

Olympic Gold Medallists



THOMAS BACH

Thomas Bach became Olympic champion in team foil at the Games of the XXI Olympiad in Montreal in 1976. He was world team champion in 1976 and 1977, individual champion in 1977 and 1978, and also won the European champions' Cup in 1978. With 23 national titles to his name, Mr Bach, who is a lawyer by training, has subsequently pursued a career in sports administration. Elected to the Executive Council of the National Olympic Committee for Germany,

he was spokesman for the athletes at the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden in 1981. He is a member of various IOC commissions - New Sources of Financing, Legal, Sport and Law, Olympic Collectors' (International Olympic Numismatics Federation) - and chaired the Evaluation Commission for the XIX Olympic Winter Games in 2002, an office which he holds once again for the Games of the XVII Olympiad in 2004. He has been an IOC member since 1991.

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

My earliest Olympic memories are of great athletes. It was Wilma Rudolph who impressed me most in 1960 in Rome, setting Olympic standards not only through her athletic performance. Winning the gold in Olympic sprinting after overcoming severe polio is an extraordinary human achievement. For this reason, I have always considered myself especially lucky to have had the chance to know this fascinating athlete. My other early memories

line in the final 1,500 metres, and had to be supported by his fellow competitors after the race. Another athlete who impressed me was Anton Geesink, with his sensational win in judo. He also exemplifies an iron will and determination, which are still part of his character today.

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

Without a doubt, it is of the time I spent in the Olympic village. Living

friendship. More than anything else, life in the Olympic village is an example of how people can compete but at the same time be tolerant and friendly. This fantastic atmosphere, which you can not understand unless you have experienced it, is the true definition of what is often described as the Olympic spirit.

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

The Olympic Movement has not only survived all of the crises of the past one hundred years, but today it is more universal and hence stronger than ever. In the one hundred years of its existence, the Olympic Movement has set an unparalleled example of understanding, tolerance and solidarity. The culmination of this development will be the participation by all 197 of the IOC-recognized NOCs in the 1996 Games of the Olympiad in Atlanta, in the United States of America. It is an encouraging sign that, through Olympic Solidarity, every NOC will be able to send athletes to this centennial celebration. As a result, this hundred-year anniversary should encourage us to make even greater efforts to ensure the universality of the Olympic Games and equal opportunities for athletes in the years ahead.

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

Olympism continues to gain social and political importance. The Olympic



(Right) Thomas Bach in action

go back to the 1964 Games of the Olympiad in Tokyo. For me, Willi Holdorf stood out in particular for his victory in the decathlon. He may not have been the most talented athlete, but he was full of energy and spirit. I will never forget how he staggered, completely exhausted, over the finish

with your opponents under one roof, and celebrating and talking with athletes from all over the world once the competitions are over, are truly Olympic moments. A sense of bonding develops in the Olympic village, and this lasts far beyond your active sporting career, often growing into deep



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Games are much more than a sports demonstration. Through its humanitarian, cultural and environmental work, the IOC has shown that the Olympic Movement has concerns in other areas and that it wishes to bring these together under the roof of Olympism. The educational role of Olympism is expressed in the UN resolution of 7 November 1995 on "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal", which was co-sponsored by a record number of 161 Member-States, following a historic speech by the IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch. By calling for observance of an Olympic Truce, the IOC has demonstrated its

commitment to world peace. Sport is the only social event in which people of all races, religions, colours, nationalities and cultures can compete peacefully according to rules which are the same for everyone. Sport thus fulfils the political philosophical concept of "one law, one people". Therein lie both its great importance and its great responsibility to society.

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

Olympic sport offers every young person the unique chance to fulfil his or her potential through achievement, in a spirit of tolerance and union. Only sport can offer this balance between

striving for perfection and respecting the achievements of others. For this reason, I can only advise every young person to become active in sport, measure their talents against others' in peaceful competition, and acknowledge their opponents' winnings in the same way that they celebrate their own victories. Sport offers every young person the chance to escape from social and also psychological ghettos. Combined with tolerance, the will to achieve and strive for success in sport opens up a world of intense experiences which almost no other social sphere can offer. In this sense, the Olympic Games remain the pinnacle of the all young athletes' efforts.