

REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The World Olympians - the fourth Olympic Unity? General Assembly of the World Olympians Association November 28-29, 2003 in Lausanne

What a fantastic opportunity it would have been for hunters of autographs from famous Olympic medal winners, when they would have been present at the General Assembly of the *World Olympians Association* (WOA) held on November 28-29, 2003 in Lausanne.

Attending the meeting were 125 former Olympians from 115 different nations, representing 27 sports. Among them 18 gold-, 16 silver-, and 19 bronze medal winners.

Since its founding in 1995, the WOA has grown impressively under the enthusiastic leadership of former Olympic fencer and IOC member Pál SCHMITT.

Even for me, having attended 27 Olympic Summer and Winter Games, and during that period having witnessed most of these Olympians

during the highlights of their career, it was an honour to meet with famous champions and hear them speak.

Most of them seem to have had brilliant careers after finishing their live as a sportsman or sportswoman. Doctors, high ranked military men, lawyers, architects and engineers were common, with some thirty elegant women among them; all made brilliant speeches. It was also good to hear what various organisations had done for athletes who had not been so lucky or who were in bad health.

This organisation (WOA) is growing rapidly and that gave them some enthusiastic sponsors, like für instance the city of Osaka in Japan, which now seems to grow hard into a real sports paradise.

For me - not as an Olympian myself, but with a lot of experience and possibly an Olympic record of attendances in the Games - it was a memorable experience to be invited to speak for such an audience with so many nations represented and to discuss those days that had gone by, with many individuals.

However, less impressive was the way the agenda had been organised; especially for us, visitors from Nordic countries, who are used to have every detail of congresses or meetings well under control well in advance.

First of all the counting and certification of number of votes should have been done as the first point on the agenda; then only a call of presence should have been necessary - and any late additions could have been added. Now it took almost two hours to have each member come down and show his/her right to vote.

The meeting derailed immediately when a two hour long debate started on finances and auditors... and it was even worse that this was evidently caused by members in the Executive Board. It is rare to witness such an inside battle! Why not settle such differences in advance, and then show the unity which the Olympic Movement always cherishes?

The outcome of the voting for the election of nine members for the Executive Board [it had been seven during the last period] should have been a catastrophe, but for the assistance of the juridical advisor of the WOA, the American Josh HENSON, himself the son of a legendary US-wrestler. Mr. HENSON'S role was to comment on actual rules and suggestions for changes to be made. If it was his idea not to announce the actual figures the WOA might have elected a new president. Each candidate was allowed to speak one minute to present him/herself and his/her ideas.

Here are the figures:

1. Liston BOCHETTE, (PUR), bobsleigh, 93;
2. Daichi SUZUKI, (JPN), swimmer, 87;

3. Amadou DIA BA, (SEN), athletics, 80;
4. Kieren PERKINS, (AUS), swimmer, 76;
5. Joel BOZOU, (FRA), modern pentathlon, 72;
6. Charmaine CROOKS, (CAN), athletics, 71;
7. Bill TOOMEY, (USA), athletics, 66;
8. Pál SCHMITT, (HUN), fencing, 63;
9. Elizabeth FERRIS, (GBR), diving, 56.

Eliminated as tenth was IOC member Irena SZEWINSKA from Poland with 53 votes. She probably spoiled her chances by a three minute talk about her medals in five Olympic Games. Liston BOCHETTE was re-elected by acclamation as secretary-general. The right for the presidency was between Pál SCHMITT and Bill TOOMEY. The decathlon champion from 1968 was the favorite, but lost the race with a surprisingly high difference: 64 to 37 votes, with two votes not accepted and Switzerland and Bermuda missing the voting [why?].

Elizabeth FERRIS and Bill TOOMEY were elected vice-presidents. It was quite remarkable that the candidates who finished in the voting on the places 7, 8 and 9, became president and vice-presidents!

So it may be concluded that the main office of the WOA remains in Budapest, Hungary. This in itself is okay, as it seems to me that the staff had made fine overall preparations of all paperwork for such a big meeting. The problem about the finances, auditors and voting were not their problem.

For the next four years, I sincerely hope that the "close to a catastrophe" happenings this time, has been a good lesson and that the unity and cooperation with the three new members, PERKINS, SUZUKI and BOZOU, will bring this very interesting organization forward to become the fourth strong pillar of the Olympic Movement.

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