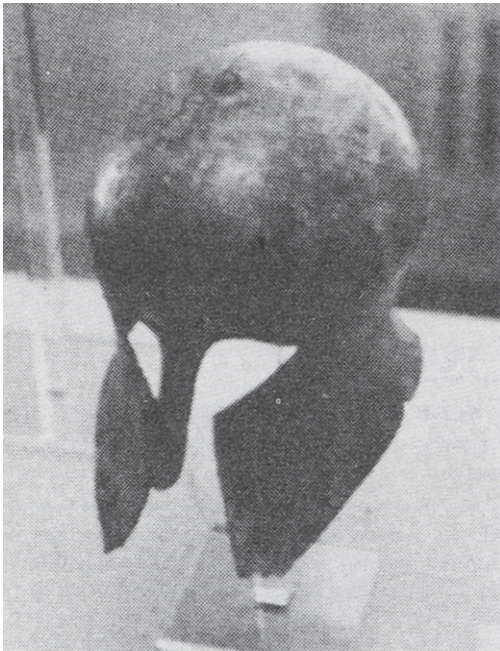


THE MARATHON RUNNER'S GREEK HELMET

by WILLI DAUME



It is a pleasure for me to bring to a successful end a very old but very significant story. It will most certainly be a pleasure too for Kee-Chung Sohn and for his homeland and — as I would hope — a pleasure for all of you gathered here.

This happening is certainly unusual, and nothing like it is ever likely to be repeated. But it may be symptomatic of the trend of the times in which we live.

Over the years, for fifty years now, we have concerned ourselves with it with great care and sensitivity. What happened, what is now going to happen, is something I see quite plainly and modestly. We make no claims to gratitude or any particular appreciation, nor in our opinion are we

The “Olympic Charter” does not authorize the presentation of any gift to an athlete who wins an Olympic event. This explains why the helmet of a Greek hoplite who lived in the VIth century B.C., which was presented by an Athens newspaper to the winner of the marathon of the Games of the XIth Olympiad, ended up in Berlin’s Antikmuseum. Fifty years later, the NOC of the Federal Republic of Germany decided to give the historic object to the man it was intended for : the Sohn Kee-Chung of Korea, now 74 years of age. A symbolic gesture aiming to tie the ancient Games of Olympia with those of the future, in Seoul in 1988. Mr. Willi Daume, IOC member and president of the FRG NOC, presented the helmet to the former champion during a pleasant reception in Berlin on 10th August. On this occasion, he told the entire story.

performing any act of fairness or complying with any legal obligations. A little bit of symbolism, which is almost indispensable for Olympic events, a little bit of humour as well, that is all.

In 1936, shortly before the Olympic Games in Berlin, the Greek newspaper “Vradiny”, which was always closely associated with sport, and still is today, sent the Organising Committee for the Games of the IXth. Olympiad in Berlin an ancient Greek helmet, a precious antique, requesting and stipulating that this helmet should be handed over to the winner of the Olympic Marathon race.

A bronze helmet in the so-called “Corinthian form” — i.e. with cheek and nose protectors —



Messrs. Sohn Kee Chung and Willi Daume.

was created — and that has been scientifically established — around the middle of the 6th century B.C., that is, in the heyday of the classical Olympic Games. It is also scientifically indisputable that it was found at Olympia or in the immediate vicinity of the place. Protective weapons of that time were and are individually crafted pieces of inimitable artistic quality. The helmet's good state of preservation and its fine patina make it an especially valuable testimony to Greek craftsmanship. Its value is immeasurable. Long ago — understandably — Greece changed its laws, so that today such a significant relic of antiquity could no longer be sent abroad. But another rule of the International Olympic Committee has remained unchanged, and this prohibited and still prohibits additional prizes being given to Olympic winners. The changed amateur regulations are irrelevant here. So quite consistently and on instructions from the IOC, the 1936 Organising Committee retained the helmet and neither the subsequent winner of the Marathon race, our friend Sohn, nor the Japanese team, of which he was a member at that time, were informed.

By agreement with the International Olympic Committee this helmet then came on permanent

loan into the possession of the Antikmuseum in Berlin, which today is part of the Foundation of Prussian Cultural Property. There, for fifty years, with scientific care and very much love, it was stored, cared for, protected, saved from terrible air raids and other acts of war and, in 1960, it was again put on exhibition as one of the museum's most important pieces. For the Olympic Games in Munich it was shown again in a special exhibition on classical Greece. That, is how it came to light.

What a story ! What a time ! The legal questions involved are insoluble. Our National Olympic Committee retained a certain right of disposal, after our Greek friends also let us know that they did not consider returning it to be in keeping with the intention of the donation at that time, that they trusted us and that they would gratefully honour a gesture in accordance with the original dedication. In 1936 the newspaper *Vradiny* wanted to create a link between the ancient Olympic Games, the nameless runner of Marathon, the first Olympic winner of the Marathon race in the modern cycle in 1896, the Greek Spiridon Louis, who, incidentally, was also a guest of honour in Berlin, and the great victor of this same race in Berlin, Kee Chong Sohn.

It is he, our Committee has decided, who, as from today, is to be the owner of the helmet. German scientists who foster particularly the ancient Greek heritage in our state museums have told us that they will miss the helmet very much and will be sad when — perhaps unconsciously — they now and then seek it in vain in the museum here. But they have — and I say this in gratitude — accepted our decision and given back the helmet.

No commemoration for the Olympic Games of 1936 is taking place in Berlin at this time. Olympic winners are meeting here and are happy to see each other again after such a long time. That is all. It is not a "cérémonie olympique protocolaire", there are no bells ringing, no national anthem or national flag involved when I now hand over the helmet in friendship to Kee-Chung Sohn for safekeeping, also in appreciation of the fact that his home country, his home town Seoul, is now preparing to hold the Games of the XXIVth Olympiad in 1988, accompanied by the best wishes of us all.