

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

Dear ISOH,

In his very interesting article, Pete Cava mentions the demonstration sport of *kaatsen*, calling this sport, “a Dutch form of cricket.” *Kaatsen* has nothing at all to do with either cricket or baseball.

Kaatsen is one of the oldest forms of sport in the world. There are many forms of *kaatsen*, which can be seen in the Spanish and French *jeu de pelote* and in the American *jai alai*, which all come from the same family of sports.

The demonstration [of *kaatsen*] in Amsterdam [1928] concerned the typical “Frisian” form of *kaatsen*. The province of Friesland (one of the twelve provinces in The Netherlands) is the only province where the people are bilingual. They speak both Dutch and Frisian. In this agrarian province *kaatsen* was one of the first sports ever played, and it goes back at least to the 14th century. Already in the oldest newspaper from this region *The Leeuwarder Courant* from 1752, this sport was mentioned. *The Leeuwarder Courant* still exists today and during the summer all the matches in *kaatsen* receive ample place in the paper.

The Frisian form of *kaatsen* is played with two teams of three players each. The only thing used is a small ball, filled with neckhairs from a calf. The players play the ball with their bare hands; some players use a special glove to protect their hand. The rules are rather complicated; but if someone would be interested, I could try to have them translated. But [*kaatsen*] is most certainly incomparable with either cricket or baseball and that was the main reason for this reaction!

Anthony Th. Bijkerk
Fochteloo, Friesland
THE NETHERLANDS

Dear ISOH,

Many thanks for your letter of 10 August 1992 and for sending me the inaugural issue of your *LSOH Newsletter*. I feel, of course, greatly honored to be invited to join the fold and I gladly accept your offer. Although not so much an Olympic historian, I hope to be nevertheless a useful member who, from his sport’s historians view, might now and then be able to set right some misconceptions prevailing among the specialists. To claim, for instance, as does Pete Cava in his interesting article “Baseball in the Olympics,” (p. 10) that *kaatsen*, the 1928 demonstration sport, was a “Dutch version of cricket” is, of course, a gross blunder. It is a descendant of the medieval game of tennis, played as a folk game in, roughly, a dozen varieties all over the globe, e.g., on the Swedish island of Gotland, on Tuscany, in the Basque country and Valencia, on the island of Lanzarote as well as in Mexico, Colombia, and Ecuador. Nor is *kaatsen* a Dutch sport; in this part of Europe, it is either Flemish or Frisian, and I presume that it was the Frisian variety which was shown to the baffled few attending this demonstration event.

Heiner Gillmeister
Brühl, GERMANY

Dear Tony and Heiner,

Pete's article on baseball was a good one but I did receive a few letters concerning his mention of *kaatsen*, as noted above. In Pete's defense, the sport does not exist in the United States and I had never heard of it except for its brief Olympic appearance. Had I done so, as the editor, I would have tried to catch and edit that error. Thanks for setting the record straight.

Dear ISOH,

Thank you for sending me the first ISOH Journal. I consider it a primary necessity that the purpose and function of the ISOH be more clearly defined in comparison to other fields. The history of the Olympic Movement is a far-ranging one and it also includes the philosophical foundations, including the entire Coubertin research.

However, when I look at the names of the present and future members, then this tells me that the ISOH neither can nor wants to fulfill such claims. Its field will be rather that of documentation and statistics, which is of course admittedly also connected with history. If this were not the case then a circle of well-known professors and academics would have to be approached in order to cover these other fields.

Would it not therefore be better - also with a view to obtaining the full support of the IOC - to formulate the aims of the ISOH more clearly and possibly to make this point clear in the name of the Society already in order to avoid irritation? The following extension would be conceivable: International Society for Olympic History, Documentation and Statistics. The abbreviation ISOH could still be retained.

As regards future work: In addition to the individual contributions of its members, it should be the aim of the ISOH to provide the IOC with a joint work. I consider it necessary as a first step to agree on a subject catalogue on the basis of which the members would work. The bulletin should then reflect above all the results of work in these fields.

I would propose the following complexes:

1. IOC
 - 1.1 Congresses, Sessions, Executive Meetings
 - 1.2 Rules, Statutes
 - 1.3 Biographies
 - 1.4 Honors, Distinctions
2. Olympic Games
 - 2.1 Organization
 - 2.2 Sporting Venues
 - 2.3 Finance/Marketing
 - 2.4 Olympic Program
 - 2.4.1 NOC Participation
 - 2.4.2 Results of the Olympic Games
 - 2.4.3 Demonstration Events
 - 2.4.4 Biographies of the Participants
 - 2.5 Cultural Program, including Art Competitions
 - 2.5.1 Visual Arts
 - 2.5.2 Philately
 - 2.5.3 Numismatics
 - 2.6 Media
3. Paralympics
4. Sources
 - 4.1 Literature
 - 4.2 Photography
 - 4.3 Films/Videos
 - 4.4 Archives

Based on this subject catalogue, the ISOH should make an offer to the IOC that it will prepare a joint international work to commemorate the occasion of the Centenary of the Olympic Games of Modern Times. Given the short time at our disposal, the complete statistics of the competitions and a list of all competitors, giving their dates of birth and death, as was already begun by Wolf Lyberg, would seem the most feasible. And in addition, a publication with the photos and autographs of all the Olympic Champions.

For this purpose it would be necessary for the ICO to come to some basic decisions, e.g.:

1. Are the competitions which were held in Athens on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Olympic Games in 1906 Olympic Games or not?

2. Which of the competitions staged within the framework of the World Exhibitions of 1900 and 1904 are Olympic and which not? Only resolutions passed by the IOC and not the private opinions of individuals can constitute an objective basis for our evaluation.

Since the IOC will open its new Olympic Museum in the coming year, the possibilities for research will not only be improved, the IOC itself is likely to be more interested in bringing order into its history.

Finally, a word on the ISOH Journal. In my opinion a conception is necessary so that all the members can be genuinely involved. The above-mentioned subject catalogue could perhaps be a help in this respect. I am personally prepared to cooperate but since a lot of demands are being made of me, I would request a more long-term orientation as to which contributions might be wished from me.

In the hope that my letter will have provided some food for thought.

Volker Kluge
Berlin, GERMANY

Dear Volker,

A lot of very interesting material is presented in your letter. I will deal with the membership of ISOH after the next letter from Donald Sayenga, which also addresses this.

I really like the framework you have presented for planning research. Perhaps as we get more formally organized this can become, perhaps with some modifications, officially recognized.

As to the idea of helping the IOC study their history for the Olympic Centennial, that is already being done. When Ture Widlund first proposed the idea of ISOH to the IOC in the mid-1980's, it was with this idea in mind - we would organize the Olympic Historians to compile the definitive 100-year history of the Olympics in all respects. We got little response from the IOC and it may be because they were organizing such a project separately. They have plans to publish a several volume history of the Olympics for 1996. Much of the work is being done by historians who are members of ISOH, but no formal alliance with ISOH exists.

In addition, the United States Olympic Committee is planning a similar, actually more ambitious project, headed by Gary Allison. They plan to publish about 25 volumes, giving the history by Olympiads, with separate special volumes. I have been contacted by Gary Allison to assist with this project but heard nothing further after our initial discussion.

As to your questions about 1900, 1904, and 1906, I agree that I would like to see the IOC make some official decisions concerning the status of 1906 and the events of 1900-04. However, I would only like to see them do that after it has been studied in great detail by a group of qualified historians, such as the members of ISOH, and the results of such study has been presented to the IOC for their evaluation. Otherwise, I honestly doubt whether many of the members of the IOC could make a truly enlightened decision concerning those long-ago Games.

Dear ISOH,

Your constitution Article Two says the purpose is to “promote AND study the Olympic Movement . . .” I hope that is a typo. At the moment I’m not even sure what the “Olympic Movement” is, but I’m sure I don’t want to promote it. “The Movement” obviously involves a technique whereby high fees get paid to unworthy people like Bryant Gumbel while at the same time self-sacrificing athletes go unheralded. I want no part of promoting that and I wouldn’t support ISOH for that purpose. In my way of thinking, the PURPOSE ought to be something Erich Kamper proposed on p. 3: “All of the forgotten Olympic competitors will be honored.” Please note what he is telling us about “The Movement”: “They preferred and still prefer scientific essays, discussions, and interpretations.” At the least, make the new ISOH Motto: “ALL OF THE FORGOTTEN OLYMPIC COMPETITORS WILL BE HONORED.”

I’ve yearned for 30 years that higher standards of accuracy could prevail everywhere in Olympic record-keeping. Voluntary sharing by ISOH members could accomplish much to erase all the errors generated by earlier writers since 1896, but it won’t be easy. Your very first issue of *Citius, Altius, Fortius* contains a couple of things I’d call inaccurate. You need a way to address inaccuracies in a friendly way, to encourage a system of self-correction whereby you will print follow-up commentary and rebuttals.

Avoid pedants and their methods! By this, I mean you should avoid getting into an academic-rigor lockstep with “professional historians.” Their style of writing and style of research lacks vitality. They are great with their footnotes, but the present academic format encourages too much reliance on written documents like diaries and government papers but not enough emphasis on direct participation in the field of study. If you take one look at other “journals” published by historians, you can see why the general public never reads them.

Likewise avoid sportswriters. Sportswriters use an extremely fluid vernacular which is easily understood. It is fun to read, employs puns and exaggerations, but it is ALWAYS slanted because it derives from the competitive business of selling newspapers. Sportswriters are generally lax on facts because that is part of the style of writing. Their laxity, although it is part of an appealing style, creates a problem for sports historians of the future. *Citius, Altius, Fortius* should have a policy opposing it.

I think you should have a feature or section in *Citius, Altius, Fortius* called **Ancient Sources**. It should be a small section, filled with carefully cited “nickel knowledge.” Most modern writers covering the Modern Games don’t have access to any accurate historical info about the Ancient Games.

Your Journal, obviously, needs an editor, and I would guess that means you [Mallon]. You’ve already begun printing inaccuracies without taking notice of them, which maybe makes things worse, rather than better. Maybe one way around this is to substitute a **Members Comment** section, but with rebuttals as mentioned above. This would be one way to stimulate free exchange in the ISOH group. I am reminded of the quote from the Roman writer, Pausanias, “I am obliged to report on the statements made by the Greeks but I am not obliged to believe their statements.” That’s what we need: obligatory reporting accompanied by obligatory disbelief or skepticism: It should be a mandate for ISOH.

The problem just now is that some of us must take existing reports at face value without further study. Others, like Erich Kamper, work patiently for years to uncover the facts underneath the existing IOC propaganda of any particular moment. Still others document the Olympic contemporary events but do so without a guide or format. The ISOH should provide a format to augment all three approaches.

One thing which I think is badly needed by Olympic historians is to divide all Olympic events into three or four categories for study purposes because each of the categories involves a different kind of history and historical study. I would propose the following categories:

- a) The Imitative Olympic Sports - those derived from sports in the Ancient Olympics such as Running, Jumping, Discus, Javelin, Boxing, Equestrian, and Wrestling.
- b) The Derived Olympic Sports - structured similar to the Ancient Sports but adapted out of modern sporting conditions: Pole Vault, Shot Put, Swimming & Diving, Rowing, Cycling, Canoeing, all the multi-event sports.
- c) Folk Games - Archery, Shooting, Baseball, Fencing, Hockey, Yachting, which have varying rules adapted from widely varying styles of folk-play around the world.
- d) Invented Sports - modern sporting events without much historical precedent: Badminton, Judo, Tennis, Basketball, Football, Gymnastics, Volleyball.

Specific questions concerning articles in Vol. 1, No, 1:

In Vol. 1, No. 1, on page 7, Pete Cava's copyrighted baseball summary omits description of the 1904 "baseball tournament" reported by James Sullivan. Mr. Cava's opinion is that it was an event we can disregard because he doesn't think it could "seriously be considered part of the Olympics." Surely the 1904 baseball event was "seriously considered" by the athletes who competed at the time. As stated by Erich Kamper, our aim should be that "all of the forgotten Olympic competitors will be honored." It is our obligation to suppress personal bias about records.

In Vol. 1, No. 1 on Page 21 - Dr. Zarnowski's superb article contains the following phrases: "Holland, a neutral in World War I . . . the Dutch had erected . . . The Dutch government . . ." As of 1928 and 1992 the name of the nation involved is more properly The Netherlands. It is a confederation of several "lands." Some of these lands are not inhabited by "the Dutch." For the last several centuries the Dutch people of Holland have held the seat of government for The Netherlands. The Dutch people of Holland probably did conduct the 1928 Games at Amsterdam, which is a Dutch city in Holland. Nevertheless we must guard against a common error to substitute "Holland" for "The Netherlands," and "Dutch" for the entire people of The Netherlands. As we can see from the 1992 example of "Yugoslavia" we should be careful to use the official names of the entrant nations and their athletes at all times when describing the Games. Anything less than this makes problems for future historians.

Dear Don,

You've raised a number of interesting points but I hope you haven't offended the entire membership! Specifically, concerning your problems with academic types and sportswriters, opposite ideas were expressed in the letter above by Volker Kluge.

It is not my purpose, nor the purpose of Ture Widlund, Ian Buchanan, Erich Kamper, or any of the founding members of ISOH to exclude academic historians from this group. In fact, I think it is important and necessary that we have that group within ISOH. ISOH was formed primarily by statistical types simply because we were the ones who pushed for it. We contacted many academic historians to become members and several have to date. Specifically, before going ahead with ISOH I contacted John Lucas, the dean of Olympic academic historians in the United States, and told him that we wanted participation from academia, even though the founders were not academic Olympic historians. (I am a clinical professor, but of orthopaedic surgery, not Olympic history.)

As to sportswriters, I also disagree with Donald Sayenga. Although some of their writing could perhaps be a bit loose with facts, I have not found that to be the case with the ISOH Members who are sportswriters and whose primary field is reporting on the Olympics or

international sports. Specifically, Phil Hersh of *The Chicago Tribune*, who writes solely in that field, is a fanatic about checking his facts and calls me frequently, using me as a source to check his material. Thus I consider his source to be of the highest quality! The other Americans who write almost exclusively on the Olympics are John Powers of *The Boston Globe*, Randy Harvey of *The Los Angeles Times*, Steve Woodward of *USA Today*, Christine Brennan of *The Washington Post*, and a few others. I really have not noticed a “looseness” in the facts of these writers.

I think ISOH should become a bit of an amalgam, presenting viewpoints from statisticians, academic historians, sportswriters, and Olympic hobbyists. I think in this manner we will get more input and it will be more varied, rather than trying to narrow our focus and possibly blinding ourselves in the process.

I like your idea of the *Ancient Sources* column as well as the *Members Comments* column. I hope to have a lot more comments and answers from members in future issues. As to *Ancient Sources*, perhaps I can get some help from one of the members who is more attuned to that problem than I.

Finally, I will comment on your notes to Cava and Zamowski myself. As to the 1904 Olympic baseball tournament, I have some knowledge of this problem having published one of the very few works dealing with the 1904 Olympics - *A Statistical Summary of the 1904 Olympic Games* (Durham, NC: 1981). I was Pete Cava's source for that statement as he called me on the phone prior to writing the article. My question is “What 1904 Olympic baseball tournament?”

James Sullivan published *Spalding's Official Athletic Almanac for 1905: Special Olympic Number, Containing the Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1904* in 1905. I have a rare copy of this and a baseball tournament is not mentioned. The results of all Olympic sporting events is mentioned, including many which could not possibly be considered of “Olympic calibre” but there is no mention of the results of a baseball tournament.

While compiling my book, I also read all of the eight St. Louis newspapers published in 1904. I never found a mention of an Olympic baseball tournament. I have seen other, more recent, sources mention a 1904 Olympic baseball tournament, but I have no idea of their source or if they are simply reporting an inaccuracy. Perhaps the event was scheduled but if it took place it was not well reported. It is not mentioned in Kamper's *Encyclopaedia of the Olympic Games*, Wallechinsky's *The Complete Book of the Olympics*, or Greenberg's *Olympic Facts Book*.

Finally, the problem regarding Holland and The Netherlands is well known. ISOH member Pim Hurman is from a small town named Laren. His letters always come with the country name “Holland.” When I asked him if “The Netherlands” was more correct, he said it did not matter. I never asked the same question of Tony Bijkerk (see above letter) but perhaps his answer would have been very different, as he comes from Friesland. His letters do have a return address of The Netherlands. Perhaps we will hear from Tony Bijkerk on this.