

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The members of the Executive Committee and IOC member Dick Pound, who represents the IOC on the Committee, sent us the following information.

What do you think about this problem? Should athletes who have not taken part in a competition actively should be awarded a medal? Please let us know your opinion which we will publish in the next issue. We allow ourselves to shorten comments which are too long. We are looking forward to receiving your statements.

Dear Friends,

While working on the new edition of my "Golden Book of all Dutch Olympians", I came across a big historical problem, about which I know that some of you have quite a fixed opinion!

In 1976 the Dutch water polo team won a bronze medal. One of the members of the team was Alex Boegschoten, who was the reserve goalkeeper. Although he was a full member of the team, according to one of his colleagues he never played one second in any of the matches, but still received his bronze medal like the other ten players.

This is one of the problems which cannot be solved, if we cannot get hold of the full protocol of each match played. In the protocols in the "official results books" from the Games in Montréal and Moscow, the teams are all mentioned with the accredited and playing eleven names, but during the match no changes of players is ever mentioned. So, I had to hear it from one of the contestants themselves to get the information that Boegschoten did not play at all. I now have the

choice to leave him out of my database and my new book, or leave him in!

My spokesman, the goalkeeper who instead played all the matches in the Olympics, stated explicitly that in his opinion Boegschoten was as much a member of the team as he himself and that he fully deserved to receive the medal. He had one argument which is completely valid and that is that if he hadn't told me this fact, I would never had known it, because nobody can ever find out if one of the players of the eleven did not play. I know that Jacques Rogge himself fully supports this view and he told us that in no uncertain words, when we visited him in September last year. I would agree that if protocol's exist where this detail is mentioned, it would be a different matter; but in this case, water polo, the rules were changed in such a way that each team consists of eleven players, regardless if they enter the water or not!

Please give me Your views on this!

*Anthony Th. Bijkerk
July 08, 2003*

Dear Friends,

This is important news. Dick Pound was the first one who answered my e-mail and with fine information!

Anthony Th. Bijkerk
July 08, 2003

You may know that the IOC has decided to take up this matter with the relevant IFs, so that there will be a consistent policy in future.

I see a difference in character between the water polo team member who does not play, but is clearly part of a team, and possible substitutes in a relay "team" who do not participate.

Richard W. Pound
July 08, 2003

Dear Tony

I support the view of the goalkeeper you spoke with, and of Jacques Rogge himself. These people got their medals under the rules that existed at the time, and according to your goalkeeper, Boegschoten deserved his. That seems to be the end of the affair. To try to change things now would be to create an unnecessary, unpleasant controversy. I would leave him in the data base, and in the book. It would be unfair to him to do otherwise. If your information is definitely correct that, although he was a bronze medallist he played no game time, it may be worth taking in a footnote to that effect.

Regards.

Harry Gordon
July 10, 2003

Dear ISOH Friends,

I certainly understand the idea of awarding medals to team members who do not compete. Recently my son's football (soccer) team finished second in the California state championship. There was one kid who not only did not compete; he wasn't actually on the roster. However he was on the training squad and was an important part of the team effort. I thought he should have been awarded a medal. (He wasn't.) Nevertheless, in terms of the Olympics, to include non-competing team members in the official records is the beginning of a slippery slope.

I suggest that the best solution is to do what dozens of Olympic coaches have done: play each member of the team at least once, even if it is for only a few minutes. If a player who receives a medal without competing, he will always have the feeling that he was not actually an Olympian, whereas a player who gets even one minute of playing time in one match can,

for the rest of his life, tell his grandchildren that he competed in the Olympics.

This solution is not new. I refer you to the sailing events of 1932. In the 8-meter class, Helmsman Owen Churchill made sure that all eleven members of his crew and alternate crew participated in at least one race so that each would be awarded a gold medal. If Owen Churchill had the foresight and understanding to do that 71 years ago, I should think that today's coaches can do the same.

David Wallechinsky
July 10, 2003

Dear ISOH friends,

In my opinion we are dealing with an almost insoluble problem, as there are a lot of Olympians who have been awarded medals, without having competed with their teams at the Olympic Games, not even for one second. Those athletes have already been included in many official records as Olympians, thus we need to wonder what will happen in case the rules change. I personally believe that all athletes who are members of their national teams should be awarded medals in case their team wins, even if they have not competed in the Games. Of course, I have to admit that the solution proposed by David is probably the most appropriate one, however, it should first of all be accepted as well as respected by the coaches, in games that are crucial for the team, the reserve players, incited by their coaches, could claim injury and not play, in order to avoid harming the team's performance. Another suggestion that could serve a solution would be to reduce the number of reserve team members to two athletes maximum. In this way, all the athletes of a country's national team would have the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games.

In conclusion, I feel that, due to the great importance that team spirit has in winning medals, I am awarding medals to all team members.

My warmest regards

Dr. Kostas Georgiadis
July 11, 2003

Dear Friends,

I fully agree with most of your comments, but especially with David's and Dick Pound's. I am glad that the IOC will consult the IF's with the intention to solve the problem once for all.

However, I remembered that something equal to what David mentioned in his message with regard to Owen Churchill, happened to the Dutch gold medal women's field hockey team in

Los Angeles in 1984. The Dutch coach replaced three of his basic team players by reserves in the 67th minute of the match, and another reserve that had not yet played in the last match, just before the end of the game. This resulted in the fact that all sixteen participants played this tournament and all sixteen got their gold medal as a result!

So, the solution mentioned by David is possible, but coaches (and chef's d'équipe should also pay attention to this problem! Maybe can Dick Pound inform the IF's about this, when the discussions with them will take place?

Anthony Th. Bijkerk
July 11, 2003

I assume the discussions with the IF's will be soon, since we would like to have a solution that can be implemented in Athens. I will check with Gilbert Felli re schedule.

Richard W. Pound
July 12, 2003

ISOH Executive Committee

I have been away on holiday so sorry for the delay in replying to Tony's queries re alternates and who counts as an Olympian and who does not. I have several comments many of which agree with what had been said previously.

1) We should not re-write history. If the Dutch athlete received a medal or a diploma, he should be counted as an Olympian. This violates the Olympic Charter somewhat, but it reflects what has happened. A similar episode occurred in Sydney with the 2000 US women's football team. Five of their members never played but they received silver medals.

2) I think there is a major distinction between team sports (basketball, football, etc.) and team events within other sports, as Dick said. For team events within other sports, the Olympic Charter states that only those competing in the final receive medals. The IOC and IFs used to follow this but no longer do (starting in 1988, I believe). Now all runners or swimmers in relays in the early rounds also receive medals. I have no major problem with this, as long as they actually competed, but for consistency, I think the Olympic Charter should be amended or as Dick noted, the IOC and IFs need to reach common ground. But I think that a line here should be drawn somewhat, and I'll lobby for this with Dick herein. In events such as team fencing, I would think the athlete had to have actually competed to be considered an Olympian (in that event) or receive a medal. A fencer who sits on the sideline throughout and never competed in a single match to me did not actually compete in the event.

3) But I agree with Rogge and I think team sports (basketball, football, hockey, ice hockey, water polo, etc.) are different. Here people train together truly as a team (they do not in fencing - it is a passive team event). The men and women sitting on the bench contribute by their efforts in practice making their other team members better. I think here it is legitimate to consider all the team members as Olympians and/or medallists. But again, this going forward only. I would not re-write history as this has not been the policy in the past. This is the American/Canadian system where all the members of the Stanley Cup winners get their name on the trophy, even if they did not compete in the final (goalkeepers/tenders only). They contributed - they competed earlier in the year, and it is likely in Olympic sports, those non-competitors competed in qualifying matches and the like.

4) As to Tony's theory of the coaches getting everybody in, it is nice in theory but difficult to implement. It relates to the win at all costs philosophy vs. the everybody plays philosophy. At the highest level of sports, the Olympics certainly, the Will at all costs philosophy predominates whether it should or not I'll leave to the philosophers. The best example I know to contradict Tony's theory involves 1980 ice hockey. The 2nd USA goalie was Steve Janaszak but he never played a single second of any match and did not receive a gold medal (to the best of my knowledge he was not supposed to receive one perhaps the IOC relented). Let's assume that the USA-URS match was the final (it was not we played FIN in the final after beating URS). With seconds to go in that match, the score was 4-3. I cannot conceive of any coach USA or any nation putting Janaszak into that match with seconds to go, under any circumstances. To do so would risk putting the gold medal at jeopardy. So I don't think this theory of asking the coaches to be certain everybody plays will work.

However, it is hard for me to conceive there is any difference in Janaszak's contribution to the team effort whether he played 1 second, or whether he got for the last few seconds of a meaningless game (the only time the coach would consent to this concept).

Bill Mallon
July 14, 2003

The IOC sent a letter last week to the IF's, with a reply date by the end of September. The IOC EB will take a decision in December or February.

Richard W. Pound
July 14, 2003

The following letter was received as a mail dated June 23 2003. It is similar to the article written by Phil BARKER about the Wembley Stadium. This article was edited in the last issue of our Journal.

I am writing to say that it is good to see an informative edition and congratulations on your efforts.

My interests lie in the two London Olympics 1908 and 1948, hence my e-mail address [wembleyman@aol.com].

I was over at Wembley almost every day watching the demolition of the stadium and finally the 'twin towers'. It was very sad to see it go and in its place now are several tall insignificant looking concrete blocks, obviously part of the new Stadium. I took some friends when the towers were almost down and we spotted a large circular construction which turns out to be the base for one end of the gigantic arch that is to become the symbol of the new Wembley Stadium. Fortunately I have a range of

photographs that I took of the interior of the Olympic Stadium including some architectural features.

We have been assured that the 1948 Olympic plaques are in storage and will be renovated and put in the museum in the new Stadium.

I also find the Olympic obituaries particularly useful for when I get round writing up my collection although I am finding the good 1948 items particularly difficult to find now.

I have heard that the finishing line of the 1908 marathon has been marked on a wall in the new BBC building on the site of the White City Stadium. Can this be verified?

Hope to hear from you,

Alan Sabey in Middlesex, England