



Polish Sports Club Names versus Commercialisation

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ABSTRACT: The article presents an analysis of the names of sports clubs appearing in the top-level Polish football, volleyball, basketball and hockey leagues. A total of 107 names were analysed. The research question concerned the lexical composition of the names and potential differences in naming between

individual sports. The research showed a tendency for names to become longer and for sponsors' terms to be used in their composition. The exception is the names of football clubs, which are the most established and are a market brand in their own right.

KEYWORDS: sport onomastic, names of sport clubs, chrematonyms.

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1. Introduction

The field of sports onomastics has not yet been graced with comprehensive studies in the Polish scholarly literature. Nonetheless, it presents an intriguing area of research that covers phenomena such as the names of clubs and sports organisations, names of sports competitions, events, facilities, as well as athletes' nicknames, national team monikers, and the like. Broadly speaking, any component of the sporting world with a proper name can be considered part of the expansive realm of sports onomastics, which has been delineated here due to its "nomenclatural scope", meaning the operation of the name within the broad spectrum of sport. Among these sports names, one finds anthroponyms, chrematonyms, ideonyms, urbonyms, etc.—a list that appears inexhaustible as new names are constantly being assigned to new objects, competitions, and so forth.

2. Aim and research method

The aim of this article is to analyse the names of football, volleyball, and basketball clubs participating in the top-tier competitions in Poland, encompassing both men's and women's leagues. Preliminary observations suggest the hypothesis that these names are not stable and change quite frequently, though not in all types of competitions, often under the influence of commercial factors. The research question posed herein concerns the clarity and transparency of such names, as well as the degree of club identification. The collected material has been subjected to both structural and semantic analysis.

3. Overview of the research material

The decision was made to examine the names of clubs representing the four most popular team sports in Poland—football, volleyball, basketball, and handball. The research material comprises the names under which the clubs were registered for the league competitions in the 2022/2023 season. It is noteworthy that these are not always the same proper nouns that are displayed on the official club websites. Nor are they necessarily the names that fans commonly use. The reason for this phenomenon will be discussed below. In total, 107 club names were analysed, including:

- a) 18 names of football clubs participating in the PKO BP Ekstraklasa in the 2022/2023 season (men's league);
- b) 12 names of football clubs participating in the Orlen Ekstraliga in the 2022/2023 season (women's league);

- c) 15 names of volleyball clubs participating in the Plus Liga in the 2022/2023 season (men's league)¹;
- d) 12 names of volleyball clubs participating in the Tauron Liga in the 2022/2023 season (women's league);
- e) 16 names of basketball clubs participating in the Energa Basket Liga in the 2022/2023 season (men's league);
- f) 11 names of basketball clubs participating in the Energa Basket Liga Kobiet in the 2022/2023 season (women's league);
- g) 14 names of handball clubs participating in the men's Orlen Superliga Kobiet in the 2022/2023 season (men's league);
- h) 9 names of handball clubs in the Orlen Superliga Kobiet in the 2022/2023 season (women's league)².

4. The state of research on the names of sports clubs in Poland

The first classification of Polish sports club names was published in 1969 by Stefan Reczek. He divided the analysed onyms based on the motivation behind the names and identified:

- a) geographical names (including names of mountains, rivers, countries, cities, districts);
- b) professional names (containing names of people, workplaces, products, or materials);
- c) personal names;
- d) names from the animal and plant world and natural phenomena;
- e) names from the realm of abstracts;
- f) group names;
- g) names of association members [cf. Reczek 1969: 192–195].

A more detailed analysis was conducted in 1973 by Jan Ożdżyński. He categorised club names according to a structural criterion and a semantic criterion. With respect to structure, the researcher identified:

- a) compound names of an expanded nature:
 - 1) full (official) names of clubs in their unchanged form, e.g. *Gwardyjskie Towarzystwo Sportowe "Wisła" in Kraków*,

1 In the 2022/2023 season, the premier men's volleyball league in Poland comprised 16 clubs; however, one of these was a Lviv club, hence its Ukrainian name Волейбольний клуб Барком-Кажани (Volejbol'nij klub Barkom-Każani) was not included in the study.

2 In the 2022/2023 season, the premier women's handball league in Poland consisted of 10 clubs; yet again, one was a Lviv club, hence its Ukrainian name Гандбольний клуб Галичанка (Gandbol'nij klub Galičanka) was not included in the study.

- 2) compound address-type names (partially abbreviated), e.g. *GTS Wisła Kraków*,
- b) names resulting from shortening full compound names to the most essential components from a name-formation perspective, e.g. *Wisła Kraków* [cf. Ożdżyński 1973: 102].

In the semantic classification, Ożdżyński distinguished three main semantic types of club names, and within them he identified numerous subgroups:

- a) specialisation names:
 - 1) names built around terms representing professions and specialities: federative³ (e.g. *Górnik, Kolejarz*), professional (*Dziemiarsz, Mechanik*);
 - 2) names built around the name of the workplace—the club's patron (*Garbarnia, Śrubarnia, Azoty*);
 - 3) names built around the designation of a product or raw material associated with the production of the workplace (*Nafta, Kwarc, Anilana*);
 - 4) names referring to club colours (*Zieloni, Czarni*).
- b) localising (geographical) names—specifying the town, city, district, region, or land with which the club's activity is associated (*Widzew Łódź, Wybrzeże Gdańsk*), referring to characteristic topographical elements such as rivers, mountains, lakes, and others (*Odra Opole, Beskid Andrychów, Wigry Suwałki*), near which the club is located.
 - 1) names of towns and cities—Latinised (*Brzozovia, Cracovia*) and native (*KS Bochnia, Częstochówka, Widzew Łódź*);
 - 2) topographical names—of rivers (*Wisła, Hańcza*); mountains, peaks, and elevations (*Beskid, Śnieżka*); lakes (*Wigry, Mamry*); other territorial names (*Puszcza, Przełom*);
 - 3) names of geographical lands and regions (*LKS Pomorze, Śląsk*);
 - 4) names representing individual cities and regions—feminine (*Warszawianka, Chojniczanka*) and masculine (*Podhalanin, Dolnoślązak*);
 - 5) possessive names—*Bolesławicki Klub Sportowy, Wieluński Klub Sportowy*.
- c) symbolic names:
 - 1) abstract concepts (*Unia, Start*);
 - 2) names of objects and natural phenomena with symbolic content: natural phenomena (*Huragan, Burza*); plants and animals (*Pelikan, Dąb*);

3 In the era of the Polish People's Republic, there were various professional federations that brought together representatives of a single industry, such as miners, regardless of the type of mining (hard coal, iron ore, metals, etc.).

- 3) mythological, legendary, and historical-commemorative names: names of people-symbols (*Hetman, Chrobry*); names of state-symbols (*Polonia, Lechia*), names of place-symbols (*Olimpia, Wawel*), names of former military formations (*Gwardia, Legia*); names of historical signs-symbols (*Pogoń, Gryf*);
- 4) imaginative names (*Stella, Złote Koło*) [cf. Ożdżyński 1973: 102–121].

This intricate classification was based on 580 club names registered in provincial state committees. Today, such a central register no longer exists. Moreover, sports competitions have lost their state character and have become commercialised, which is reflected in the naming of clubs.

Particularly interesting are the analyses of the names of Polish football clubs between 1927–1998 conducted by Wojciech Wilczyński. The researcher identified a dominant three-part structure of the name consisting of:

- a) an acronym defining the club's affiliation with a particular environment or region, indicating its operation in a given city, or even a sponsor. It can also function as the name of the club, e.g. *ŁKS Łódź, GKS Katowice*.
- b) the proper name of the club—indicates the organisation's connections with a broadly defined area of operation or refers to established concepts entrenched in tradition, e.g. *Wisła Kraków, Widzew Łódź, Lech Poznań*. Sometimes this part is elliptical, and its place is taken by an acronym.
- c) the city where the organisation is registered, e.g. *Warszawa, Chorzów* [cf. Wilczyński 1999: 118].

Among the most recent classifications, it is worth mentioning the one created by Bogusław Dunaj, who described the parts of the name structure. Among the components of club names, he distinguished the following:

- a) the name of the town or city (M),
- b) acronym (S),
- c) club name (Nk),
- d) sponsor's name (Ns) [cf. Dunaj 2007: 490].

Dunaj then pointed out naming schemes using the mentioned components:

- a) S + M (*AZS Gdańsk*);
- b) S + Nk + M (*RTS Widzew Łódź*);
- c) S + Ns + M (*WTS Atlas Wrocław*);
- d) S + Nk + Ns + M (*KS Wisła Enion Kraków*);
- e) S + Ns + Nk + M (*KS Bergson Śląsk Wrocław*) [cf. Dunaj 2007: 491–492].

A historical description of the diversity of club names was made by Kazimierz Jaruszewski, who identified the following stages in the development of club onomastics:

- a) from 1867 (the establishment of the first Polish club—*Lwowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne “Sokół”*) to regaining independence—names with semantics related to cultural and symbolic values (*Jedność, Pogoń*);
- b) the interwar period and the years of World War II—abstract names, mythological and biblical figures (*Fortuna, Wyzwolenie*);
- c) the post-war period [cf. Jaruszewski 2000: 224].

Wilczyński marked the temporal divisions slightly differently, pointing out:

- a) the pre-war period (before 1939)—names most often centred around the words *society* or *sports club*;
- b) the years 1945–1989—worker-related names, associated with performers of activities, mineral resources;
- c) after 1989—names centred around the name of the sponsor.

To fully illustrate the existing studies on club onomastics, one must mention articles concerning the naming of local football clubs [Jaruszewski 1997, 1998, 2014; Lica 2005, Czyżak 2006], foreign clubs [Maziarz 2015, Olejnik 2016, Fastyn 2021], and running clubs [Kijak 2015].

Most of the cited authors rely on the aforementioned classifications and complement them with new club names. Particularly interesting in this context is Mateusz Maziarz’s text, which examines 92 names of clubs playing in the top three Bulgarian leagues [Maziarz 2015]. The author points out the strong legacy of onomastics from the socialist period, which is evident, for instance, in naming clubs after historical figures. Another noticeable feature is the preference for toponyms from Slavic times. It should be noted that Bulgarian football clubs relatively rarely use sponsor names.

A similar semantic analysis was conducted by Marcin Fastyn [2021]. Having examined the names of Montenegrin clubs, he demonstrated that the most commonly used element is toponyms. Less frequently in the names examined by Fastyn, anthroponyms and other terms related to people (e.g. job titles) are noted. No names referring to sponsors are mentioned in the article in question.

Slightly different analyses were carried out by Agnieszka Kijak, who examined the names of running clubs. The research material was gathered using participant lists from marathons organised in Poland in 2014. In comparison to the names of football clubs, as well as volleyball, basketball, etc., they are distinguished on one hand by their lack of recognisability, and on the other hand by their ephemeral nature, which often accompanies the occasional nature of the name. This, in turn, results in onyms associated with running clubs fulfilling different functions. As Kijak concludes, this is primarily information—they convey “knowledge about the running group, the purpose of running, charitable

actions, or ideas. These chrematonyms primarily depict the character of the club, meaning that it is a running club” [Kijak 2015: 206].

5. Legal conditions governing club names

Before presenting analyses of the research material collected, it is worth examining the legal status regulating the issue of naming clubs participating in Polish leagues. Thus, in the *Licensing System for Ekstraklasa clubs—season 2022/2023 and subsequent*, we read:

4.1.2.2. The following are distinguished:

- 1) the company (name) of a joint-stock company that is a club, and
- 2) the name of the club under which the club participates in football competitions, which do not have to be identical. [...]

4.1.2.4 Changing the name of the club, under which it participates in football competitions, can be made at any time and does not require re-application for the Licence. However, it does require prior consent [...]. The change of the club’s name, under which it participates in football competitions:

- 1) may not affect the historical name of the club;
- 2) may involve adding an advertising component or one referring to the owner of the club. [*Podręcznik licencyjny...* 2022: 15]

In football, there is considerable freedom regarding the naming of clubs—two types of names are distinguished (legal and customary), there are no guidelines on the number of components in a name, and it can be quite freely modified during competitions. The only requirement is to maintain what is known as the club’s historical name.

The regulations concerning the naming of volleyball clubs are more restrictive:

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1. The name of the team participating in the League may consist of a maximum of three components and the designation of the town or city that is the seat of the Club.
2. The name of the team participating in the League may be changed during the season, provided that the approval of the Managing Entity is obtained and a fee of 2000 PLN net is paid into its account. [*Regulamin profesjonalnego współzawodnictwa...* 2022: 4]

Interestingly, in volleyball, the rules specify a limit on the number of components in a team's name (a maximum of three plus the name of the town or city). Additionally, there is a fee for changing the team's name during the season.

A similar convention has been adopted by the Polish Basketball Association:

4. Team Name

- 4.1. In competitions organised by PLK, only one team from the same Club may participate.
- 4.2. The team name may consist of a maximum of five words, including the name of the city.
- 4.3. The name of the team participating in the competitions may be changed after the start of the competitions, upon payment of a fee to PLK in the amount indicated in the Fee List.⁴ [*Regulamin rozgrywek...*, accessed 2023: 2]

In the basketball rules, the length of the name (a maximum of 5 elements) and a higher fee for changing the team's name during the competitions than in the case of volleyball are noteworthy.

It is significant that neither in the documents related to granting licences to clubs nor in the handball competition regulations is there any information concerning team names.

6. Structure of club names—analysis of research material

6.1. Single-element names

The first group consists of single-element names. This category includes only one football club name—*Cracovia*. It belongs to the group of so-called Latinised names—the toponymic name of Kraków (the city from which the club originates) is rendered using its Latin-language equivalent.

6.2. Two-element names

This group comprises 46 names from the entire body of the research material, which accounts for about 43% of all analysed names. However, there is a clear dominance of two-element football club names (24 out of the 46 onyms included in this group).

Among the two-element names, the following nominative structures can be identified:

- a) acronym + city name:

⁴ In the season 2022/2023, this fee amounted to 3000 PLN.

- 1) volleyball club name: *GKS Katowice* (*GKS—Górnicy Klub Sportowy*);
- 2) basketball club names: *MKS Pruszków*, *MKS Dąbrowa Górnicza*⁵ (*MKS—Miejski Klub Sportowy*), *BC Katowice* (*BC—Basket Club*);
- 3) women's football team name: *KKP Bydgoszcz* (*KKP—Kobiety Klub Piłkarski*);
- 4) handball team name: *MMTS Kwidzyn* (*MMTS—Miejsko-Młodzieżowe Towarzystwo Sportowe*).

This is not a particularly popular nominative structure. The acronym usually refers to the full, legal name of the club or association that runs it. Two onymic structures are an exception to this. Both contain an acronym indicating the sport discipline—basketball (*BC*) and women's football (*KKP*), respectively. The English-language acronym *BC* refers to a popular naming trend in European sport, especially football—starting the team name with the acronym *FC—Football Club* (e.g. *FC Barcelona*, *FC Köln*, *FC Copenhagen*).

b) acronym + sponsor's name:

- 1) volleyball club name: *ŁKS Commercecon* (*ŁKS—Łódzki Klub Sportowy*).

The indicated naming structure has only one representation—the reason is probably the negligible identification function performed by such constructions—they do not indicate the city from which the team originates. In the case of the discussed name, this function is taken over by the acronym, which has been functioning in the Polish sports environment⁶ for over 100 years—making it understandable and identifying the team with the city.

c) traditional name + town or city name:

- 1) basketball club names: *Śląsk Wrocław*, *Legia Warszawa*;
- 2) football team names: *Widzew Łódź*, *Lech Poznań*, *Pogoń Szczecin*, *Górnik Zabrze*, *Czarni Sosnowiec*, *Śląsk Wrocław*, *Legia Warszawa*, *Górnik Łęczna*, *Pogoń Tczew*;
- 3) handball team names: *Górnik Zabrze*, *Gwardia Opole*, *Start Elbląg*, *Piotrkovia Piotrków Trybunalski*.

In this group, football club names, especially men's, are definitely dominant. This is related to the longest tradition of such competitions in Poland, leading to a deep-rooted presence in the consciousness of users, who easily identify these competitions by their so-called traditional names. Adding the name

5 The town or city name is always treated as a single element, even if it consists of several words (e.g., *Dąbrowa Górnicza*, *Piotrków Trybunalski*).

6 The football section of the *Łódzki Klub Sportowy* (*ŁKS*) was the first to be established in 1908.

of the town or city is a requirement of football regulations—even without it, terms such as *Widzew* or *Legia*, most commonly used by Polish speakers, fulfil their function. It is worth noting the repetitiveness of some names within different disciplines—those sports organisations that have a recognisable name and encompass various sections use the same onym (e.g. *Śląsk Wrocław*—basketball and football teams), which also serves to build the brand.

- d) sponsor's name (single-element) + town or city name
- 1) volleyball club names: *Trefl Gdańsk*, *Luk Lublin*, *Cuprum Lubin*;
 - 2) basketball club names: *Trefl Sopot*, *King Szczecin*, *Anwil Włocławek*;
 - 3) football team name: *Orlen Gdańsk*; *HydroTruck Radom*;
 - 4) handball team names: *Azoty-Puławy*, *Industria Kielce*.

In this group, volleyball and basketball clubs are predominant. The sponsor's name is a very significant component, similar to the three-element structures that will be presented below. It should be mentioned that these names refer to patronymic names, which were found among Polish clubs earlier, during the PRL era.⁷ Following the economic reorganisation, some teams retained the patronymic core in their names, but the change in the entire competition system meant that most were seeking a new sponsor, whose name was incorporated into the club names. Also noteworthy is the small representation of football club names. This results from two factors. Firstly, the football league, especially for men, is the most stable and has the longest tradition. This results in the club's name being treated as a brand, a product, which will be discussed further. Secondly, the tendency not to include the sponsor's name in the club name is a feature of the entire football onomastics in Europe. Moreover, in some leagues, including a name referring to a sponsor in the club's name is prohibited.⁸ The last remark related to the discussed naming structure is associated with the transonymisation of some sponsor names. For example, *Trefl Gdańsk* (volleyball) and *Trefl Sopot* (basketball) are names derived from the sponsor's brand, but in the minds of fans, they primarily function as club names. Such a procedure is only possible when the team's name is stable and it has been successful at the same level of competition.

7 For instance, the handball club Anilana Łódź took its name from the Anilana factory, which produced synthetic fibres.

8 An example is the Bundesliga, the German football league. An exception, due to tradition, was made for the club Bayer Leverkusen, whose name includes the designation of the sponsor—the German pharmaceutical conglomerate. However, this is a historical name, formed in the interwar period. Interestingly, when Red Bull began its cooperation with a club in Leipzig in the lower leagues, the sponsor's name could legally function. After promotion to a higher league, this was no longer possible, so the acronym RB was reinterpreted—this time as Rasen Ballsport (grass ball sport).

6.3. Three-element names

Three-element structures usually contain the name of the sponsor. It should be mentioned that the lack of financial stability has caused frequent changes of strategic sponsors, especially in clubs that do not achieve the best results. This situation often results in changes in the names of clubs—for example, the volleyball club from Bydgoszcz changed its name sixteen times over twenty years (1992–2022). Importantly, the only stable element of the name was the toponym—Bydgoszcz. Below are the most common naming patterns within three-element structures:

- a) sponsor's name + traditional name + town or city:
 - 1) volleyball clubs: *Grot Budowlani Łódź*, *Onlybio Pałac Bydgoszcz*, *Aseco Resovia Rzeszów*, *PSG Stal Nysa*;
 - 2) basketball clubs: *PGE Spójnia Stargard*, *Suzuki Arka Gdynia*, *Rawplug Sokół Łańcut*, *MB Zagłębie Sosnowiec*;
 - 3) handball teams: *Orlen Wisła Płock*, *KGHM Chrobry Głogów*, *Energa Wybrzeże Gdańsk*.

This structure does not occur in football clubs, which confirms the distinctiveness of the naming trends of football teams compared to clubs representing other team sports.

- b) sponsor's name + acronym + town or city (other orders are permissible)
 - 1) volleyball clubs names: *Energa MKS Kalisz*, *Indykpol AZS Olsztyn* (*AZS—Academic Sports Association*), *BKS Bostik Bielsko-Biała* (*BKS—Bielsko Sports Club*);
 - 2) basketball club names: *Tauron GTK Gliwice* (*GTK—Gliwice Basketball Society*);
 - 3) a football team name: *TME⁹ SMS Łódź* (*SMS—School of Sports Championship*);
 - 4) handball team names: *MKS FunFloor Lublin*, *MKS URBIS Gniezno*, *Energea MKS Kalisz*.

Also in this group, football teams are not numerously represented (one women's team). In other cases, the leading elements of the name, i.e. those based on which the club is most often identified, are very different—this function is performed by acronyms (e.g. *SMS*), toponyms (*Kalisz*), and sponsor names (*Indykpol*).

- c) acronym + traditional name + town or city

Multi-element naming structures are not easy to remember, and using them in full is uneconomical. However, they occur because of the sponsor's name, so it

9 *TME – Transfer Multisort Elektronik*.

may be surprising to find three-element structures that do not refer to the supporting enterprise. They are very rare—in the analysed material, they appear in relation to one discipline:

- 1) handball team names: *KPR Ruch Chorzów* (*KPR—Handball Club*), *MKS Zagłębie Lubin* (*MKS—Municipal Sports Club*).

d) use of other elements in the structure

This group includes names that, due to their structure, do not fit into the categories presented above. In the analysed material, three such onyms were found:

- 1) a football team name: *AZS UJ Kraków*—the structure includes two acronyms: typical of clubs *AZS—Academic Sports Association* and indicating the university at which the club operates—*UJ* (*Jagiellonian University*). The third element is a toponym, whose inclusion results from the regulations of the Polish Volleyball Federation.
- 2) handball team names: *Handball JKS Jarosław*—the name contains two typical elements, i.e. an acronym (*JKS—Jarosław Sports Club*) and a toponym, as well as the English word *handball*, *KPR Gminy Kobierzyce*—the name contains an acronym (*KPR—Handball Club*) and an unusual indication of the sponsor and place—the club is based in Kobierzyce, and its sponsor is the Kobierzyce commune.

6.4. Four-element names

The following types of four-element names were recorded:

- a) multi-element sponsor's name // names + traditional name + town or city:
 - 1) volleyball club names: *IŁ Capital Legionovia Legionowo*, *Roleski Grupa Azoty Tarnów*, *Aluron CMC Warta Zawiercie*, *Grupa Azoty ZAKSA Kędzierzyn Koźle* (*Zakłady Azotowe Kędzierzyn SA*)—in the case of this name, it is necessary to pay attention to the excellent onomastic procedure—the patronymic acronym *ZAK* and the designation of the type of enterprise *SA—joint-stock company*, were used to name the club; the created name *ZAKSA* began to function as an independent onym associated only with the volleyball club;
 - 2) basketball club names: *Grupa Sierleccy Czarni Słupsk*, *Polski Cukier Start Lublin*, *Enea Abramczyk Astoria Bydgoszcz*;
 - 3) a football team name: *PGE FKS Stal Mielec* (*FKS—Factory Sports Club*);
 - 4) handball team names: *Grupa Azoty Unia Tarnów*, *Sandra SPA Pogoń Szczecin*.

- b) use of other elements in the structure:
- 1) volleyball club names: *DevelopRes Bella Dolina Rzeszów*—while including a sponsor's name and toponym in a club's name is common, incorporating the sponsor's strategic product into the name is unusual. *Bella Dolina* refers to a housing estate in Rzeszów, mainly invested in by the club's title sponsor. *Moya Radomka Lotnisko Radom* is an example where the sponsor's name and the club's traditional name are used together. The inclusion of *Lotnisko Radom* (*Radom Airport*) in the name is innovative, as it is not the official name of a facility but rather seems to be a promotion of the controversial airport through the club's name.¹⁰
 - 2) basketball club names: *Arriva Twarde Pierniki Toruń*—this example consists of the sponsor's name (Arriva), toponym, and the unusual component *twarde pierniki* (*hard gingerbreads*)—while *gingerbread* is a symbol of Toruń, the use of the adjective *hard*¹¹ in the name is surprising and may evoke negative connotations.

6.5. Five-element names

This category includes four names with the structure:

- a) sponsor name + sponsor name + acronym + traditional name + town or city name: one is the name of a handball team: *Agred Rebud KPR Ostrowia Ostrów Wielkopolski*, three are names of basketball teams, i.e., *Polskie Przetwory KS Basket 25 Bydgoszcz*—this name consists of the sponsor's designation, the acronym *KS* (*Sports Club*), the English-language reference to the sport (*basket*), the toponymic name *Bydgoszcz*, and the number 25—for people not associated with the club, this is an unclear element, it is difficult to indicate its origin; however, it refers to Primary School No. 25 in Bydgoszcz, where the founding meeting of the club took place in 1994—then established under the name *Basket 25*, which should be considered the traditional name of this team.

¹⁰ The Radom airport was opened on 27 April 2023. The construction of the facility was accompanied by controversies related to the location of the site.

¹¹ The combination *twarde pierniki* (*hard gingerbreads*) could be interpreted as stale or not fresh. However, it seems that the creators of the name wanted to exploit a different meaning of this adjective—*twardy* (hard in the sense of resilient, strong-willed) as 'characteristic of a person who does not easily give in to the influence of others and is able to endure a lot to achieve what they have planned, and is harsh on others' [WSJP PAN]—the term *twarde pierniki* would then refer to the basketball players.

The lack of greater representation of this group is caused on the one hand by regulations (in volleyball, the name can have a maximum of four elements), and on the other hand by the obscurity of such constructions, especially in relation to lesser-known teams.

The table below presents a numerical summary of club names constructed from one, two, three, four, or five components, divided by discipline.

Table 1. Structure of sports club names in Poland by discipline

Discipline	One-component names	Two-component names	Three-component names	Four-component names	Five-component names
Football	1	24	4	1	0
Volleyball	0	9	10	8	0
Basketball	0	6	11	7	3
Handball	0	8	12	2	1
Total	1	47	37	18	4

Source: own work.

7. Club names versus commercialisation

As the above analyses have shown, apart from men's football, team names are primarily constructed using a sponsor-related onym. This practice is embedded in the strategies for the development of sport in Poland, and club boards make it an element of advertising campaigns. The management board of one of the volleyball clubs commented on the team name change resulting from the signing of a new sponsorship agreement in this way:

For years, these two strong brands—KGHM and Zagłębie Lubin—have been inseparably connected. The name change is essentially adding our strategic sponsor's name to the current club name. The change, essentially cosmetic, is a gesture towards the company that has been supporting us for years. It is largely thanks to KGHM's investments that we achieve successes and continue to grow. The name change is nothing more than strengthening our business-sport alliance. [Zaglebie.org, accessed 2023]

The commercialisation of sport is evident at every turn, be it in the sporting, economic, or linguistic arena. Zuzanna Walczak observes:

The trend is increasingly noticeable where Polish clubs, once closely tied to the local community, are now being transformed into joint-stock companies, with their shares sold to interested investors. In this way, investors become the formal owners of the clubs, with the freedom to manage them as they see fit. Regrettably, this also affects aspects such as changing the crest, team names, etc. [...]. [Walczak 2015: 57–58]

Name changes are not viewed positively by either fans or players. Sponsorship contracts, media obligations, and the very manner of financing sport mean that a sports club becomes a business entity:

Modern sports clubs are organisations that operate in the market of commercial services as economic entities engaged in competitive play. This means that while on one hand they fulfil higher social utility goals related to physical culture objectives, such as the development of physical culture among youth and adults, contributing to overall health and satisfying the needs associated with organising society's leisure time—on the other hand, sports clubs are financed and accounted for in terms of profit generated, adhering to classic economic calculation. [Kędziorek, Matusiak 2019: 72]

Thus, the club's name becomes a brand, a commodity put up for sale, and to a lesser extent, is associated with tradition. Meanwhile, marketing experts point out that:

Brand management is essentially the skilled creation and management of a symbol and the associations these symbols evoke in the fans' minds. Building brand equity, which contributes to increasing its value, requires the creation of a marketing programme that develops brand assets from the point of view of its needs. [Urbaneck 2002: 99]

The analyses presented above seem to contradict the rational use of the club's name as a brand—especially when they are constantly changed. Unfortunately, clubs do not take advantage of the potential created by their naming tradition and the aforementioned attachment to the name-brand with which fans identify. Football clubs, particularly men's, are an exception, as reflected in their significantly higher financial results compared to other team sports.

8. Conclusions

The naming trends observed in the four disciplines (football, volleyball, basketball, handball) are not uniform. The names of basketball clubs are by far the least stable and most commercialised, while those of football clubs are the most stable and least commercialised. This is due to the high variability of sponsors within the basketball league and somewhat less so in volleyball and handball.

There is a tendency to create increasingly longer names for volleyball, basketball, and handball teams, resulting from the inclusion of the name of the strategic/title sponsor (often more than one) in the onyms.

Full, for example, four-element club names, usually do not function either in the language of fans or in the language of sports commentators. They do not meet the criterion of language economy. Occasionally, individual components of the name are used by journalists due to synonymy, but this can be a risky move (lack of awareness of the full name by the recipient). Constant name changes do not positively affect the development of the brand that is the sports club, nor do they contribute to building a positive image. For this reason, clubs often strive to retain at least one stable element in the name that identifies the club with its traditions (if any). A name that is rooted in tradition and has a foothold in the consciousness of fans (is a strong brand) is usually not expanded with sponsor names (the case of football).

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