

The Chelm vs. Lublin Wagon Race

By Philip Fishl Kutner

Quite some time ago the champion Lublin Loggers sent a courier to Hymie the captain of the Chelm Wagon Wheelers (CWW). The letter was full of snide remarks about the manhood of the CWW bokhers, and included a challenge for a 4-man wagon-pulling race. The letter stated that the Lublin courier would remain in Chelm until a reply was forthcoming. It further stated that their courier would personally take the response, for the Chelmer courier probably could not find Lublin.

According to the Chief Archivist of the Chelm Courier, many years ago, a Lublin wagon pulling team had trounced a team from Chelm. The loss was so heart-wrenching that Chelm never accepted the challenge again. After many years, the invitations stopped coming, and it was lost in the memories of the elder Chelm sages—that is, until now.

The letter was read at the following meeting of the CWW, and the idea that anyone would insult their manhood and that Chaim their courier could not find Lublin was too much to swallow. A letter was dictated and sent with the Lublin courier to Louie the Lublin Loggers' chief Lieutenant. In essence it accepted the challenge with the contest to be held at the upcoming Annual Lublin Fair. The choice was made to embarrass the Loggers on their own home grounds.

Both clubs selected their respective teams and began a regimen of a strict nutritious diet. The CWW bokhers ate bowlfuls of golden chicken soup with kreplekh to build up stamina for the grueling event of a kilometer. In addition physical conditioning took up several hours every day. They alternated upper body exercises of weightlifting and cardiovascular exercises of Jumping Yankls and skipping rope.

As the weeks passed, the CWW bokhers became very physically fit, and they were sure that the match would be an easy victory and the Lublin Loggers would be greatly humiliated in their own city. However, no effort was made to account for the mental/psychological aspect of the grueling race.

Despite the Chelmers best effort, they lost the kilometer long race by over 100 meters. On the way home all four Chelmer racers were very quiet and upset. It was decided to take a week off and then to meet and decide on a strategy for a face-saving rematch. There was no doubt that, with adjustments to the team effort, CWW bokhers would be victorious and have a face-saving experience.

When the week passed, the team of four Chelmers met with the entire group. After much discussion a game plan was developed. It was decided that they lost because Lubliners had 3 men pulling the wagon and one man in the wagon holding the reins. The Chelmers had just the opposite—3 men sat in the wagon—one holding the reins, a second blowing the bugel and a third playing the drum.

The game plan did away with the musical instruments, for it added weight and it meant that the puller could lighten the load and move faster. However this raised a problem, what would the Musicians do in the wagon? It was decided that the bugeler would urge on the puller by repeating the rhyme;

Khap, Khap, Khap, Klipity Klops
Chelm is on top and Lublin Flops

The question was raised about what to do with the drummer. After much brainstorming the decision was reached to have him face backwards to see how far the Lublin wagon was behind and let the Chelm team know if the enemy was catching up.

A week before the race, Chelm held a pre-victory party. The entire town came out to celebrate and urge their contestants to come home as winners.

Early the next morning the team started the 70 kilometer trek to Lublin. It was decided that they would use the six days as a toughening period and that instead of having a team of horsed pull the wagon that their human team would do the pulling. Because of the rainy season and the many deep ruts, the plan was to cover 10 kilometers a day.

On the day of the race The CWW team was still 10 kilometers away and they forfeited the race. It was a humiliation that they could not face. How could they go back to Chelm and tell them that the Chelm team had once again been defeated by the Lubliners.

According to the story in the Lublin Ledger the CWW team was jeered all their way through Lublin. It was said that they kept on going and ended up in Bialystok—never to return Chelm.

If you visit Bialystok today, you will find that there is a story about fools arriving from Chelm and were married off to four old maids who could not find anyone who would marry them. The story further relates that the four couples were sent to America and all became multi-millionaires.