

# Alida Johanna van den Bos

\*1902-01-18 †2003-06-16

Alida Johanna van den Bos was until Wednesday, July 16, 2003 the oldest living Olympic champion in the Netherlands and in the world. She was born 18<sup>th</sup> January 1902 in Amsterdam, and thus was 101 years and 179 days old, when she passed away.



She started her gymnastic career when she became 16 years old and became a member of the gymnastics club DOK in the city of her birth.

Talented as she was, she made rapid improvements and soon she was chosen in the Dutch national team, a couple of years before the organisation of the Games of the IXth Olympiad, to be held in Amsterdam in 1928.

The selection and the training for the Dutch national team were rather stringent, especially for those early days. She told this story some years ago, when she was interviewed by one of our Olympic historians.

Each Wednesday-evening and during the weekend, training took place in the gymnastics-hall from a local school in Amsterdam, or, of all places, on the beach near the seaside resort Scheveningen.

This outdoor training was thought necessary, because the trainer of the national team, Mr. KLEEREKOPER, knew that the actual Olympic tournament would also take place outdoors and he wanted to prepare the team for all eventualities.

Alie van den Bos survived all that training as one of the best of the selected gymnasts and as a logical consequence she was selected

for the national Olympic team, and chosen to represent the Netherlands at the Games of the IXth Olympiad, in Amsterdam, in 1928.

She called these Olympic Games *"the most wonderful experience in her life"*.

With the Dutch gymnastics team, consisting of ten athletes, she won the 1928 Olympic gold medal with flying colours!

**Alie van den Bos as "chef d'équipe" in 1948.**

History tell us that gymnastics for women was on the Olympic programme for the first time in Amsterdam, in 1928, and then only as a team-event.

Individual gymnastics competition for women did not come on the Olympic programme before the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952.

Almost half of the Dutch gymnastics team for 1928 were Jewish girls. With only one exception, these all perished in one of the German extermination camps during the Second World War. Mr. KLEEREKOPER, the trainer happened to be Jewish too, and he also did not return alive from those camps.

Alie van den Bos offered one of her former Jewish team members that she would take care of the children from that Jewish family, but the offer was declined. She completely understood that denial and said: *"One never leaves ones children alone, but nevertheless...!"*

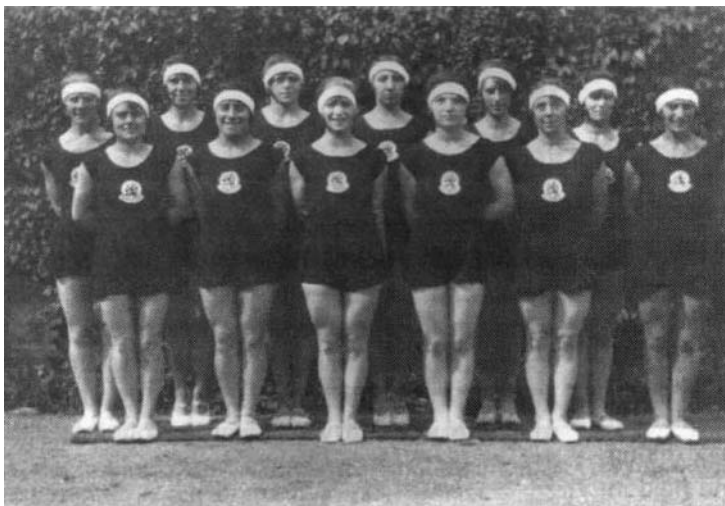
In normal life, Mrs. Van den Bos was a teacher at a technical school.

She kept being a gymnastics buff all through her life, and was a member of a gymnastics club for decades. In this way she brought her love for gymnastics over to many young girls!

In 1948, she was appointed "chef d'équipe" of the Dutch Olympic team, which finished in fifth place during the Olympic Games in London.

Since a couple of years, she was living in a home for the elder in Amsterdam, but for many years she lived in an apartment on the third floor of a large block, close to the "Amsterdamse Bos".

**Dutch Ladies Gymnastics Team 1928 with Alie van den Bos on the far left in the backrow.**





There happened to be no lift in this block and so for many decades, she had to climb all those stairs to get home. Her longtime experience in gymnastics came to her aid. Only in the last couple of years, she had to use a personal lift to get home on the third floor.

Alie van den Bos reached the age of 101 years on January 18 2003, and lived quietly in her room in the "Leo Polakhuis" in Amsterdam until her death. She was frail, but her mind was sharp till the very end.

In 2000, the Council of the Olympic Order

awarded her the Olympic Order in silver and IOC-member Anton GEESINK personally made the presentation. She was immensely pleased with the award, which she received at the age of 98 years! When she reached the age of onehundred years, the Netherlands Olympic Committee brought her a large bouquet with 100 red roses!

Alie van den Bos was cremated in Amsterdam on July 21, 2003.

Tony Bijkerk