

## Leszek Blanik



Leszek Blanik was an Olympic champion gymnast, who lends his name to one of the more complex moves on the vault: a double and a half front handspring in a pike position followed by a double back Tsukahara. It was the vault that brought him gold at the 2007 World Championships in Stuttgart and the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Blanik retired in 2010 and set up a training centre in Gdansk, his home since 1996. Asked what a gymnast feels before the vault, he once famously replied: "The last five minutes are a nightmare. Hundreds of thoughts stream through your head but one in particular: let's get this over with."

## Jerzy Bralczyk



Jerzy Bralczyk is a linguistic scholar specialising in the relationship between language and the media, advertising and politics. A professor since 2000, he is an eminent member of the Polish Language Council and Polish Linguistic Society, and also advises on ethics at the Warsaw Stock Exchange.

He became well known as host of television show *Mówi się* (So they say) and now presents a daily radio programme, *Słowo o słowie* (A word about the word). He has still found time to write several books – yet as his hobbies include collecting old manuals of proper speech and conduct, his work is his passion.

## Marek Kamiński



Marek Kamiński is an explorer, author and photographer, who in 1995 became the first person to reach the North and South Poles in a single year unassisted. He has led numerous expeditions to both Poles since, as well as climbing the likes of Kilimanjaro and Mount Vinson, Antarctica's highest peak.

Among Kamiński's other adventures he has sailed the Atlantic, journeyed to the source of the Amazon and made a 60-day crossing of the Gibson Desert in Australia. He has produced numerous documentaries and books along the way, started a charity and lives with his wife and daughter Pola in Sopot.

## Marek Krajewski



Marek Krajewski is an award-winning Polish crime writer, best known for his series of six novels set in pre-war Wroclaw (which was, at the time, Breslau) with the policeman Eberhard Mock as the protagonist. The novels, starting with the 1999 work *Death in Breslau*, have since been translated into 18 languages.

A classics lecturer at the University of Wroclaw, Krajewski has won a litany of awards, both in the field of crime writing and for his depiction of Wroclaw. He has helped "restore the memory of the city and its former inhabitants" according to a tribute announced as he was given a 2006 President Award.

## Robert Korzeniowski



Robert Korzeniowski is a four-time Olympic race walking champion and former world record holder. He became the first Polish person to claim gold at three successive games when he defended his title in the 50km walk in Athens in 2004 – he was the first walker to do the 20km and 50km double in 2000.

Hailing from Lubaczow near the Ukrainian border, Korzeniowski also took 50km gold at three IAAF World Championships and was twice named Polish sportsman of the year. He retired in 2004 and has since turned attention to sports broadcasting, business training and organising nationwide running events.

## Tomasz Kuszczak



Tomasz Kuszczak's career was stalling when, aged 22, he was released by Hertha BSC Berlin after four seasons without a single appearance. A move to West Bromwich Albion FC changed all that as injury to Chris Kirkland gave him his chance in 2005: the ex-WKS Śląsk Wrocław keeper has not looked back.

He joined Manchester United FC and marked his debut by saving a penalty in a 1-0 defeat by Arsenal FC. Largely utilised as an understudy to Edwin van der Sar, he has been in and around the side ever since though neither that nor a rich crop of Polish goalkeepers have curtailed his international career.

## Włodzimierz Lubański



Named Poland's Golden Player in 2004, Włodzimierz Lubański's record of 48 strikes in 75 international appearances remains unsurpassed. For two decades he racked up goals in Poland, Belgium and France, adding a litany of honours to Olympic gold in 1972, when he captained the side to glory in Munich.

It all started at Górnik Zabrze, where Lubański won seven league titles and six Polish Cups. He spent seven seasons at KSC Lokeren OV before ending his career in France aged 38. He has since coached in Belgium and, helped by an ability to speak six languages, done television commentary on Polish television.

## Bohdan Łazuka



Bohdan Łazuka is a legendary figure of stage and screen in Poland. He started as a cabaret artist but migrated to theatre, film and even a sideline as a stand-up comic. Since making his debut in 1958 he has accrued over 50 movie acting credits and is familiar in Poland as the voice of Harry Potter's Barty Crouch.

A big football fan, for an earlier generation he is the man behind Tajemnica Mundialu (The Mystery of the World Cup), the song Łazuka performed to mark Poland's campaign at the 1982 finals. It has become a hymn for the national side, helped in large part by their run to the semi-finals in Spain.

## Jan Mela



In 2004, a day after turning 16, Gdansk-born Jasiek Mela became the youngest person to reach both the North and South Poles, a feat made more remarkable by the fact he did so without two limbs. Two years earlier, sheltering from the rain in an electricity substation, he suffered a 15,000-volt shock.

After three months of treatment his left thigh and right forearm were amputated. He met Marek Kamiński, however, who set him his Polar challenge. Mela reached the North Pole aged 15 and then, eight months later, reached the South Pole. He has since taken part in expeditions to Kilimanjaro and Mount Elbrus.

## Dariusz Michalczewski



Dariusz Michalczewski is a former world boxing champion who in 2003 came within one fight of tying Rocky Marciano's all-time best for longest undefeated record. Based in Germany since defecting in 1988, the Gdansk-born light heavyweight had 48 wins from as many bouts before defeat by Julio César González.

Two years later Michalczewski lost his final fight but he remains one of the best pound-four-pound boxers of the past two decades. He also held the WBO cruiserweight belt before moving back down – his aggressive style, and resulting nickname, the Tiger, always remained the same though.

## Józef Młynarczyk



Józef Młynarczyk is a former Poland goalkeeper who rose to prominence at lowly Odra Opole in the late 1970s. From this unassuming base near the Czech border he broke into the national team in 1979, starring as Poland finished third at the 1982 FIFA World Cup and reached the last 16 four years later.

By then he was at FC Porto, adding two league winners' medals to the two he won at Widzew Łódź in 1981 and 1982. In 1987 he helped Porto to European Champion Clubs' Cup glory before retiring in 1989. He has since worked as goalkeeper coach at Porto, Widzew and within the Polish national-team setup.

## Leszek Możdżer



A jazz pianist, composer and producer, Leszek Możdżer has gained acclaim from the United States to Chile, where he performed to a crowd of 15,000. The recording of his New York concert with Adam Makowicz went double platinum, as did an album with Lars Danielsson and Zohar Fresco.

A graduate of Gdansk's Stanisław Moniuszko Music Academy, he started in clarinetist Emil Kowalski's band before making his name with his 1994 album, Chopin Impressions. He has since recorded with many of the greats of Polish jazz and other musicians like Pink Floyd's Dave Gilmour.



## Antoni Piechniczek



Antoni Piechniczek is a former Poland international and coach who now works in the national senate. A reliable defender, he won three caps between 1967 and 1969 in a playing career that brought honours with Legia Warszawa and hometown club Ruch Chorzów but it is as a coach that he made his name.

Piechniczek guided Poland to third at the 1982 FIFA World Cup and then to the last 16 four years later. He returned to the helm in 1996/97 via spells as boss of Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, though already his attention was turning to politics. He was elected to the senate in 2007.

## Maryla Rodowicz



Maryla Rodowicz is an iconic singer, perhaps most famous for her 1973 number, *Małgośka* (Maggie). Her catalogue of 600 songs have sold over 15m copies and also includes Poland's official anthem for the 1974 FIFA World Cup, *Futbol*. She has attracted a multitude of awards throughout her 40-year career.

Rodowicz has taken to stages across the globe accompanied by her trademark acoustic guitar, and has become a familiar figure at festivals. She is also a respected actor, a regular on television, in musicals, operas and music shows. Her autobiography, *Long live the ball*, was published in 1992.

## Magdalena Schejbal



The daughter of Jerzy Schejbal and Grażyna Krukówny, Magdalena was on television from an early age as the child star of *Ja i moje życie* (Me and my life). Yet she was shying away from the profession, studying sociology, before getting her break in the 2001 film *Głośniejszy od bomb* (Louder than bombs).

Schejbal has not looked back since, gaining widespread acclaim for her four-year stint in the successful television series, *Kryminalni* (Criminal Investigators). In 2006 she secured her first major role on the stage as Cordelia in Woli theatre's *King Leah* and still works in television, film and the theatre.

## Andrzej Strelau



As a youngster it was handball in which Andrzej Strelau excelled, representing the Polish national team. His career with the ball at his feet was limited to a solitary top-flight match but his name will forever be linked with the beautiful game after a successful coaching career spanning three decades.

He is best known for assisting coach Kazimierz Górski during Polish football's golden age of the 1970s, a role he combined first with the U21s and then the helm of hometown club Legia Warszawa. After spells in Iceland, Greece and Legia again he was national-team coach himself between 1989 and 1993.

## Maciej Stuhr



Maciej Stuhr is an actor of stage and screen, and ever popular choice as host of major award ceremonies. He presented the European Film Awards Gala in Warsaw alongside French actress Sophie Marceau in 2006, a year after being named a Master of Polish Speech.

Yet it was as an actor that psychology graduate Stuhr made his name, ever since his role aged 13 in Krzysztof Kieślowski's 1988 television serial *Dekalog* (The Decalogue) alongside his father, actor Jerzy. He has had numerous parts since, most famously as Kuba Brenner in *Chłopaki nie płaczą* (Boys don't cry).

## Lech Wałęsa



A Nobel Peace Prize winner and the country's president from 1990 to 1995, much of Poland's recent history flows through Lech Wałęsa. An electrician at Gdansk shipyard, Wałęsa led the Solidarity trade union on strike in August 1980 demanding civil rights and labour reform from the Communist authorities.

Nine years later he was the leader of the opposition delegation and one of the signatories of the Round Table Talks which started the democratic system changes that spread throughout eastern and central Europe. In December 1990 Wałęsa became Poland's first democratically-elected president.

## Wojciech Gąssowski



Gąssowski is an award-winning singer, guitarist and composer. Two of his albums have gone platinum, 1988's *Party* and *Where are those parties now*. His 2010 release *I Wish You Love*, features covers of the likes of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Dean Martin and Ella Fitzgerald.

Born in Warsaw, Gąssowski has collaborated with several Polish groups and also tried his hand at acting, starring in Janusz Morgenstern's *Two ribs of Adam*, including a well-known duet with Karin Stanek. A keen tennis player, he is a fixture at Poland's football games.

## Robert Janowski



Janowski is the consummate polymath. A trained veterinary surgeon and pianist, he made his name as a rock star and now divides his time in various guises as a singer, actor, composer, poet, radio journalist and television presenter. For a younger generation he is the face of the Polish version of *Name that tune*.

He has won several television awards but retains residency at Warsaw's Drama Theatre. Indeed, amid his many deviations the stage has been an abiding passion. He made his name in the musical *Metro* in 1991 and has accrued acting credits on stage and screen ever since.

## Dariusz Szpakowski



Szpakowski is a sport journalist and commentator. He made his name on Polish Radio before making the switch to television in 1983: he has been a fixture on screen ever since. He has covered Olympic Games, UEFA European Championships and no fewer than eight FIFA World Cups.

In 2000 he won a footballing Oscar as best TV commentator but, a graduate of Warsaw's University of Physical Education, it was basketball that Szpakowski excelled at, playing for Legia Warszawa. He retains an interest in several sports, commenting on anything from hockey and canoeing to cycling.

## Janina Ochojska



Head of Polish Humanitarian Action, Ochojska is an activist whose passion for helping others formed after she was struck by polio as a child and travelled to France for surgery. During convalescence she volunteered for EquiLibre, an organisation providing medical help and food for hospitals and centres for ill children in Poland.

In 1989 Ochojska helped establish the Polish wing of EquiLibre, overseeing aid relief in Sarajevo among other projects before, seeking greater autonomy, founding Polish Humanitarian Action in 1994. Her work has been acknowledged by awards at home and abroad. She published a book, *Heaven Is Other People*, in 2000.

## Natalia Partyka



Partyka is a two-time Paralympic table tennis champion, one of only two athletes – along with South African swimmer Natalie du Toit – to compete at both Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2008. She was just 11 when she competed at the 2000 Paralympics in Sydney; four years later she won individual gold and team silver.

Born without a right hand and forearm, Partyka is noted for her silky stroke play and tactical acumen. She has won numerous accolades, including a Champion award for the best disabled Polish athlete at the 2009 Masters of Sport Gala and Personality of the Year at the 2009 Sports Gala in her native Gdansk.

## Beata Pawlikowska



Pawlikowska is a travel writer and broadcaster, whose journeys have been documented in publications from National Geographic to Playboy. She has been prolific for over a decade, spending a couple of months each year on her travels, often to South America where she has documented the life of Amazonian Indians.

Over 20 of Pawlikowska's *Blonde in...* pieces have appeared in National Geographic, often illustrated with her own photographs and drawings. Since 2009 she has fronted her own travel show, *The Mysterious Blonde*, on television station TVP2 as well as hosting *The World According to a Blonde* on Radio ZET.

## Grażyna Torbicka



Torbicka is an award-winning television host and journalist. The face of TVP2's *I love cinema*, she is a popular master of ceremony but is just as likely the recipient as presenter with two Victors from academy awards prominent among her accolades. She is a three-time winner at the Telekamerą national television awards.

FC Barcelona fan Torbicka was decorated with a Silver Gloria Arts Medal for Merits to Culture by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and received a Rose of Gala in a category entitled *Always Beautiful*. In 2007 she became artistic director at the film and arts festival *Two Shores* (Dwa Brzegi).