

THE WITNESSES: GUNNAR ERICSSON

“Diplomacy averts confrontation; to make the same mistake three times is hopeless; profit is the employee’s best friend”. Gunnar Ericsson intersperses his conversation with maxims. He uses them mischievously to give himself time to observe the reaction of his interlocutors and to think about what he is going to say next.

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“MY PRIORITY: OLYMPISM”

He developed this habit as his experience of people grew. His father, a remarkable businessman and former minister of commerce, had taught him never to ask a question unless he was certain he did not already know the answer, even if only intuitively. When the time came to choose a career, he hesitated between the bar, medicine, and the Diplomatic Service — and became a soldier! The Second World War had just broken out; he was 20.

In 1943, his brother Lars died and so Lieutenant Gunnar Ericsson left the army in order to assist his father in running the family firm. An unspoken bond linked the tastes of the two men. They both shared a love for sport and business, and both adored football. “The field was my third home, the two others being Stockholm, my native city, and Atvidaberg, my village. When I was three I was already kicking a ball around the field near our house. I played in a junior team, then at university. In fact my passion was greater than my talent and in the end I gave up playing.” The father was president of the Swedish Football federation between 1936 and 1948; the son likewise between 1969 and 1975.

But a passion does not disappear, it transforms itself, and Gunnar Ericsson turned his passion to the service of sports administration. He spurred the Atvidaberg football team into action. It became one of



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Bo Ekelund, IOC Member from 1948 to 1965, helped Gunnar Ericsson discover Olympism.

the top teams in Sweden, gained promotion to the first division and won the national championship on several occasions. In sports administration as in professional management, Ericsson applied three principles that military life had taught him: the importance of physical condition; what to say and what not to say when giving orders; and short-term and long-term anticipation and planning. He liked and knew how to persuade, something he proved throughout his life, both on a professional level and in sports administration.

Well known nationally for his enterprising spirit, Ericsson invited the Brazilian football team to Atvidaberg to train in preparation for the 1966 World Cup. It was on this occasion that he got to know João Havelange, future IOC member in Brazil and future President of FIFA.

His life was hectic. Like his Viking ancestors, Gunnar Ericsson was always ready to set off again. Untiring, he travelled the world in search of new markets; his

company prospered and grew. The father of six children, he played tennis and golf and supported his football team.

Bo Ekelund, IOC member in Sweden, persuaded him to go to the Games of the XVIth Olympiad in Tokyo, and in so doing opened up to him a whole new horizon and interest. Fired with enthusiasm by Olympic sport and its influence: "It takes less time for Olympism to grow in your head than in your heart, but once it grows in your heart it never leaves you. It has become my priority", he said recently.

Ericsson felt highly honoured to be co-opted into the IOC in 1965. Two years later he was appointed member of the Finance Commission and in 1967 member of the Aid Commission IOC-NOC. In 1988 he was elected to the IOC Executive Board at the IOC Session in Seoul.

In 1968 he stood for the Swedish parliament and was elected. Increasingly absorbed by his new functions, Ericsson



Putting military principles to work in life.



The royal palace in Stockholm.

spent less and less time with his family who complained to him about it. His sons told him: "It you want to go on living like this warn us now". But how do you stop when everything is going well and the goals that have been reached are replaced by new ones?

In 1972 FACIT AB merged with Electrolux, and he subsequently became Head of Electrolux International. In 1972 he resigned from parliament, but his pace of life hardly slowed. He continued to open up markets to Swedish industry, mainly in

the Far East. In 1981 he was appointed President of the International Council of Swedish Industry.

When in 1980 he was appointed to the IOC Eligibility Commission, he thought hard about the relationship between sport and money. This is how he describes his position now: "20 or 25 years ago very few people took part in the Games as they did not have the money. The inequality of incomes created a sort of discrimination which is why under-the-counter payments became more widespread. The word ama-

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During a visit to Barcelona, Mr. Gunnar Ericsson with Mr. José Miguel Abad, President of COOB'92, (r.) Mr. Artur Takac, presidential delegate for the preparation of the Games, Mrs. Françoise Zweifel, IOC Secretary General and Mr. Fernando Riba (left).

teur has totally lost the meaning it had at the beginning of the century, and it was moreover removed from the "Olympic Charter" in 1974. The Olympic Games attract the best athletes in the world; you have to allow the best ones to take part, and most of these are professionals. Money enables sport to be promoted throughout the world and especially in developing countries".

President Juan Antonio Samaranch appointed him President of the Study and Evaluation Commission for the Preparation of the Games of the XXVth Olympiad.

Now that Barcelona has been chosen to host the Games in 1992, Gunnar Ericsson, who heads the Olympic Games Co-ordination Commission (liaison with Barcelona), finds himself faced with a new challenge: "If something goes wrong it's I who will get the blame, at least that's what I keep telling myself", he smiles, gathering his things together before heading for the airport.

At 69 years of age, Gunnar Ericsson who in 1970 was voted the most elegant man in Sweden — and who has remained so — walks quietly away. *M.-H.R.*