

Soccer in Wyoski Dwór

Like other Lithuanian towns Wyoksi Dwór had fallen under the influence of the outside world and was obsessed with soccer. A Maccabi group of thirty young men was organized.¹ They also did gymnastic exercises, but all their free time was devoted to “dribbling the ball with their feet.” Their parents sighed, “It’s terrible – the ball, the ball!” These young men were not satisfied simply with playing the game. They also invited Maccabi teams from neighboring towns for matches. In such cases, the host town was responsible for covering all the guests’ expenses: travel, food, and the like. After a match, the participants were often battered and bruised, but that only fueled the Maccabis’ devotion to the sacred act of kicking. At one match the ball struck an elderly spectator. He shouted, “I’ve been killed!” and fell in a faint. A commotion ensued. The town was in an uproar; some of the people were prepared to ban the players. However, the man suffered only a scare and thought he had gone on to his heavenly reward. The matches continued to be held.

Excerpted from Hirsz Abramowicz, “A Lithuanian Shtetl,” in *Profiles of a Lost World: Memoirs of East European Jewish Life before World War II*, ed. Dina Abramowicz and Jeffrey Shandler, trans. Eva Zeitlin Dobkin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press in cooperation with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1999), 85-6.

¹ The Maccabi World Union is an international organization promoting sport activities among Jewish youth. Established in 1895, it later became affiliated with the Zionist movement. In 1939, there were over 200,000 members of the movement, located in 38 countries.