

POLISH HERO

By Dresdin Archibald

In response to a request from Larry Sheppard of North Bay, ON I am writing a little bit on one of his (and many others) favourite lifters. The man in question is the fabled **Waldemar Romuald Baszanowski** who was born on the banks of the famous river Vistula in Grudziądz, Poland on August 15, 1935 . This town was part of the First German Reich from 1871 to 1920. After the Treaty of Versailles redrew the map of post WWI Europe it became part of the revived nation of Poland. Nineteen years later this part of Poland was directly in the road of Hitler's invaders and still later was to come under the domination of the Soviets. This is typical of the fate of Poland, being a sometime buffer state forever fought over between their contentious German and Russian neighbours. This has produced a distinctive Polish mindset that must have influenced the young Waldemar.

His first name is derived from "**vald mar**", an Old Germanic name meaning "famous ruler." How prophetic that would eventually be. He would take part in four Olympic Games (from 1960 to 1972), taking gold in the two middle ones. Twenty five World Records and many other European and Polish ones would also fall to him over the course of his long career. When looking the name "Waldemar" up on the web there were only two examples of famous people with it. One of them was Baz.

In his earlier athletic endeavours he had excelled as a sprinter and a gymnast, two skills that would stand him in good stead in future. After doing his compulsory military service he entered the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw in 1957. He took the bronze at 60 at the 1957 Polish nationals.

He was often thought of as a muscle-less wonder and maybe he was by weightlifter standards. He was too tall for the 60s and was still too tall when he settled into the 67.5s. This was a time when Polish coached seemed to have all of their lifters competing one or even two categories too low. But closer examination revealed a very athletic physique that was more muscular than what first met the eye. He would always be the example given when any coach was describing a lifter with lean athletic lines. This unlikely physique probably contributed much to his great popularity.

As for style, he was an enigma, changing from split to squat and back again all through his career. Other lifters have done this but they did not set world records with both. He did. He started as a splitter probably because it was another Pole, American Norbert Schemansky who greatly influenced East European quick lift styles. The Soviets took many films of the Old Professor, whose bottom positions were low and faultless. His pulling was primitive, often done on sharply bent arms but once he dove under he hit the right positions. They then taught this style



to all of their lifters right up into the early 1960s. While the Americans adopted the squat style during the mid 1950s many of the Soviets and Poles retained the split until the late 1960s. Baszanowski as undoubtedly influenced by this. But when the advantages of the squat style were shown him he easily learned it as well, and put it to use. He was the last man to set world records with the split and also the only one to set world records in both styles in the snatch. As far as I know he cleaned only in the split style, at least when at the elite level. Hoffman claimed he also squat cleaned at one time but I have seen no photos of such. The fact that he used a squat snatch and split clean is also unusual. Most lifters who employ both styles use a split snatch and squat clean. He was never a threat to breaking a press record due to his slim build and long arms but with the loosening of the rules during the 1960s he was able to stay close enough so that he never had to make up too much in the quick lifts.

His first international meet was the **1960** Olympics in some very fast company. All of the top five would win world titles in their careers. Baz had arrived in the sport late in life for a

lifter. Many have arrived and retired before he even started his international career. Few would have imagined that he would soon come to dominate his category in the coming decade. (Sorry, no lift-by-lift available).

1960 Results	NAT	Press			Total
		Press	Sn	C&J	
1 BUSHUEV Victor	URS	125.0	122.5	150.0	397.5
2 TAN Howe Liang	USA	115.0	110.0	155.0	380.0
3 ABDUL A.	HUN	117.5	115.0	147.5	380.0
4 ZIELINSKI Marian	POL	115.0	110.0	150.0	375.0
5 BASZANOWSKI Waldemar	POL	105.0	117.5	147.5	370.0
6 HUSZKA Mihaly	HUN	110.0	107.5	147.5	365.0

All of that would change in the **1961** Worlds in Vienna. Baz would overcome all of the erstwhile favourites in the 67.5s and win quite unexpectedly. S&H titled their story on him as “Poland’s Surprise Champion”. One of the reasons of course was his age. He was now 26, about the time that most elite lifters start to wonder how long they will last. He totalled 402.5 that day. He finished 2.5 ahead of Sergei Lopatin (URS) and the man who would be his long time nemesis, team-mate Marian Zielinski, by 7.5.

1961 Results	NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1 BASZANOWSKI Waldemar	POL	115.0	120.0	120.0	122.5	122.5	127.5	155.0	160.0	162.5	402.5
2 LOPATIN Sergei	URS	120.0	125.0	130.0	115.0	120.0	122.5	160.0	160.0	152.5	400.0
3 ZEILINSKI, Marian	POL	120.0	125.0	127.5	112.5	117.5	120.0	150.0	155.0	155.0	397.5

In their article S&H mentioned the track and field and soccer work that Baszanowski did to help his conditioning. This was treated as quite the novelty at the time but hindsight has shown this to be a desirable practice and now a common one in the re-adaptation cycles. Baz was thought to be the first such exponent and also thought to be one of only a few who did so. Such work would eventually be known as “general physical conditioning” or GPP for short after it was adapted to weightlifting from other sports by writers like Medvedev and Matveev. Baszanowski’s great condition and his ultimate successes did much to popularize this aspect of total sport preparation. The days of the slow, lumbering lifter, if they ever existed, were now definitely gone, even for big men.

In **1962** the Worlds had been scheduled for the USA but their unwillingness to allow the East German flag to fly caused them to be moved to Budapest. In his third Worlds Baz added 10 kg to his total but only managed the silver. He thus showed that his performance the previous year was no one-time wonder. But if he wanted to hold the gold again in ever tighter competition he would have to do better. The Russians had won this category every year from 1953 to 1960 with a different lifter almost every year. In 1962 they had yet another new lifter, Viktor Kaplunov, better than all the others and reputedly a professional bear hunter up near Archangel. He would prove too much for our man, even though his 412.5 total tied the world record. The Russian took gold with 415 while Zielinski got another bronze with 405.

1962 Results	NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1 KAPLUNOV Viktor	URS	125.0	130.0	132.5	115.0	120.0	122.5	150.0	155.0	160.0	415.0
2 BASZANOWSKI Walden	POL	117.5	122.5	125.0	122.5	127.5	127.5	155.0	160.0	162.5	412.5
3 ZEILINSKI, Marian	POL	120.0	125.0	127.5	115.0	120.0	122.5	150.0	155.0	160.0	405.0

Things went no better for him in **1963** but with a surprise twist. At the Worlds in Stockholm he even dropped 2.5 kg but still managed to take the silver again via bodyweight. This would be a replay of 1962, going up against Kaplunov and Zielinski again. But this time it was the veteran Pole who came up the middle to win while the Soviet had to settle for bronze.

1963 Results		NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1	ZIELINSKI, Marian	POL	125.0	130.0	135.0	115.0	120.0	122.5	155.0	160.0	160.0	417.5
2	BASZANOWSKI Walde	POL	120.0	125.0	127.5	125.0	125.0	125.0	160.0	170.0	170.0	410.0
3	KAPLUNOV Viktor	URS	127.5	132.5	135.0	117.5	122.5	125.0	155.0	160.0	160.0	410.0



Bas Splitting



Grand Old Man Marian Zielinski Frogging

1964 saw the Olympics come to Tokyo. The Japanese took this opportunity to show the world that they were now welcomed back into the world's community of nations. Rome had taken a similar tack four years previously when they proclaimed that they were the first Axis nation to be trusted by the world again. In the competition home-town boy Yoshinobu Miyake took the 60 kg gold. The next night saw Baz and Kaplunov both total 432.5. But our man was 350 grams lighter so Poland had a gold to add to Zielinski's repeat as bronze winner.

1964 Results		NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1	BASZANOWSKI Walder	POL	125.0	130.0	132.5	127.5	132.5	135.0	160.0	165.0	165.0	432.5
2	KAPLUNOV Viktor	URS	135.0	140.0	142.5	120.0	125.0	127.5	160.0	165.0	167.5	432.5
3	ZEILINSKI, Marian	POL	130.0	135.0	140.0	120.0	120.0	120.0	160.0	172.5	172.5	420.0

In Tehran the next year we had the usual post Olympic let-down. At least it was usual in the less competitive environment of 1965. Lifters would peak for the five rings but then take their foot off the gas the following year. This was sort of an early form of long term cycling. Baz would make 427.5, five kilos less than the previous year. It was a great year for the Poles. Zielinski took the silver while the rest of the team won the team title. Kaplunov never seemed to live up to his earlier potential. It was thought that the younger man would soon move out of reach of Baszanowski but the younger man faltered and the older Polish veterans prevailed. This routing of the Russian must have been savoured by the folks in Poland.

1965 Results		NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1	BASZANOWSKI, Walden	POL	122.5	130.0	135.0	130.0	135.0	135.0	160.0	165.0	167.5	427.5
2	ZEILINSKI, Marian	POL	135.0	135.0	140.0	120.0	125.0	125.0	160.0	165.0	167.5	425.0
3	KAPLUNOV, Viktor	URS	130.0	135.0	137.5	120.0	125.0	125.0	155.0	170.0	170.0	412.5

It was in East Berlin in 1966 that Baz's career was diverted in a strange way. Yet another new lightweight phenomenon emerged from the Soviet Union in the name of Evgeni Katsura. He was a gifted athlete who worried the Poles greatly. It was decided that Baz would be better off going up to the 75s to challenge Viktor Kurentsov even though the Russian was also coming on strong. In the meet Baz was able to take the silver even though he weighed only 70 kg. It appeared to be a good career move. However, it eventually occurred that Katsura was convicted of drunk driving, sent to jail and stripped of his "Master of Sport"

honours. Soon after they found him hanging lifeless in his cell. At the same time Baz was having difficulty gaining the necessary muscular bodyweight that would be needed to successfully conquer Kurentsov and Ohuchi. We see this in the results below. Baz had Kurentsov at the subtotal but just did not have enough gas for those heavy jerks. In fact Kurentsov took the 75s across the 400 pound jerk barrier with his 3rd lift. This unfortunate turn of events enabled Baz to return to his natural 67.5 category for the next season.

1966 Results		Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total	
NAT		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3		
1	KURENTOV Viktor	URS	135.0	140.0	145.0	127.5	127.5	127.5	167.5	177.5	182.5	450.0
2	BASZANOWSKI, Waldem	POL	135.0	142.5	142.5	127.5	135.0	137.5	165.0	175.0	185.0	447.5
3	DITTRICH Werner	URS	130.0	140.0	140.0	127.5	132.5	135.0	165.0	170.0	170.0	442.5

In 1967 the World's were originally scheduled for a return engagement in Tokyo. But the Japanese government would not allow the East Germans to fly their flag. This situation ultimately led to the Worlds being cancelled when there was no time to find a substitute host nation. Luckily there was a "Little Olympics" meet to be held in Mexico City as a dry run for 1968. Since most of the world's best were invited this would have to serve as a sort of unofficial Worlds. Despite all this Waldemar would reach a new PR as a lightweight with a winning total of 440 kg, all serving notice that the 32 year old was not going to step aside just yet. Neither was the 38 year old Zielinski for that matter.

1967 Results		Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total	
NAT		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3		
1	BASZANOWSKI, Waldem	POL	130.0	135.0	135.0	130.0	135.0	135.0	165.0	170.0	170.0	440.0
2	ZIELINSKI Marian	POL	130.0	135.0	140.0	120.0	120.0	125.0	155.0	155.0	160.0	415.0
3	JALAYER Parvis	IRN	117.5	122.5	122.5	122.5	127.5	127.5	162.5	170.0	170.0	407.5



Low Jerk



This is how they pressed in 1970

The year 1968 meant another mythical trip to Mt. Olympus. Baz was at his career peak and was fully expected to win. And win he did, although he slipped a little to 437.5 kg. Parvis Jalayer (IRN) advanced to take the silver while the soon to be 39 year old Zielinski hung in for yet another bronze, his third at the Olympics.

1968 Results		Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total	
NAT		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3		
1	BASZANOWSKI, Waldem	POL	130.0	135.0	140.0	130.0	135.0	140.0	167.5	170.0	170.0	437.5
2	JALAYER Parvis	IRN	120.0	125.0	127.5	120.0	125.0	127.5	165			422.5
3	ZEILINSKI, Marian	POL	135.0	140.0	140.0	120.0	120.0	125.0	160			420

But it was **1969** that he made his best winning total as a lightweight. The best thing was that this 445 was made before a home town crowd in Warsaw. While on the podium the crowd chanted "**Sto Lat! Sto Lat!**", the famous Polish toast exhorting the honouree to "live to 100 years". That same crowd would just as enthusiastically cheer another Pole later in the week as Bob Bednarski (USA) battled the Estonian Soviet Jan Talts in a controversial 110 category. This was truly the crowning meet of his career when his countrymen could see for themselves how great he had been all those years. It should be noted here that Baz almost did not live to compete in these Worlds. Some months before he was involved in a car accident that claimed the life of his wife. Recovering from his injuries and also despondent over the loss of his wife, he was in no condition to defend his title. But eventually he came around and decided that the best way to combat his problems was to lose himself in heavy training. The result was just what he needed.



By this time the old soldier Zielinski had finally retired but was to be replaced by another new Polish lifter. Zbigniew Kaczmarek was the man to take his place and soon was making life just as difficult for his illustrious teammate as Zielinski had. He served notice for the future here with his bronze medal.

1969 Results		NAT	(Sorry, no lift-by-lift)			
			Press	Sn	C&J	Total
1	BASZANOWSKI, Waldemar	POL	140.0	135.0	170.0	445.0
2	BAGOCS Janos	POL	135.0	127.5	167.5	430.0
3	KACZMAREK Zbigniew	POL	140.0	125.0	160.0	425.0

The year **1970** saw the Worlds finally come to the USA in Columbus, Ohio. It would mark the start of Baszanowski's descent from the top of his sport. He managed a 437.5 total, still good, but he was missing lifts he would have done in the past. The writing was now on the wall. In addition, by now young Kaczmarek had come of age and was able to just edge Baz out of the gold. It would seem that the only ones Bas ever had to worry much about were his fellow Poles.

1970 Results		NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1	KACZMAREK Zbigniew	POL	135.0	140.0	142.5	125.0	132.5	135.0	160.0	165.0	167.5	440.0
2	BASZANOWSKI Waldemar	POL	137.5	137.5	137.5	130.0	135.0	137.5	165.0	170.0	170.0	437.5
3	DEHNAVI, N	IRN	135.0	140.0	140.0	120.0	125.0	125.0	160.0	167.5	167.5	420.0

In **1971** it was more of the same. Baz repeated his 1970 total while Baz slipped a bit more. He now missed old PRs regularly as we can see below. He did look brilliant at times, as he cleaned the 172.5 but could not hold the jerk. He could console himself that he was still one of the two best in the world but that has never been good enough for champions. He wanted to win it all one more time.

1971 Results		NAT	Press			Snatch			Clean & Jerk			Total
			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
1	KACZMAREK Zbigniew	POL	142.5	142.5	147.5	127.5	127.5	130.0	165.0	165.0	170.0	440.0
2	BASZANOWSKI Waldemar	POL	140.0	140.0	145.0	130.0	135.0	135.0	165.0	170.0	172.5	435.0
3	KIRZHINOV Mukharby	URS	135.0	135.0	135.0	120.0	125.0	127.5	162.5	167.5	167.5	430.0

1972 was to be his final year of competition. He would qualify for his fourth Olympic team but the hoped-for impetus that a possible record third Games gold would provide did not materialize. He had reached a full 37 years of age two weeks before the Games. The Black September affair had not yet happened so that could not be used as an excuse. But this time

it was Father Time who was the culprit, a most uncompromising opponent who seldom in the habit of giving out favours. Kirzhinov by now was just too strong, as was Kaczmarek. Baz's press had improved, but only due to the lax adjudication that made it possible for thin men to press world records. His 435 total was one of his best but it was no longer good enough for victory. When the day was over the one time surprise champion had to settle for 4th place. With that Waldemar Baszanowski decided to call it a career. (Sorry, no full lift-by-lift).

1972 Results	NAT	Press			Total
		Press	Sn	C&J	
1 KIRZHINOV Mukharby	URS	147.5	135.0	177.5	460.0
2 KUCHEV Mladen	BUL	157.5	125.0	167.5	450.0
3 KACZMAREK Zbigniew	POL	145.0	125.0	167.0	437.0
4 BASZANOWSKI Waldemar	POL	142.5	130.0	162.5	435.0

In the 1970s Indonesia hired him as their national coach. I'm sure he was also functioning in a wider role. His influence in the years he was there undoubtedly resulted in the awarding of the Junior Worlds to Jakarta in 1993.

His luck in matrimony did not improve, having lost his second wife to cancer. He is now married a third time I believe.



Coach Baszanowski



President Baszanowski

Eventually he returned to Poland. There he rapidly rose up the ranks of their sporting community. He eventually headed up the Polish Olympic Committee, a very prestigious job in that country. Then in 1996 Baz was elected to the IWF Executive Committee.

In 1999, he was elected President of the European Weightlifting Federation. Due to the fact that he thus had an automatic seat on the IWF Executive he dropped his elected IWF position so as to concentrate on the European Federation. Although Asia is coming on strong Europe is still the premier continental federation so his position there is one of the most important in our sport.

I have met the man and chatted with him several times. He asked me about the whereabouts of Andrej Kulesa and Miroslav Korkowski (MB), both of whom he had mentored in earlier days. He speaks very good English and looks not much older than he did in his prime. He still has his trademark flattop and has not gained a pound since retiring.

When I went up to Nunavut to work right after the 2003 Worlds I told one of my new colleagues, a Pole, that I not only knew his great countryman but had in fact chatted with him two weeks previous. He then made a great show of bowing down to me in respect. He was not a lifter but due to Poland's rather different hero manufacturing requirements he knew all about Baszanowski. Finally, true to his name he has indeed become a **famous ruler** of the iron world who may indeed live to see his centennial birthday.