

ISOH PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



What a long, strange trip it's been – Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead

It seems like yesterday that we met at the Duke of Clarence in the Knightsbridge Section of London. There were seven of us there that day and we had lunch and later dinner that evening. The seven members present were Ian Buchanan, Stan Greenberg, Ove Karlsson, Peter Matthews, David Wallechinsky, Ture Widlund, and myself. Several other Olympic historians had been invited and regrets had been received from Tony Bijkerk, Peter Diamond, Pim Huurman, Erich Kamper, Volker Kluge, and Wolf Lyberg.

We had met specifically to form a group devoted to the study of Olympic History and out of that meeting came the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH). The meeting was far from formal. I remember after we agreed to form the group, we walked outside, and were walking back to our hotel, when somebody remembered we needed someone to lead the group. We stopped and someone else said, "How about Ian," and by acclamation Ian Buchanan became our first President – while standing in the rain, on a street corner outside the Duke of Clarence.

Recently, in looking through some of my old notes from Ture Widlund, while working on a book on the 1912 Olympics, I became impressed by Ture's contribution to this concept. There are letters in my correspondence file going back to 1983, in which Ture discusses the idea of forming this society. He wrote several times to the IOC trying to enlist their support, and we also discussed possible names for the group in some of the letters. He was definitely instrumental in the founding of ISOH.

But the study of Olympic History long predates the founding of ISOH. Probably the first authors who wrote on the history of the Modern Olympics were the German, Fritz Wasner, and the Swede, Erik Bergvall. I know little else of these two individuals, but some of their early books are in my library and I wish I knew more. Shortly thereafter, Carl Diem of Germany made the study of the Olympic Movement his life's work and his institute continues to produce top-notch research on the subject to this day. In the 1950s, the Hungarian IOC Member, Ferenc Mező, produced several books on the history of the Olympics and one of these, *The Modern Olympic Games*, was instrumental in forming my interest in the subject.

In the 1960s the Austrian, Erich Kamper, began producing books on the Olympics and he was first Honorary President of ISOH. He was also the first Olympic historian to be awarded the Olympic Order (in 1983), and was a big inspiration to me in the early days of what was once, for me, a hobby.

In the 1960s the field of Olympic History expanded. Prior to that time, the subject was primarily a statistical one. But in the United States, John Lucas wrote a PhD thesis on Pierre de

Coubertin in 1958, and really began the study in this country of the Olympics on a socio-political basis. This topic has become much more important in the last half of the 20th century and now dominates much of the writing on Olympic History. Dr. Lucas was the forerunner in the United States, but he has been joined worldwide by many researchers and the field now includes many sub-topics – including philosophy, sociology, political science, kinesiology, and several others.

As the field of Olympic History has expanded, so have the number of journals and groups devoted to its study. ISOH is now far from alone. Olympic Study Centres have proliferated, starting in the late 1980s with the formation of the Olympic Study Centres at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada (led by ISOH member Bob Barney) and at the Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport (led by Miguel Moragas). These have been followed by similar centers in Sydney and Beijing. The University of Western Ontario began a yearly academic journal in 1991 entitled *Olympika*, devoted to the history, sociology and politics of the Olympic Movement and Olympic Games.

ISOH has flourished since 1991. We now have 300 members in almost 50 nations. Our journal was originally entitled *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, and I served as the first editor. I remember putting it together on the floor of the study with my wife helping, and our dogs sitting nearby. Now entitled the *Journal of Olympic History*, it has been significantly upgraded through the work of Steve Harris and Tony Bijkerk and their associate editors. We are indebted to the efforts of Anthony Edgar, who in his post with the Sydney Organizing Committee, helped publish the journal in a much more professional form.

Ian Buchanan served ably as ISOH President from 1991-2000, at which time I was elected to follow him. Ian and I have corresponded with each other since 1981 and first met in 1983. To any member who has not met him, you are the lesser for it, for he is all the man there is. He brought ISOH into the 21st Century and I hope I can only follow in his footsteps.

So follow us into our second decade of existence. Let's hope it is as successful as our first decade. And let's hope also that the Olympic Movement also flourishes further, and in the light of recent events, that it does so in a peaceful world.

Bill Mallon
ISOH President
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