

POLISH-AMERICAN BASEBALL NIGHT – ‘Big Hit’, NPASHF Next

By Raymond Rolak

DETROIT– Before the game, the players watched with amaze: both the A’s and the Tiger’s. They watched along with everyone else, the color and the authentic costumes. They watched the Polish folk dancing and listened. The show was spectacular and this all helped to make Polish-American Night at Comerica Park a giant hit.

Coordinated by the **Polish American Congress-Michigan Division**, the evening was a vision of color and the weather was perfect. For those in attendance, the Polish style music was a hit also. At game time, Comerica Park was standing room only.

The home team lost to the Oakland A’s, 5-4, but the post game fireworks presented by *Pepsi* got most in attendance in good spirits before they left the stadium. The accompanied Polka music during the fireworks show was a surprise and an added bonus.

It was the 40th Annual Polish-American Night with the Tigers and before the game General Manager, Dave Dombrowski was smiling, “We will have a full house and it will be a great pre-game show.” The Tigers and the Polish-American Night committee hit a home run with the presentation.”

At the Detroit event even “PAWS”, the Tiger’s mascot was dressed in Polish folk costume and the Press Box and staff commissary was serving Polish stuffed cabbage and kielbasa-n-kraut.

Early arrivals to Comerica were treated to the lively tunes of *Big Daddy Lackowski & the La-De-Das*, *The Natural Tones* and *The Kielbasa Kings*. Big crowds gathered outside of Comerica Park before the game and enjoyed the music. WDIV-TV weatherman, Chuck Gaidica highlighted Big Daddy Lackowski on the Channel-4 evening news.

Also, the first 10,000 people entering the stadium got vintage-style wool ‘Olde English D’ Tigers caps with the 1935 World Series highlighted. These were sponsored by the **Detroit Medical Center**. It is the 75th anniversary of that title. Furthermore, The Tigers and the Polish-American Night Committee presented tee-shirts to those that bought a pre-planned ticket package. Also, the **Polish American Congress Foundation** got \$5 from every Polish Night pre-game ticket package sold.

There were 13 dance troupes and the Polish Scouts performing on the field. Representatives of sponsoring Polish fraternal groups were introduced before the game.

Before the game, Tiger radio broadcaster Jim Price hosted Wally Ozog, currently of Chicago and President of the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America, on his pre-game show. Price highlighted past Polish-American nights at Tiger Stadium. Throughout the Oakland-Detroit game broadcast, Price brought to light, anecdotes about former Major League Polish-American baseball players. He told humorous stories about Tom Paciorek, Frank Tanana, Ron Peranowski and Dick Tracewski. Price, who played for the Tigers said, “We always looked forward to Polish-American Night as we had Polish food in the clubhouse after the game and we always teased “Trixie” (Tracewski), for getting another plaque from the host committee. People forget he was on three World Series winners as a player and another as a coach. That’s four rings. Those are great memories.”

Price also mentioned that former Tiger Jim Northrup and his wife are sponsoring an orphanage in Poland.

On the field, right before the umpires declared, “Play Ball”, Barb Toboy, introduced Robert Szczublewski, who was dressed in traditional Polish costume. He had stirring renditions of the Polish National Anthem and the “Star Spangled Banner”. It transitioned to the honoring of a decorated U.S. Army veteran, Specialist Joe James, who was on leave from Iraq. They got standing ovations

Ceremonial first pitch throwers, Nicole Blaszcak and Jerry Lubiarez did commendable jobs and survived the tremendous applause. The PRCUA Zakopane Polish Folk Dance Group had the distinction of being the color guard.

The Tiger loss dampened a spectacular three home run night by Miguel Cabrera. It was the first time for the Tiger slugger that he had three in one game. Oakland reliever Andrew Bailey earned his 10th save of the year. The A’s are now 9-2, in the all-important, one-run games.

In the press-box, former Tiger great Willie Horton reminisced how honored he felt when presenting Paciorek into the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame in 1992. “I remember how great the mushroom soup was that evening. I love Polish food. Tom and I were teammates in Seattle. He had good years in Seattle. He always helped keep the clubhouse loose. He is a great baseball broadcaster, always prepared.”

Ray Fosse, former catcher for the Oakland A’s and now their flagship station broadcaster sent glowing reports of the evening to California during his call of the game. Mario Impemba of Fox Sports Detroit also painted the picture of Polish –American Night with highlights on the Tigers TV-cast. Fox Sports Detroit had great camera work with their *High Definition* video of the pre-game show. The television camera’s highlighted all the color of the Polish-American Night extravaganza.

Most of the electronic media outlets mentioned the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony June 24, in Troy, Michigan which will honor former Phillies Manager Danny Ozark. Ozark led the Phillies to NL-East titles in 76, 77 and 78. He was also a longtime coach for the L. A. Dodgers. Past Philadelphia slugger Greg Luzinski will present for the deceased Ozark (2009). Paciorek, the popular and veteran announcer, is scheduled to emcee. He was awarded a sports *Emmy* for his White Sox and Washington National's baseball broadcasts.

NPASHF Chairman Jim Conrad said, "We will also be inducting swimming champion Kristy Kowal of Reading, Pennsylvania and Hamtramck, Michigan native and tennis great Peaches Barkowicz." NPASHF board members manned an informational table near the right field foul corner.

During an afterglow (*poprawiny*) at the *Coaches Corner Bar & Grill*, in Harmonie Park, former University of Buffalo football player Gerry Ratkewitz over *piwa* (Polish beer), said, "I remember Al Kaline's only three home run game, it was in 1955 against Kansas City. Steve Gromek was the winning pitcher." Detroit native son, Gromek, pitched for the Tigers at the time and was inducted into the NPASHF in 1981.

Polish-American Night, the game and festivities, were dedicated to the memory of Poland's President Lech Kaczynski and First Lady Maria Kaczynska and the 94 others who lost their lives in the tragic airplane crash of April, 10, 2010 in Smolensk, Russia. They were in route to the 70th anniversary memorial of the World War II, *Katyn* atrocity.

Vice President of the Polish National Alliance, Paul Odrobina said, "I hope we can have this many people for Polish Night in Chicago." The White Sox will host Polish Night at U.S. Cellular Field on July 6.

The Cleveland Indians will host the Washington Nationals at Progressive Field on June 11, for **Polish Night with the Cleveland Indians** at 7:05 EST. Tickets are only \$12. More info at www.polishyoungtown.com

THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS WERE REPRESENTED ON THE FIELD at COMERICA PARK

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
ZAKOPANE POLISH FOLK DANCE GROUP
HONOR GUARD AMERICAN AND POLISH FLAGS**

**POLISH SCOUT ASSOCIATION
ZWIAZEK HARCERSTWA POLSKIEGO
DETROIT DIVISION**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
ROGALIN DANCE TROUPE
WYANDOTTE**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
HALKA DANCERS
DETROIT**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
OPOLE DANCERS
WARREN**

**POLISH WOMENS ALLIANCE
LOWICZ DANCERS
WARREN**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
POLSKIE MAKI DANCERS
HAMTRAMCK**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
MALA POLSKA FOLK ENSEMBLE
STERLING HEIGHTS**

**POLISH NATIONAL ALLIANCE
CENTENNIAL DANCERS
PLYMOUTH**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
SYRENA DANCERS
DEARBORN**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
ZAJACZEK DANCE ENSEMBLE
STERLING HEIGHTS**

**POLISH WOMENS ALLIANCE
ZAMEK DANCERS
DETROIT**

**POLISH ROMAN CATHOLIC UNION OF AMERICA
WIELICZKA DANCERS
REDFORD**

**POLISH NATIONAL ALLIANCE
POLISH ALLIANCE DANCERS
DEARBORN**

**POLISH NATIONAL ALLIANCE
POLANIE SONG & DANCE ENSEMBLE
DEARBORN**

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