

BOOK and MOVIE REVIEWS

Leni Riefenstahl: A Memoir. by Leni Riefenstahl. In English. (Published in New York by St. Martin's Press, 1993; Published in London by Quartet Book, Ltd., in 1992, as ***The Sieve of Time: The Memoirs of Leni Riefenstahl***; Published in Germany by Albert Knaus Verlag GmbH, 1987, as ***Memoiren.***) Reviewed by Rusty Wilson, Ph.D. ISBN 0-312-09843-X. \$39.00 in the United States; \$48.99 in Canada. 669 pages. Order from St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010 USA.

The book that just about every Olympic and film historian had been waiting for, the memoirs of Leni Riefenstahl, the producer/director of the greatest Olympic film of all time - *Olympia*, was finally published in the United States last year. But as is usually the case when you anticipate something for such a long time, you are sometimes disappointed. This is partially the case with Riefenstahl's monumental autobiography (656 pages of text with a 13-page three-column index).

Riefenstahl has a selective, romanticized view of her life that makes the reader wonder about the accuracy of her many claims. Riefenstahl's assertions are hard to accept without a cautious eye. She declares, among other things, that she spoke against Nazi Jewish policies with Hitler, that *Triumph of the Will* was not a propaganda film, that she knew nothing of Hitler's policies, that she never had a political thought or opinion and that the Nazi Party and Dr. Goebbels had absolutely no influence over the film at all. She also declares throughout the book that nearly every man with whom she came in contact, except Hitler, desired her, some to the point of attempting suicide when they couldn't possess her. When describing an "affair" with 1936 Olympic decathlon champion Glenn Morris (page 196), Riefenstahl claims that, after Morris received his medal, "I held out my hand and congratulated him, but he grabbed me in his arms, tore off my blouse and kissed my breasts, right in the middle of the stadium, in front of a hundred thousand spectators." It is hard to believe that an event of such a sensational nature would go unnoticed and unreported by the world's press. In fact, several of the 1936 U.S. Olympic team members that I spoke with claim that not only were the actions very much out of character for Morris but that the incident simply did not happen.

The story of the publication of her autobiography is almost as riveting as the work itself. She told Cooper C. Graham (author of the definitive study of the production of *Olympia*, ***Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia***, Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986) in 1981 that she had begun her memoirs. However, at the end of her ***Memoirs*** (page 653) she claims that her first attempt at writing them came on 1 November 1982. Publication finally came six years later in Germany, followed by the British edition still five years after that. In a 1991 letter to me she mentioned that the publishing of her autobiography in the United States was "stopped." Why were there delays and "stoppages" in publication? The answers to these questions would be interesting in themselves and could go a long way in justifying Riefenstahl's paranoid view of her life.

Riefenstahl admits that she has had, since the early days of her life, an intense interest in fairy tales. It appears that she has carried that preoccupation to the writing of her memoirs, turning her life into a large, captivating but informative fairy tale. Although Riefenstahl has a dramatic, distorted, selective, and naive view of her life, she is still an extremely interesting individual whose life was touched by some of the most famous and notorious individuals in history. What she has to say, and even what she has chosen to say, is important to all serious Olympic historians. Although much of what Riefenstahl says must be looked at with a critical focus, it is still a necessary addition to anyone's Olympic library.

The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl. A three-hour documentary by filmmaker Ray Müller. Reviewed by Mike Clark for *USA Today*. [Note: Mr. Clark is the film reviewer for *USA Today*. This review is reproduced herein with his kind permission.]

The first adjective refers to the German legend's status as the 20th century's foremost woman filmmaker - the second to the forum in which her talents were notoriously displayed. After 60 years, Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is still the most accomplished propaganda movie ever, but it cemented the beautiful, ex-actress's eternal rep[utation] as the Third Reich's pinup girl.

Filmmaker Ray Müller interviewed her at length for this three-hour documentary, a smash at last fall's New York Film Festival. As seen here at age 89, she is athletic enough not just to scuba dive in her ninth decade, but to bob and weave with practiced Ali dexterity when asked the questions that refuse to die. Even when confronted by documented evidence that tarnishes her protestations of ignorance about Nazi horrors, she downplays her friendship with Hitler. At very least, the film confirms a guilty verdict for blind ambition, opportunism, and apolitical amorality.

Still, she remains fascinating, and so is the film, even if the final hour (about her acclaimed still photography of the Sudan's Nuba tribe) can't compete with the 30's material. Film clips are ample, both from *Will* and from 1938's *Olympia*, the subtler German sales job about the '36 Olympics and the greatest sports documentary of all time. Ever the filmmaker, Riefenstahl occasionally tried to arm-wrestle Müller for control of his own movie, displaying agitation not over political grilling, but over questions of movie aesthetics. Sometimes the little things tell you everything.

The Lost Past. Concealed or Forgotten? by Gottfried Schödl. In English. (Published in Budapest by the International Weightlifting Federation, 1992.) \$18.00 US - including postage to Europe; \$21.00 [US] - including postage outside Europe. Reviewed by Ture Widlund. Order from International Weightlifting Federation, Hold u. 1, Pf. 614, 1374 Budapest, HUNGARY.

There are many historical books for some Olympic sports, mainly athletics. In weightlifting there are few, at least in languages accessible to Westerners. The President of the International Weightlifting Federation, Gottfried Schödl of Austria, has been annoyed at the lack of historical studies of weightlifting. So he wrote a book about the history of weightlifting himself.

Weightlifting had a rough road to become a world sport. When it began to gain momentum, in the second half of the 19th century, there were a plethora of different lifts, one-hand lifts, two-hand lifts, lifts with a weight in each hand, repetition lifts, etc. The way the final result was calculated also varied. The lifts had different values, there were even style points. The lack of uniform rules and competition regulations was a hindrance for its development into an international sport.

“World Championships” in weightlifting (and wrestling, which at that time was regarded as one sport under the name of heavy athletics) were announced by clubs and associations. Lifts and rules were those of the organizing country, which always favored its own lifters. Six “World Championships,” the first in 1891, have been found before the first international federation was founded in 1905. Its name was Amateur Athleten Weltunion. However, this federation never became the expected unifying power, as its activities were paralyzed by internal feuds.

It became apparent that weightlifting was lacking an international federation that could influence the IOC. Weightlifting was an Olympic sport at the inception of the Olympic Games in Athens 1896 but was not on the Olympic programme in London in 1908 nor in Stockholm in 1912. The alarmbell sounded. At a meeting in Stockholm during the Olympic Games, delegates from 12 nations met and decided to found a new international federation for weightlifting and wrestling, Internationaler Weltverband für Schwerathletik. Statutes and rules would be passed at a subsequent meeting in Berlin 1913, the same procedure as for athletics. At the Berlin meeting the name was changed to Internationaler Amateur-Weltunion für Schwerathletik. At the IOC Congress in Paris 1914 it was decided to reinstate weightlifting on the Olympic programme.

The leading weightlifting nations of the time, Germany and Austria, were out in the cold after World War I. At the initiative of the Swiss-born, naturalized Frenchman, Jules Rosset, a federation for just weightlifting was founded during the Olympic Games in Antwerp 1920, Fédération Internationale Haltérophile, FIH. In 1950 bodybuilding was included and the name was changed to Federation Internationale Haltérophile et Culturiste, FIHC. Bodybuilding was dropped in 1968 and the name was changed back to FIH. However, powerlifting was then included. But in the following year, 1969, powerlifting was dropped at the recommendation of the FIH Medical Commission. The name was changed to the present one, International Weightlifting Federation, IWF, in 1972. Weightlifting for ladies was accepted in 1983 and the first World Championships for ladies were held in 1987. In 1993 the IWF had 156 member nations and is said to be the sixth largest international federation.

From 1920 the book is, in the main, a matter-of-fact account of the history of the international federation (FIH, FIHC, IWF). In his capacity as longstanding President (since 1972) of the IWF, Gottfried Schödl has had access to all relevant source material. It is, however, missing accounts of world class weightlifting performed outside of the international federation, in the USSR in the inter-war period, in China from 1958-74, and in the workers sports unions in the inter-war period. The official world record was surpassed 185 times in the USSR before it joined the FIH in 1946, 19 times in China 1958-74 and a number of times in the workers sports unions (unknown how many).

In appendices there are a number of lists: All the Executive Board members of the IWF and its predecessors, the IWF member nations by chronological order and by continent, all-time world records inclusive of the now abolished one-hand lifts and the press, men, women and junior men, Olympic Games and World Championships, medal compilations for the Olympic Games and the World Championships.

The book is an indispensable source for those who want to follow the development of weightlifting since the second half of the 19th century. Great feats, changes in the rules and regulations, the technical progress, internal organization and feuds, everything is covered. It is just a pity that the book was published in 1992, as at the end of 1992 an epoch ended and a new era began. The weight classes were changed. Those established in 1913 were abolished and new classes were introduced. Had the book been published in 1993 it could also have been the history of the old weight classes. But 1992 is now missing and with it the last Olympic Games, the last World Championships and the last world records of the old weight classes.