

COLLECTOR CAPTURES OLYMPIC HISTORY IN COIN COLLECTION

When Ottawa native Alexander Driega bought his first Olympic coin in 1953 he didn't know it would one day be part of what is probably the world's biggest collection of coins commemorating the Olympics and other world games. His first coin commemorated the 1952 Olympic Games, held in Helsinki. The coin revived a tradition of minting special coins for the Olympics that had lain dormant since the ancient Olympics.

Since then a number of countries around the world have minted Olympic commemorative coins. Driega's collection, meanwhile, has grown to hundreds of coins, including some of the earliest ever minted. He has three ancient Greek Olympic coins that date back as far as 480 B.C.

It is no accident that Driega chose the Olympics as the theme for his collection. He is an athlete himself (he tried out for a Commonwealth Games track and field team once and currently plays on a old-



timers hockey team) and is, in his own words, "a sucker for anything displaying the Olympic rings".

The collection, which he calls "A Salute to Champions", has been Driega's passport to a number of places, including

the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, last fall's International Olympic Committee meeting in Tokyo, and the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. It has grown to include not just coins, but medals and commemorative pins as well, always with a sports theme.

Collecting gold and silver coins is not an inexpensive hobby. "It drives me to the poorhouse every four years", chuckles Driega. So why does he do it? "I do it for the love of sport and to contribute to the Olympic Movement", he says. "I love what the Olympic rings stand for".

Each one of Driega's coins encapsulates a moment in Olympic history. The early Greek coins were likely struck to celebrate a particular victory in the Games. One of the more recent coins is a reminder of a tragic moment in Olympic history - the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes in Munich. Another depicts the disappointment generated by the boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. The latest set to be minted is a series for the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville. Driega plans to keep collecting and hopes to display his coins at both the 1992 Summer and Winter Olympics.

Alexander Driega, an Olympic collector.