

# Olympic Gold Medallists



## PAL SCHMITT

Pál Schmitt, IOC member in Hungary since 1983, is an accomplished fencer who counts among his distinctions two Olympic titles in team épée, won at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico and Munich in 1972. President of the Hungarian NOC since 1989, he is a member of the organizing commit-

tee of International Fencing Federation tournaments and was appointed Hungarian ambassador to Spain in 1993. He is currently IOC vice-president, chairman of the new Sport and Environment Commission, and a member of the Olympic Movement and Olympic Collectors' Commissions.

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

In 1956, when I was 14, I remember that the Hungarian Olympic Team left for the Olympic Games in Melbourne while the Hungarian Revolution was going on, and that the circumstances in the country and in the capital of Buda-

pest were not favourable. I listened anxiously to the radio commentaries (there was no television coverage available at that time) about the Olympic Games and was eager to learn the results. I clearly recall the victory of László Papp, who won his third Olympic title, and the dramatic struggle of the waterpolo final between the Soviet and the Hungarian teams. László Papp became my first Olympic idol, because of his outstanding sportsmanship and human qualities.

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

In the épée final of the Mexico Games I was, as usual, the first fencer to compete against the Soviet team. My fellow team members advised me on strategy, and said that I should try for a double defeat, which would allow them to overcome the Soviet side. Abushametov, my opponent, had surely received similar instructions, since the Soviet team also had two fantastic fencers: Kriss and Nikantsikov. Consequently, during the entire opening bout, we stood 5 or 6 metres apart and our swords did not even touch. The approximately 6,000 enthusiastic Mexican fans were extremely disappointed, because

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they had been expecting a heated struggle in the final. The simultaneous radio commentator must have had a hard time covering the "action". I remember this final with pride, since we won 8-3 against the Soviet team, and my later victory also helped us to achieve our dream of winning the Olympic championship.

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

The most important message of the Games is the unity of the Olympic Movement. We are proud that the 197 NOCs of the world have accepted our invitation. The power and the steady development of the Movement is reflected by the increased number of participating nations: in 1896, only 245 athletes from 13 countries were present in Athens. It is the responsibility of the International Olympic Committee to preserve the universality of the Games while maintaining the high level of the competitions. I feel convinced that the Centennial Olympic Games, like all of the previous Games, will be a magnificent celebration of sport and culture, and of

the wonderful contribution which youth has made to peace.

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

In my opinion, the most important task of Olympism and sport is the education of youth. The unknown challenges of the next century can only be faced by those who have the appropriate physical and educational background. Consequently, the old adage of a "sound mind in a sound body" is more valid than ever. Recently, President Samaranch honoured me with the task of chairing the IOC Sport and Environment Commission. I feel convinced that Olympism has great opportunities and much to do in this field as well. Everyone should work to preserve the environment, by all possible means. We Olympians therefore have a responsibility in this endeavour. I consider education to be one of the most effective tools and methods.

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

My message to the youth of today is that they should not miss the wonder-

ful opportunity which sports offers. It is not possible for everyone to become a champion, but in the wide spectrum of sport, which includes popular sport, competitive and high-level sport, recreational sport, school and university sport, and so on, each and every one of us may find his or her most suitable activity. Sports is one of the mainsprings of life.



Munich 1972