

Olympic Gold Medallists



ANTON GEESINK

Judo was officially included on the Olympic programme at the 1964 Games of the XVIII Olympiad in Tokyo. The Japanese, who were flattered by the decision, naturally hoped to win the all-category gold medal. It was therefore a dismayed silence, followed by thunderous applause, which greeted Dutch athlete Anton Geesink when he used his 110-kilogram frame to immobilize the Japanese champion Akio Kaminaga. Three years earlier, Geesink had become the world champion, claiming a title which had previously always gone to the Japanese. He repeated this feat in 1965 by winning the world title again, this time against Matsunaga of Japan.

Geesink learnt most of his technique and extremely rigorous training methods in Japan, and won 18 European titles, reigning as European all-category champion almost uninterruptedly from 1953 to 1967. After his victory at the Tokyo Games, Japan hailed him as a hero, graciously acknowledging his talent. After 1967, he became an official instructor for the Dutch army, and went on to train winners including the Olympic champion in Mexico City, Wim Ruska. Coopted into the IOC in 1987, he has been one of the Sport for All movement's most dedicated supporters, and acts as a delegate during the Olympic Games.

OR : What is your earliest image of the Olympic Games?

My first acquaintance with the Olympic Movement was not positive. I had been a member of the national wrestling team since 1956 and had been nominated for the

1960 Olympic Games in Rome. While training for the Games in southern France, I received a telegram from the NOC requesting me to return immediately to the Netherlands. I had expected to be asked to carry the Dutch flag into the Olym-

pic stadium during the opening ceremony. Instead, I was told that, because I was a sports teacher, I was considered to be a professional and could not take part. After working so hard, there was no reward for me, only punishment.

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Fortunately, in time the Olympic Movement grew and the regulations that had been enforced in 1960 relating to amateur status were amended. This meant that I could then take part in the 1964 Olympic Games, and I proudly carried the Dutch flag into the Olympic stadium in Tokyo and won the gold medal in judo.

OR : What is your best memory or favourite anecdote from the Olympic Games?

My best memory from the Olympic Games is of my discovery that the Olympic Movement is not restricted to the happy few but intended to promote sport for all.

OR : In your opinion, what is the significance of the Centenary of the Olympic Games?

The Centennial of the Olympic Games proves that the Olympic Movement has been stronger than the two World Wars. It will stimulate thousands of youngsters to challenge themselves and others in order to improve our society.

OR : What role do you feel sport and Olympism play in modern society?

The Olympic Movement, sports and culture have the power to demolish the boundaries that divide people and countries. The Olympic Movement has several timeless goals: equality [...], sport for all, amateurism versus professionalism, the role of women, and the environment.

OR : What message would you like to give to today's youth?

Be competitive. Improve yourself and our society day by day; but don't forget that the most important condition for sports and physical exercise will always be the enjoyment they give. So enjoy your sport.



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