

Olympic Medallists



DENIS OSWALD

A former member of the Swiss national rowing team, Denis Oswald was 13 times national champion in the elite category, including five championships in skiff (i.e. one-man) rowing. He took part in the 1968 Games in Mexico City, where his team won a bronze medal in the four oars with coxswain. Finalists at the 1972 Games in Munich, and four years later at the Montreal Games, his team placed 8th in the four oars with coxswain. Denis Oswald, who was the first runner-up in the Swiss national university ice hockey cham-

pionship, moved from a career in top-level sports to international sports administration, where he served as secretary general of the International Rowing Federation (FISA) before becoming president of the Federation in 1989. Deputy secretary general of the Swiss NOC, he became an IOC member in 1991 and plays an active part in the work of the commissions, particularly the Juridical Commission, where his experience as a lawyer and arbitrator for the Court of Arbitration for Sport is put to good use.

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

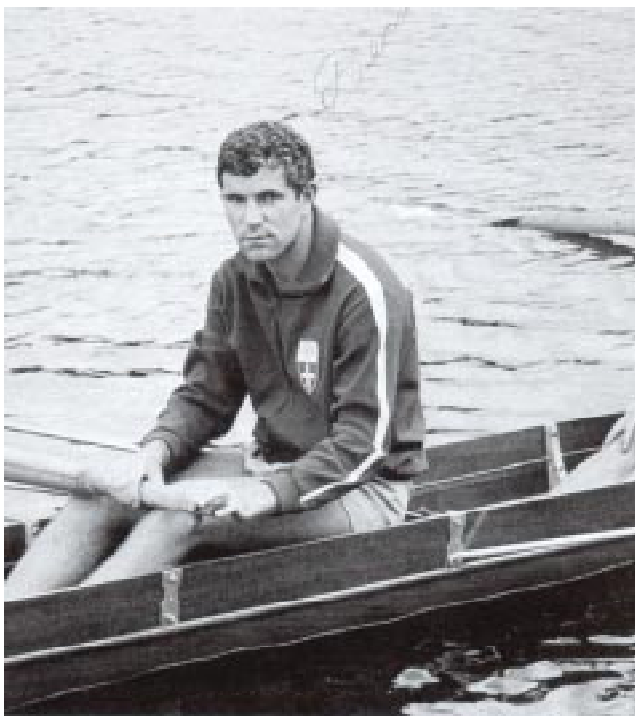
In 1960, when I was 13, few families had a television. One summer, I was walking past a radio and television shop which had a set playing in the window and I saw a stunningly graceful athlete run up and clear a 2.14-metre hurdle. This was John Thomas at the Olympic Games in Rome. The image fascinated me, and I couldn't move away from the shop window until the competition had ended. That was my first "contact" with the Olympic Games, and every day, I went back to the shop window to see the other events from the Games in Rome.

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

At the Olympic Games in Mexico City, I watched the athletics events closely once the rowing competitions had ended. After one fantastic set of meets, I ended up at the Olympic village restaurant with some other athletes. We quickly got to talking, and I

said how impressed I had been by one of the races I had seen a few hours before. I asked the others if they had seen the race I was talking about, and one of them answered

shyly: "Yes, in a way, I did see it. I won it!" And as he undid the zipper of his track suit jacket to reveal a magnificent gold medal, a look of pride lit up his face.



Denis Oswald, bronze medallist at the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Montreal.

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

In historical terms, one hundred years is not very significant. But for an institution, to survive one hundred years in our troubled world is a sign of strength, health and vitality. This centennial therefore attests to the value of the Olympic Movement. The fact that after one hundred years it is stronger than ever allows it to move confidently into its second century of existence.

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

Sport and Olympism constitute one of the most interesting social phenomena of our time. No event other than the Olympic Games can hold the attention of so many people for a full two weeks. This fact places sport and Olympism in a strategic position in terms of public outreach, and thus enables them to play an educational role and to promote a number of ideas, rules, principles and a philosophy of life that is based on the values which they embody and uphold.



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

It is important that young people organize their lives around an ideal or a cause which can be their focus and which at the same time gives meaning to their lives. The practice of a sport is like a school for character: it teaches you to concentrate your efforts on achieving a goal, to acquire a sense of determination and restraint, and to accept adversity and defeat and overcome them. I believe that this is a way for young people to attain and develop qualities which subsequently help them to cope with the problems they encounter in any area of their lives.