

# Participants in the Olympic Games



## DAME MARY ALISON GLEN-HAIG, DBE

Dame Mary Alison participated in the fencing events in all of the Games of the Olympiad from 1948 to 1960 (London, Helsinki, Melbourne and Rome). Given her medical background and training (she directed, among other institutions, the Princess Christian Hospital in Windsor), she served on the IOC Medical Commission from 1983 to

1993. She was elected as an IOC member in 1982 and became an honorary member in 1994. Very active in the management of Olympic sport in her country, she has also belonged to the British Olympic Association, the Central Council for Physical Recreation, the Sports Council, and the British Sports Association for the Disabled.

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

The story of the 1908 Marathon. I never tired of hearing the story of the Marathon at the 1908 Games, of how it was run from Windsor Castle to the Stadium at the White City, and how the distance was extended by 385 yards so that the finish would be in front of the Royal Box. How Pietri Dorando competing for Italy was so exhausted when he arrived at the Stadium, that he turned right by mistake and fell on the track. He was helped up and continued, but he fell again. He was helped up again, but those assisting him did not realize that the first assistance had disqualified him from winning the gold medal. For some time he lay between life and death. Her Majesty Queen Alexandra was so impressed by his courage that she gave him a gold cup.

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

I have two special memories of the 1948 Games. The first is of the party given by the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace for the competitors, and of Her Majesty remarking to me that my uncle was very proud of me. I had no idea that she knew my uncle.

The second was of the dinner I and my colleague had in the French kitchen. The British competitors had to take their rations and ration books with them to the women's quarters. In the house next door the French girls were eating beefsteak and chips. The smell was too much for us, so we slipped in to their dining room and joined the queue.

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

I imagine that when one lives, in good health, to the age of one hundred, there is a unique package of experience which ought rightly to be a source of fascination, education and inspiration to those who follow. The same must surely apply to a uni-

versal event which attains its Centenary celebrations. It is advisable to look back and assess the pros and cons of all the years and to ask - "Have things improved?"

In the case of the Olympic Games there are further questions, such as "Has the challenge presented by Pierre de Coubertin to the youth of the world been honoured?" "Have we learned from experience?" "Are we perhaps guilty today of missing potential promise; bowing to man's seeming desire for power in sport, to the mass media, to hype and razz-ma-tazz?" "Is there self-aggrandizement?" "Does competition smack of battle rather than fair play?" "Is there a God named Money?"

For me the significance of the Centenary of the Olympic Games will be found in straightforward answers to such questions, and in an analysis of *all* Olympic roles - from the IOC to training schemes, to selection processes, to personal commitment, to giving rather than getting, to appreciating the "other man", and much else: in short, the Olympic ideals laid bare.

# Participants in the Olympic Games

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

Sport is of significant interest to large sections of the population - it is part of our social structure. There is also heavy commercial involvement: all who play (and some who don't) wear appropriate clothing and want the right equipment - racket, bat, sports bag, and so on.

Olympism conjures something more. Whether the man in the street has any concept of "Olympism" (other than television coverage) is questionable. Furthermore, the glitz, glamour, appearance, money, gifts related to medals, undue lobbying, the seeming self-aggrandizement of some who - competitors or officials - wearing their national colours and meeting with success, can too easily assume a style that is

distasteful to the ordinary citizen, who then becomes cynical [and thinks], "If that is Olympism, I'll pass it by".

To the dedicated athlete, however, Olympism must surely have meaning. This is, perhaps, particularly true at junior or intermediate level. The philosophy of fair play, commitment, concentration and the personal demands so made, should add up to a well focused individual who appreciates and accepts that training is hard and endless.

To work fearlessly in the interests of Olympism will not be easy; it calls for total integrity and in "modern society" that is sometimes overlooked or smothered. Nevertheless, Pierre de Coubertin's call to the youth of the world rings true: it is to be hoped that society will uphold it.

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

Achievement in any sphere is customarily the result of hard work. To pay constant attention to the task at hand is not easy for anyone - but it is necessary: that thought is worth pondering and adopting. Always beware the "chip on the shoulder" which will inevitably deny you your full potential.

I often find that someone else has expressed a belief far better than I can myself, so I shamelessly "steal". Here's an example:

"The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but *what they become by it*".

(John Ruskin, 1819-1900)



*Dame Mary Alison Glen-Haig DBE, participant in the fencing competitions at the Olympic Games from 1948 to 1960.*

