

SHORT HISTORICAL NOTES XIII

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Ph.D. Anton Gajdoš born on 1.6.1940 in Dubriniči (today Ukraine) lives most of his life in Bratislava (ex TCH, nowadays SVK). He comes from gymnastics family (his brother Pavel have world championship medals) and he devoted his life to gymnastics. His last achievement is establishment of Narodna encyklopedia športu Slovenska (www.sportency.sk). Among his passion is collecting photos and signatures of gymnasts. As we tend to forget old champions and important gymnasts, judges and coaches, we decided to publish part of his archive under title Short historical notes. All information on these pages is from Anton's archives and collected through years.



LEON ŠTUKELJ (* 12.11.1898, Novo Mesto, Slovenia, †8.11.1999, Maribor, Slovenia)

Leon Štukelj, lawyer who graduated at University of Ljubljana, had the first international competition at World Championship in Ljubljana (Slovenia, ex Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) in 1922. At his the first appearance he competed not only on apparatus, but also in swimming and track and field disciplines. At his 1.60 m height and 50 kg weight, his body was not able to achieve good results at shot put, as the ball had 7.25 kg. Similar results were also at other world championships as up to the end of WWII also other disciplines besides apparatus were included.

But on the other hand Olympic Games were just created for Leon. Already at OG in Paris (France) 1924, he won all around title and gold on high bar. His victory in all around was won on vault, where we can still admire his extra ordinary motor abilities. Figure bellow show how split vault for 10 points had to be performed. Gymnast had to jump over line of 1.70 m height (without break it) in the first flight, than support and split jump. For a gymnast it was important to raise his center of body mass close or over 2 meters, and again we have to consider Leon's height was only 1.60 m. His surprise victory had huge impact, he was invited to Finland and Hungary to show his mastership, King of Yugoslavia decorated him with Sv.Sava of V.order. In Slovenia masses were waiting for him at railway stations to congratulate him, in Novo Mesto mayor saluted him with Ave triumphator. For his 100th birthday a remake of this celebration took place in Novo Mesto with collaboration of IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch and FIG Norbert Bouche.

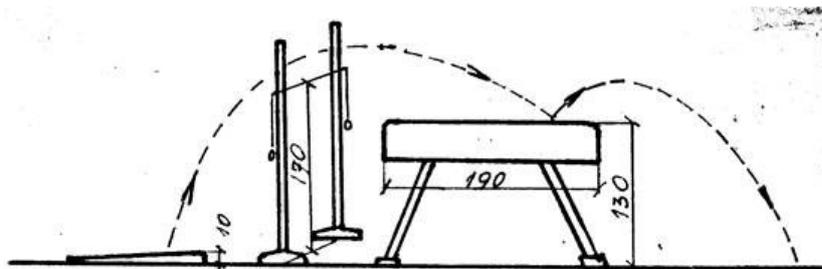
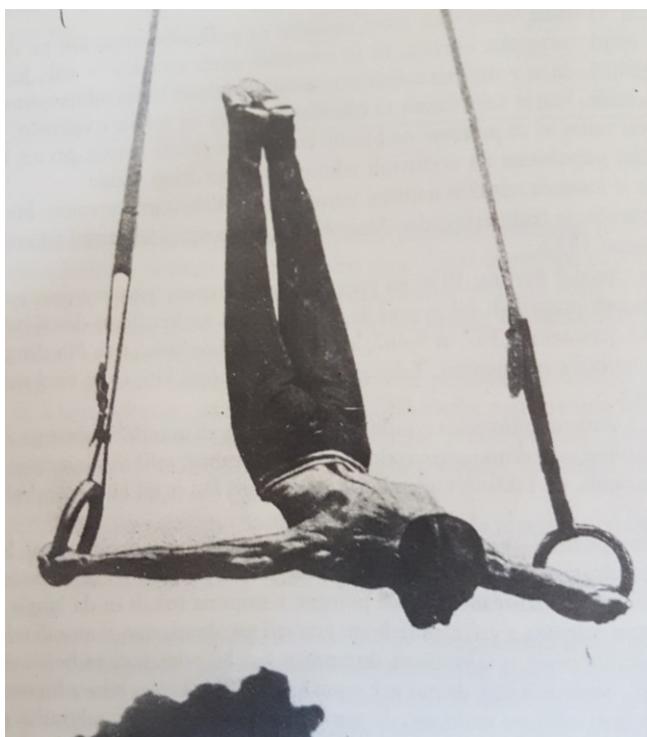


Figure 1. OG 1924, vault apparatus measures. Vazzaz, Gregorka: Razvoj telovadnega orodja na Slovenskem [Development of gymnastics apparatus in Slovenia], Elan, 1984

At OG 1928 in Amsterdam (Netherland) he was excellent again with wining rings, in all around he was the third, and also team under dr. Viktor Murnik (father of Slovene gymnastics) placed on the third place. In his book he wrote down, his team took on train parallel bars from Ljubljana to Amsterdam. Whenever they had to change train, they had to carry parallel bars to next train. But it was worth, as showed results.

Yugoslav team did not compete at 1932 OG in Los Angeles (USA) due to lack of money and argues inside Sokol union. Unfortunately, as whole generation of gymnasts under Leon Štukelj leadership was between both WW among top gymnasts in that time.

His last OG were in Berlin (Germany) in 1936, where at his late age for gymnast still managed to place himself on the second place on rings.

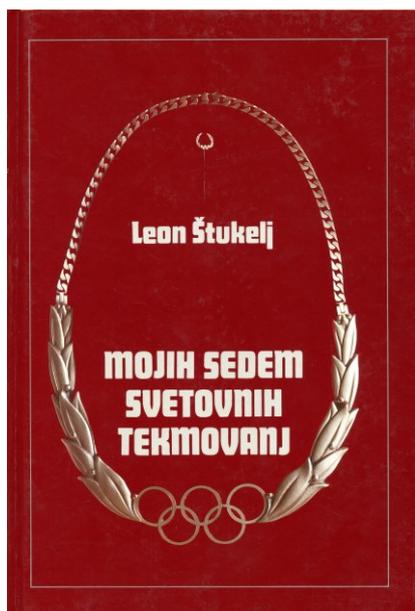


Despite it is not officially it is important to know Leon Štukelj is the first gymnast to perform inverted cross on rings at World Championship or Olympic Games.

Photo on the left is from Leon Štukelj's book *Mojih sedem svetovnih tekmovanj* [My seven world competitions].

After the WWII communist regime took him in prison for two years, relased him and degraded him from judge into one unimportant company secretary.

IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch rewarded him in 1987 at University games in Zagreb (Yugoslavia) and took him out of anonymity and with new state of Slovenia, he again deserved olympic honors. He is with Miroslav Cerar individual founder of Slovene Olympic Committee. His star moments were at Atlanta (USA) 1996 OG opening ceremony where he was introduced as the oldest living Olympic champion.



Leon's book is excellent description of history of gymnastics between WWI and WWII. With lot of photos, the most important are all results from all competitions he competed. From the book we can read, many gymnasts at OG or WC were rewarded with the maximum possible scores e.g. at OG 1924 Zamporini (Italy) on parallel bars, Seguin (France) on vault, Štukelj on rings, just to name some of them.



Leon Štukelj and his OG medals at his home in Maribor (archive and photo Anton Gajdoš)