

= Ok?cie Airport incident =

The Ok?cie Airport incident (Polish : Afera na Ok?ciu) was a dispute between players and technical staff of the Poland national football team on 29 November 1980 , starting at the team hotel in Warsaw and climaxing at Ok?cie Airport . An incident of footballing insubordination at a time when strike action and other forms of civil resistance were intensifying in communist Poland , it caused a domestic press storm , which led first to the suspension of several prominent players , then the resignation of the team manager , Ryszard Kulesza .

Józef M?ynarczyk , the team 's goalkeeper , was hungover when the time came to leave the hotel for the airport , having not been to sleep following a night on the town with a friend . Kulesza and one of his assistants , Bernard Blaut , decided to leave M?ynarczyk behind , much to the indignation of some players , including Stanis?aw Terlecki , Zbigniew Boniek , W?odzimierz Smolarek and W?adys?aw ?muda . Terlecki , a stridently pro @-@ Western intellectual with a reputation for mocking the communist establishment , was particularly angered , and himself drove M?ynarczyk to the airport , where the players continued their protests . Kulesza eventually relented and allowed M?ynarczyk to travel with the team .

The Polish media took hold of the story and vociferously attacked the rebellious players over the following days . Meanwhile , Terlecki again defied the communist authorities by arranging for the players to meet Pope John Paul II . The Polish Football Association sent Terlecki , M?ynarczyk , Boniek and ?muda home and imposed various bans preventing them from playing at the international and club level over the next year . Terlecki and Boniek in particular were condemned by the association as insubordinate " rabble @-@ rousers " . Smolarek received a more modest , suspended ban . Kulesza resigned in protest at the sanctions imposed on the players , saying they were too harsh . Most of the banned players were reinstated during 1981 , but Terlecki was not ? he emigrated to the United States in June that year and although he returned home five years later , he never played for Poland again .

= = Background = =

In June 1976 , a series of protests took place across communist Poland soon after the government announced plans to increase sharply the fixed prices charged nationwide for many basic commodities . Violent incidents occurred in P?ock , Radom and Ursus as the protests were forcibly put down , and the planned price hikes were cancelled . These demonstrations and the events surrounding them brought the Polish workforce and intellectual political opposition together , and by 1980 , a campaign of civil resistance for political change was intensifying strongly . Industrial strike action in Lublin in July 1980 ? the so @-@ called Lublin July ? preceded the formation of Solidarity (Solidarno??) in the port city of Gda?sk during the following months . This was the first non @-@ communist trade union in an Eastern bloc country . The government took several steps to obstruct Solidarity 's emergence , enforcing press censorship and cutting off telephone connections between the coast and the hinterland , but despite these efforts four out of every five Polish workers were members of the union by late 1980 .

Poland 's national football team , managed by Ryszard Kulesza , was then regarded as one of the world 's best , having finished third at the 1974 World Cup . In November 1980 it was ranked sixth in the world by the Elo rating system . Late that month , the team was preparing for a 1982 World Cup qualifying match away against Malta on 7 December . The squad 's departure was scheduled for 29 November , 10 days before the game , so the players could attend a training camp in Italy , then contest a warm @-@ up match against a team representing the Italian league .

One of Poland 's key players at the time was Stanis?aw Terlecki , a forward whose club was ?KS ?ód? . The son of university lecturers , Terlecki held a degree in history from the University of ?ód? , as well as fervent anti @-@ communist political views and a strident attitude regarding their display . He was known for openly mocking the establishment with subversive abandon , and regularly made jokes in public about communist authority figures and organisations , prompting the ire of the Polish Football Association (PZPN) and the Warsaw police force . The first Polish international player with

a university degree in anything other than physical education , he eschewed the Polish sports magazines read by many of his team @-@ mates on road trips in favour of Western news journals such as Newsweek and Time . Like many Polish intellectuals , he sympathised with movements such as Solidarity ; following their example , he twice attempted to unionise Polish footballers during the late 1970s . The PZPN blocked both attempts , banning Terlecki from all organised football each time ; first for six months , then for a year .

= = Incident = =

= = = Main incident = = =

Late on 28 November 1980 , the night before the team 's departure for Italy , goalkeeper Józef Młynarczyk and forward Włodzimierz Smolarek , both of Widzew Łódź , left the team hotel in Warsaw , the Hotel Vera , without permission . According to Smolarek they did this to get some dinner because they did not like the food at the hotel . They met a friend of Młynarczyk 's , sports journalist Wojciech Zieliński , at the Adria nightclub . According to Andrzej Iwan , another member of the team , the main topic of conversation was Zieliński 's estranged wife , who had been caught prostituting herself around Warsaw , and had since moved to Italy . Several Poland players knew her , and Młynarczyk had just been to Italy to play for Widzew Łódź against Juventus . According to Iwan , the journalist encouraged Młynarczyk to drink as they talked , hoping the goalkeeper might have news of her . Smolarek left the club around 02 : 00 , but Młynarczyk and Zieliński stayed until about three hours later .

A senior national team official , Colonel Roman Lisiewicz of the Polish Army , said he saw the goalkeeper and the journalist reach the hotel in a taxi soon after 05 : 00 ? but rather than going to his room , Młynarczyk then left again with Zieliński before returning again around 07 : 00 . Tired and hungover , Młynarczyk joined the rest of the players for breakfast , and according to Terlecki spent most of the meal getting worked up about possible managerial retribution . Młynarczyk was in such bad shape that he was unable to carry his own bags ; Smolarek took them for him . Next to the team bus , one of Kulesza 's assistants , Bernard Blaut , confronted Smolarek and told him that Młynarczyk was to stay behind .

Smolarek , Terlecki and two other Polish players ? Zbigniew Boniek and Władysław Muta , both of Widzew Łódź ? angrily objected and nearly came to blows with Blaut . Grzegorz Lato , one of the team 's forwards , did not join the protest but later said that he had not thought Młynarczyk drunk enough to warrant exclusion . The team eventually left without Terlecki or Młynarczyk . Terlecki , whose own car was to hand , drove himself and Młynarczyk to the airport , where the confrontation continued .

Terlecki tried to stop the many pressmen at the airport from photographing Młynarczyk by running around , yelling , and snatching cameras and microphones from their hands . Meanwhile , the other players attempted to talk Kulesza around , telling him that Młynarczyk had serious personal problems . Kulesza eventually relented and allowed the goalkeeper to travel with the team .

= = = Press storm ; players meet the Pope = = =

Among the journalists at the airport were Jacek Gucwa of Polish Television , Bogdan Chruściński of Polish Radio , and Remigiusz Hetman of the weekly football journal Piłka Nożna . News about the incident quickly spread across the country , partly because of Terlecki 's outlandish actions in the reporters ' presence ? Iwan later reflected that Terlecki had " made so much commotion it was impossible to sweep everything under the carpet " . Boniek corroborates this version of events : " Terlecki was massively to blame . He brought Młynarczyk to the airport in his own car , then pulled the plug powering a TV camera out of the wall . " Grzegorz Majchrzak , a historian of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance , questions Boniek 's words , positing that he might have distorted events in an attempt to distance himself from Terlecki .

The government attempted to use the scandal as a popular distraction , aiming to deflect attention from the strikes and other industrial action . A number of journalists attacked the players who had supported Młynarczyk ; the Przegląd Sportowy sports magazine ran the headline " No Mercy for Those Guilty of the Scandal at the Airport " while Tempo , another journal , was similarly severe , proclaiming " This Cannot Be Tolerated " . Piłka Nożna condemned the " magnificent men ... who think they can do what they want " , but at the same time questioned the conduct of the team 's non-playing staff .

In the Italian capital , Terlecki continued to defy the establishment . The players were under strict instructions not to associate with the Vatican while in Rome , but Terlecki arranged for them to meet Pope John Paul II , who was himself Polish . Seeing this as a second act of defiance , the PZPN promptly sent Terlecki , Młynarczyk , Boniek and Żmuda home , escorted by General Marian Ryba of the Polish Army , who was also the football association president . Lech Poznań 's Piotr Mowlik replaced Młynarczyk for the match against Malta , which Poland won 2 - 0 .

= = Aftermath = =

= = Hearings and suspensions = =

Ryba announced on 1 December 1980 that he intended to bar the dissenting players from the Poland squad . When the rest of the team returned to Poland , Terlecki once again attempted to form a footballers ' union . Securing the support of 16 other Poland international players , he wrote a letter to the PZPN declaring their intention to do so , leading the authorities to order them to face a tribunal . Only Terlecki , Boniek , Żmuda and Młynarczyk continued to endorse the letter when challenged in court .

On 15 December , PZPN officials attempted to reconstruct the night 's events , asking various players and staff to give accounts of what had happened . Several journalists were present . The stories told contradicted each other in several places , notably regarding how much Młynarczyk had had to drink . The team 's technical staff said that he had been obviously intoxicated when they had seen him , while the goalkeeper insisted he had taken only " three glasses of champagne and a sip of beer " with his friend . Another point of contention regarded the conversation at the airport , which had caused Kulesza to yield . It was generally agreed that the players had talked the manager around by telling him that Młynarczyk had personal problems , but the non-playing staff now accused them of emotional blackmail . The players said their intention had been to explain the goalkeeper 's off-field issues to help the manager make a more informed decision .

Terlecki 's answers at this meeting under the questioning of General Ryba , a former military prosecutor , were typically provocative ; when the general asked what time Terlecki had left the hotel on 29 November , the ŻKS forward said 08 : 00 . " Are you sure it was 08 : 00 ? " Ryba pressed ? " Are you sure it wasn 't 08 : 02 ? " The player replied that he wasn 't : " No . Maybe it was even 08 : 03 . I don 't know this time exactly , because I have one of your Russian watches . "

A week later , the PZPN announced its final verdict . The only versions of events accepted for consideration were those recounted by Kulesza and Blaut ; those of all the players and of the team physiotherapist and sport psychologist were dismissed . Żmuda and Młynarczyk were barred from playing for either Poland or their clubs for eight months , and Terlecki and Boniek for twelve . Smolarek received a two-month ban , which was suspended for six months . Citing their previous records of insubordination and misconduct , the PZPN called Terlecki and Boniek " rabble-rousers " .

= = Reactions = =

Kulesza left his job soon afterwards ; according to Majchrzak , he resigned in protest at the players ' punishments , which he thought were too harsh . Officials at Widzew Łódź accused the PZPN of bias , saying the association had not supervised the players properly and should shoulder some of

the blame . Directors at Widzew and ?KS ?ód? briefly considered resigning their PZPN memberships and organising their own league championship , but did not . The national team players ' council , at that time comprising Marek Dziuba , Pawe? Janas and Wojciech Rudy , wrote an open letter expressing surprise at what they saw as excessive sanctions against Terlecki , Boniek , ?muda and M?ynarczyk . They admitted the goalkeeper 's conduct had been far from exemplary , but contended that the incident was only minor , and had been exacerbated by disproportionately prominent and negative press coverage .

Despite being without some of their top players , Widzew ?ód? were crowned champions of Poland at the end of the 1980 ? 81 season . Ryba left his post in April 1981 , along with a number of his contemporaries , described by Stefan Szczep?ek , a sports journalist and football historian , as " honest officials , together with some football @-@ friendly Polish Army officers " . In their place came a number of communist officials , most prominently W?odzimierz Reczek , an erstwhile Politburo member , who took over as head of the football association despite a reputation for not liking the sport .

M?ynarczyk , Boniek and ?muda had their bans cancelled early . ?muda and M?ynarczyk returned in the 1 ? 0 home win over East Germany on 2 May 1981 , and Boniek was reinstated four months later . The players ' recall was partly due to the efforts of Kulesza 's replacement , Antoni Piechniczek , to secure their return . According to Majchrzak , Boniek and ?muda apologised for their actions before the General Committee for Physical Culture and Sport of the Polish People 's Republic , the PZPN 's governing body , but kept this from Terlecki , who appealed to have his ban lifted several times , but to no avail .

= = Legacy = =

Terlecki openly participated in students ' strikes at his old university in ?ód? and across Poland over the next few months , providing food to the students by the car @-@ load . ?KS cancelled his registration in early 1981 . Majchrzak stresses that Terlecki was the only player involved in the incident not to regain his place in the Poland team , and claims that this was down to an intense grudge held against him by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Secret Police (SB) . Terlecki developed his own theory that the media circus following the airport incident had been deliberately engineered by the SB to head the players off forming their own trade union . There were several other incidents of drunkenness involving M?ynarczyk , Majchrzak writes , but this was the only occasion when any player was punished for it . In October 1981 , when the team travelled to Argentina , M?ynarczyk arrived at Ok?cie " completely drunk " , according to Iwan , but far from reprimanding him , team staff gave him even more alcohol during the flight to help ease the pain of his broken finger .

Poland qualified for the 1982 World Cup with a perfect record , and performed strongly in the competition , losing to Italy in the semi @-@ finals but beating France in a play @-@ off to claim third place . Kulesza became the manager of Tunisia , and later founded a coaching school in Warsaw .

Saying he was " being treated like a leper " , Terlecki emigrated to the United States in June 1981 , and joined the Pittsburgh Spirit of the Major Indoor Soccer League . He pursued a new life in America with great vigour . Terlecki 's on @-@ field displays in the U.S. were widely praised ? in three seasons with Pittsburgh he became the club 's all @-@ time top goalscorer ? but managers reportedly had trouble " harness [ing] Terlecki 's fiery temper " , and his wife Ewa became intensely homesick . Terlecki announced his intention to move back to Poland in 1985 , saying that he believed the political situation had improved and that he wished to reunite his family . He returned home the following year , and resumed his career in Polish club football . He expressed a desire to play for the national team again , but was never selected .