he managed to establish a leaders’ corps and develop a limited physical education programme. In 1911, the YMCA also organised the first ever volleyball competition in Brazil, held in the city of Recife [Nauright & Parrish 2012, p. 145].

A year later, Maurice C. Sallasa was replaced by Henry J. Sims who was a specialist in wrestling and gymnastics. He spent most of his time trying to improve young Brazilians’ performances in these sports. While he was working there, the popularity of physical education and sport constantly rose. In 1920 a National Department of Physical Education was established in Brazil and H. J. Sims was called to its office. In this new position, he developed Christian physical education even further [Johnson 1979, pp. 167-170].

As for Uruguay, Montevideo became home to the first YMCA in 1909 but it was of little significance until the following year. In 1910, Springfield College graduate and YMCA secretary Jess T. Hopkins was employed in Montevideo, where he soon received 50,000 dollars from the Uruguayan government to erect sports grounds. These were used for American sports that had been introduced here by the YMCA and its functionaries. J. T. Hopkins brought basketball to South America, for example [Johnson 1979, p. 91]. In addition, he was instrumental in raising the standard of school athletics and modernising school facilities and areas that could be used for physical education and sport.

In 1916 the Uruguayan YMCA began to discuss the possibility of establishing a YMCA school to instruct local secretaries and physical education directors. J. T. Hopkins had been in favour of this idea, which later became reality. Building work had been
completed by 1922 and the school opened its doors to its first students a year later [Dyreson, Mangan & Park 2013, p. 188].

In 1930 the YMCA was instrumental in developing a new indoor sport – futsal (five-a-side soccer). This was first presented by Juan Carlos Ceriani in the Uruguayan capital Montevideo [Bellos 2009, pp. 168-169].

In 1912 Paul Phillips arrived in Argentina’s Buenos Aires, probably at the best possible moment. At the time, a huge wave of construction work had just finished, during which a number of hotels and schools were built. P. Phillips took advantage of this, convincing the “right people” of the need to provide sports facilities. In the following nine years, he went on to organise one of the best physical education programmes in South America.

Phillips himself was inclined towards athletics, which he managed to interest his students in as well. In addition, he organised evening gymnastics classes and introduced basketball to Argentina. Its rules were translated into Spanish by local YMCA secretaries. He was also responsible for organising annual National Championships in boxing, wrestling and swimming. In 1921 he was replaced by Fred W. Dickens. Paul Phillips then left Argentina to spend two years in Turkey.

F. W. Dickens continued with the on-going programme, mainly focusing on athletics. In 1927 he became coach for the Argentinian national team of athletes [Johnson 1979, pp. 171-172].

The first association in Chile was founded in Valparaíso in 1912. Six years later, the movement extended to Santiago de Chile. The physical education programme of the Chilean YMCA was prepared between 1912 and 1915, when Fred C. Wurtz held the post of general secretary. Before the arrival of the American YMCA secretaries, the physical education system in Chile had been highly influenced by the German Turner system, brought by German immigrants. There were also traces of the Swedish system, which Joaquín Cabezas preferred. He was sent by the local authorities to study Ling’s system in Stockholm.

In such an environment it was no easy task for the YMCA to promote its “American” sports. Basketball and volleyball were presented with the slogan “sport for all” and the YMCA finally managed to promote these sports to a limited extent.

J. T. Hopkins held office in Chile too, working hard to modernise and erect sports grounds. In addition, he was responsible for the translation of American physical education books and rules of “American” sports into Spanish [Johnson 1979, p. 252].

The above-mentioned Elwood Brown became another important figure for the YMCA. As he had done in Asia, he wanted to organise a big sporting event that would become a tradition. In 1920 he travelled around South America, where he met local YMCA physical education directors. With funding from them he subsequently managed to organise the so-called South American Games, later renamed the Latin American Games [Constable 1999, p. 150]. Secretaries Dickens and Sims also took part in their organisation [Nauright & Parrish 2012, p. 138].

The first Mexican YMCA was established in 1891, when it separated from the existing Christian Society. It again went on to employ the physical education program imported from the United States. Some local functionaries had spent time in Springfield learning about a number of “American” games, which they subsequently introduced in Mexico.

Basketball is one of those games. The first swimming and basketball teams in Mexico were organised by YMCA physical education directors A. C. Stewart and Charles Westroop. Another important member of the Mexican YMCA to attend Springfield School was Enrique C. Aguierre – the later Mexican minister of sport and physical education [Beezley 2004, p. 59].

Basketball was first introduced in Mexico in 1903. The leader of the Mexican YMCA also changed that year and Richard Williamson became the new secretary. In his charge, the local YMCA flourished. The first athletics clubs were formed and gymnastics also became more widespread.

The first YMCA physical education secretary to work full-time in Mexico was Percy K. Holmes. He came to Mexico in 1910 and during his office he managed to raise the importance of physical education in local schools. In addition, he became founder member of the Mexican Olympic Committee and the first athletics coach for the 1924 Mexican Olympic team. [Johnson 1979, pp. 163-166].

After finishing his work in Brazil, Henri de Baillet–Latour left for Mexico, where he and Mr Cuéllar made efforts to have a delegation of Mexican athletes sent to the “South American Games” in Rio do Janeiro – but without success. However, alongside these two protagonists of sport, the Mexican YMCA did spark off a tradition of Central American Games, first held in Mexico City in 1926 with 14 participating states [Constable 1999, pp. 150-151].

The American YMCA and its physical education programme

American YMCA secretaries began to work in a similar way in Europe. Having originated in England in 1844, the YMCA had already set up a number oflo-
The American YMCA’s first steps towards expansion in Europe go back to the First World War. During the war, the American YMCA worked not only alongside soldiers of various armies but also alongside their prisoners of war [Tlustý 2015]. Elwood Brown was again a major figure working for the YMCA in Russia during the First World War. He later worked in France as director of the YMCA athletics department, which closely cooperated with the American army and was responsible for entertaining American soldiers. After the First World War, he was instrumental in organising the Inter-Allied Games (see Fig. 4.), which took place in 1919 in Paris in honour of the Allies’ victory [Daniels 2000, pp. 123-125]. This sporting event took place at Pershing Stadium, which had been designed and erected with YMCA support. The French government provided the site and the US army did most of the building work [The Inter-allied... 1919, pp. 101-102]. The Inter-Allied Games were a huge success [Summary of world war..., 1920, p. 134].

Pierre de Coubertin was so delighted with their organisation that he sent their program to the organisers of the first post-war Olympic Games, which were held in Antwerp in 1920. Pierre de Coubertin also urged summoned Elwood Brown to speak at four International Olympic Committee meetings in 1920, 1921, 1922 and 1923. During the first one, Elwood Brown expressed his and the YMCA’s plans to organise an event similar to the “Far Eastern Championship Games” in South America [Constable 1999, pp. 147-148].

Physical education functionaries from the American YMCA also gradually began to work in universities and vocational schools in Europe. Through this, the American YMCA slowly extended its physical education activity across Czechoslovakia, Poland, Estonia, Rumania, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey and France [YMCA (Časopis... 1926, No. 1, p. 7-9].

However, the American YMCA’s influence had actually penetrated into Europe prior to the First World War. After J. Naismith had invented basketball, it spread very quickly. It had already been adopted in Europe by the end of the 19th century, particularly in Germany, Russia, Turkey and France. Basketball was presented in Paris in 1893. It was first played in the Czech lands in 1897. It was demonstrated in Turkey in 1904 and a year later in Russia [Sigfried 2008, p. 450].

In Italy, American soldiers demonstrated their “American sports” just after the First World War in 1918-1919, leading to their increased popularity. Basketball, or rather a game similar to it, had first been played in Venice in 1907, but it was American YMCA instructors that increased its popularity among the Italian people during the First World War [Martin 2011, p. 110].

Even after the war had ended, the American YMCA was asked by the Italian government to stay and continue its activity. Its work helped to create a nationwide interest in sport and its high standards led to Platt Adams, secretary, being asked by the Italian Olympic Committee to take charge of the Italian national team and coach them. The YMCA also built large physical education complexes with swimming pools and gyms in Rome and Torino. In particular, the Torino YMCA had superb facilities in the interwar period. Its swimming pool was actually used by the Italian team during their final preparations for the 1924 Summer Olympics. Basketball evidently became the most popular sport promoted by the YMCA [YMCA (Časopis... 1926, No. 1, p. 7-9].

King Alexander of Greece also summoned Arthur E. Marriott, YMCA director of physical education and Springfield College graduate, to form a national Olympic team in post-war Greece. The association had already been given permission to use the National Stadium for some of its physical education events [Constable 1999, pp. 194-195]. L. W. Riess, a big promoter of American sports, later became YMCA physical education director there. Mr Machotka also worked in Greece. The YMCA gradually began to build tennis and basketball courts, football pitches and athletics grounds for its activities in Greece. YMCA bases also had to be built, though. In 1928 a YMCA base was built in Salonic, with a gym and indoor swimming pool.
French playgrounds and parks were also filled with children playing games brought by American YMCA secretaries. These included basketball, volleyball and baseball. Basketball was particularly popular there. It again became a demonstration sport at the 1924 Paris Olympics but this time it was not only played by teams from the host country, as it had been in 1904 [Johnson 1979, pp. 242-247]. L. C. Schroeder, a former student and teacher at the YMCA’s Springfield Physical Education College, was in charge of the French Olympic team at the 1924 Summer Olympics [Tep pražské Ymky 1925, No. 8-9, p. 7]. He organised a wide range of specialised physical education courses. In 1924 - 1925 he also taught in a number of other European countries10 - including Czechoslovakia and Poland [YMCA (Časopis... 1926, No. 1, p. 7-9).

L. C. Schroeder was one of the greatest experts of his time on coaching light athletics. In March 1925, when he was YMCA General Secretary of Physical Education and Sport in Europe, he was invited to stay at the local YMCA in Warsaw. He shared his knowledge and opinions on light athletics and light athletics training, which was of particular benefit to local coaches and their trainees. [Stadion 1925, No. 12, p. 9].

This important functionary also led several sports courses in Czechoslovakia.11 Other YMCA sports pioneers were Captain Machotka, F. M. Marek, J. A. First, J. A. Pipal a L. W. Riess. They organised a huge number of courses for Czechoslovakian sports clubs to teach them new trends in light athletics and, more importantly, ball games [Bureš & Plichta 1931, pp. 383-385].

Indeed, the YMCA is to thank for the expansion of basketball, volleyball, softball and other games across Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the technique of coaching in-game signals was brought to Czechoslovakia by this organisation. F. M. Marek became one of the greatest promoters of ball games in Czechoslovakia, having been introduced to these sports during study stays in Springfield and Chicago. Several other members of the Czechoslovakian YMCA also studied at these two schools [National Archives in Prague, collection: YMCA, No. of the cardboard: 4, Signature: 8].

However, for various sports to be developed and played, new facilities and sports grounds and gyms were required. The first two modern sports grounds were built in 1921 in Prague and Bratislava. Advice and material was provided by J. A. Pipal, who helped to set up sports grounds and athletics tracks for both youngsters and adults throughout the republic. Traces of his work in Czechoslovakia could still be seen 30 years later [National Archives in Prague, collection: YMCA, No. of the cardboard: 4, Signature: 8, YMCA v prvním desetiletí 1921-1931].

By 1927 the YMCA had begun building six more sports grounds and four gyms. By 1928 it had its own sports centre in Prague, with a 25 metre indoor swimming pool, banked running track, gymnastics hall, saunas and a spa. In addition to its own hard work, the local YMCA owed such rapid expansion to the generous support from its colleagues in the USA and Canada. In 1921 it received 1 794 600 dollars from its American colleagues. The YMCA’s other income came from members’ contributions, donations and from the state as well [Kössl, Stumbauer & Waic 2004, p. 98].

The YMCA also established the tradition of permanent summer camps in Czechoslovakia. Its origins can be credited to J. First, who also participated in a long-term study stay in Springfield. The first YMCA camp – Sázava – was established in 1921. By the beginning of the Second World War, the Czechoslovakian YMCA had opened fifteen [Tlustý 2013, pp. 59-67].

The YMCA was founded in Poland again with extensive support from the United States. The YMCA entered the newly established Poland at the end of the First World War alongside their returning army [Polaska YMCA 1923-2003, 2003, p. 2]. Arriving in Warsaw on 21st April 1919, they had accompanied General Józef Haller’s troops back home at his request [Kala-macka 1992, p. 66].

The YMCA’s physical education program became widespread in Poland as well. It organised basketball, volleyball (often doubles or triples) [Polska YMCA og-nisko Krakowskie... 1936, p. 5], chess and table tennis tournaments, swimming races and hiking or skiing trips on innumerable occasions [Polska YMCA ognisko Krakowskie... 1937, p. 21]. The number of YMCA-run boathouses, sports grounds, skiing courses and summer and winter camps rose gradually and was by no means negligible [Polska YMCA ognisko Krakowskie... 1937, p. 5].

In the early 1920’s, the YMCA had three main centres in Poland – in Warsaw, Lodz and Krakow. To start with, though, they only used rented premises [National Archives in Cracow. Collection: Związek Młodzieży Chrześcijańskiej Polska YMCA Ognisko Krakowskie, Signature: 228, O gmach dla krakowskiego gniazda Y.M.C.A.]. Another centre was later opened in Gdan-sk (1932). Smaller centres were also established, of course, and by 1925 there were fifteen of them [YMCA (Časopis... 1925, No. 1-2, p. 37-38).

During the interwar period, the Polish YMCA also built several of its own sports facilities, partly financed by the United States. These were buildings with gyms or an indoor swimming pool. In Poland, the YMCA divided various sports into separate sections, as they had done in Czechoslovakia. These were established and organised by “Klub Sportowy Polskiej YMCA” [Stad-jon 1930, No. 49, p. 8]. Ball games were particularly popular in the winter months and swimming in the summer, the YMCA using its indoor swimming pools for training.

During the interwar period, not only traditional ball games like basketball and volleyball became extremely popular among members. The populari-

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10 He mainly taught on the Balkan peninsular and in Northern Europe.
11 Courses in Nymburk and Olomouc are well-known examples.
ty of less traditional activities like boxing, wrestling and weightlifting also rose and the Warsaw YMCA achieved great success in these sports [Stadjon 1928, No. 21, p. 11].

After the First World War, the American YMCA saw rapid expansion across other countries around the world. But it needed more trained leaders to expand and improve its physical education program. To cater for that, the International Young Men’s Christian Association School was opened in Geneva, Switzerland on 15th September 1927, in line with the American school model. The Geneva school was acknowledged as an affiliated school and promised financial support by the International YMCA College in Springfield, which it had close ties with.

Initially, the institution in Geneva did not have its own facilities for sports provision. However, they did benefit from the fact that everything they required had already been built in Geneva. So athletics, swimming, indoor sports and various gymnastics exercises could be taught there. Students could also use the nearby courts. Students were not only instructed by local experts but also by physical education experts from a number of other countries or fellow students with various sports specialisations.

The school’s teachers always made efforts to combine theory and practice. The various exercises were often anatomic, physiological, aesthetic or otherwise justified. The school’s philosophy was to produce healthy, all-round graduates. The school rejected forced and unilateral training [International Young Men’s... 1928, pp. 8-11].

The American YMCA was thus instrumental in developing physical education and sport in many countries around the world. However, its activity in a number of them was significantly paralysed by the 2nd World War, many local organisations restricting their activity before its outbreak. During the 2nd World War, the YMCA had to suspend its operations in many countries.

Conclusion

The YMCA was founded in London in 1844 but it by no means focused its initial activity on physical education and sport. The YMCA’s physical education program became particularly widespread in the United States, where, in the course of time, there were almost ideal conditions for their activity. Besides building gyms and sports grounds, the association also established schools of physical education, which were attended by students from all over the world.

Due to such schools, the YMCA’s physical education program began to expand rapidly. From the mid-19th century, local YMCA groups were established on almost every continent. Secretaries (mainly from the United States) were sent to various countries around the world to share their expertise and develop physical education and sport. Furthermore, the American YMCA supported these newly established groups, both in terms of material and funding. Its secretaries also introduced new sports and training methods.

A number of YMCA workers were transferred to new workplaces. This was partly thanks to the US army, who the association cooperated with, organising ways to entertain its soldiers. Reading rooms and kitchens were provided, for example, or they were offered the opportunity to do sport. So alongside the US army, YMCA workers travelled to many countries around the world, where they helped to establish the first local groups. By the end of the First World War, the American YMCA was already active in South and Central America, Asia and Europe. On these continents, it also organised big sporting events held for sportsmen from a variety of countries.

In their new workplaces, the various YMCA secretaries made efforts to innovate and modernise the current physical education system and began to introduce and promote their ball games and sports in local schools. They were of such a high standard that many of them were asked to take charge of national teams and prepare them for the top world competitions.

Today, the Young Men’s Christian Association is still active in many countries around the world, although it is not always abbreviated YMCA. The meaning of the abbreviation has actually been translated into many languages and subsequently shortened again. Some examples of how the association can be found abbreviated in Europe are as follows: CVJM in Germany and Austria, KIE in Hungary, IKE in Romania, KFUM in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, CEVI in Switzerland, UCJG in France, XAN in Greece and XCM in the Ukraine. It is the largest volunteer youth organisation in the world, active in approximately 120 countries with a total of around 58 million members.

Sources and literature

Archive funds
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