

WOLF LYBERG'S TOUR DE FORCE
A Milestone in the History of Olympic Research

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In the summer of 1993, ISOH Executive Committee Member Wolf Lyberg completed an enormous task regarding Olympic history with, the publication (so far very limited) of his four-volume work ***The Athletes of the Games of the Olympiad 1896-1992. The 73,000 Participants***. In 1991 he completed his work on the Winter Games 1924-1988 - published in 1992 in combination with a supplement including Albertville - totalling approximately 11,000 names.

Wolfs main goal has been to make a complete register of all athletes actually starting in the Olympic Games, with full names, birthdates, and year of Olympic appearance. Wolfs work was initiated and supported by the IOC - and through this support he has been able to go through Olympic archives in different host cities and the IOC Headquarters in Lausanne. His work has, in my opinion, been extremely fruitful. Firstly, it seems that the IOC initiative has inspired NOC's and individual Olympic historians (many of them ISOH Members) to strengthen their efforts to make complete records of their country's Olympians. Secondly, the lists with 84,000 names of Olympians is an excellent foundation for Olympic historians all over the world to go further in this research process, trying to fill the holes which remain to be filled. In a work of this scale, no one can expect 100% accuracy. Therefore I do hope that Wolfs work could be spread to all Olympic enthusiasts all over the world, inspiring them to make strong efforts to clear out mistakes, holes and uncertainties.

The main problem is to have complete biographical information for athletes in the "old days." For the Olympic Games before World War II, only the files of 1912 and 1936 give sufficient information about the athletes. For the rest, we have to rely on national sources such as birth and death registrations, newspapers, occasionally NOC archives and other sources.

For the last few years I have been trying to make an index of all competitors in Olympic Track & Field. My project differs from Wolfs in four points:

- 1) I include the 1906 Athens Games
- 2) I do not include tug-of-war
- 3) I also try to include the results achieved for each athlete
- 4) I also try to include the year's best and personal best performance for each athlete.

In the research process, I have been able to exchange information with Wolf Lyberg in a most fruitful way. Wolf's sources have been Olympic files while mine have mostly been from the world of track & field athletics itself - especially many members of the Association of Track & Field Statisticians (ATFS).

In trying to make an international status of the research situation regarding track & field Olympians before 1940, I enclose a table of the competitors 1896-1936, with information about status for one research variable: birthdate. Of the 3,681 registered competitors, for 2,464 we have the complete birthdate and for an additional 410 we have information about the year of birth - a coverage of 84.8%. The most striking feature is the almost 100% coverage of the Scandanavian countries (missing one Dane! - Otto Bock who competed in 1906 and lived in Hamburg, Germany). This is partially related to the fact that both Lyberg and myself are Scandanavians and are closer to the sources. But also important has been the excellent research done by other enthusiasts in these countries (Dahllöf/Karlsson in Sweden, Larsen/Kristensen in Denmark, Siukonen/Rantala in Finland, Jorsett/Teigen in Norway), and that these nations have a small population with good bureaucratic procedures for registering births and deaths since the 19th century. Good coverage is also registered for "big" Olympic nations such as the United States (an admirable coverage of 92.3% thanks to Hal Bateman and Bill Mallon), Germany, Italy, Hungary, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. Also good, but with a ways to go, are Great Britain, France, Canada, The Netherlands, South Africa, Austria, and Spain. Among the "problem" nations are Greece (mainly due to the high number of competitors in 1896 and 1906), Mexico, India, Romania, and Brazil - also Belgium and Australia are a "little behind."

It is natural to conclude that the situation in other sports is quite similar to track & field athletics. A short glance through Wolf Lyberg's work seems to verify this. So let us hope that Wolf Lyberg's work will inspire Olympic historians in all comers of the world to dig deeper into their national sources to carry on Wolfs work. Paraphrasing Isaac Newton: "If I have seen further than [others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

In the following totals, the athletes who started for two different countries have been deducted:

Eduard Herman	Russia 1912	Estonia 1924
Bohumil Honzatko	Bohemia 1912	Czechoslovakia 1920
František Janda-Suk	Bohemia 1900, 1912	Czechoslovakia 1920, 1924
Mor Koczan-Kovacs	Hungary 1908, 1912	Czechoslovakia 1924
Johannes Villemson	Russia 1912	Estonia 1920

Athletes from New Zealand competing for the Australian team in 1908-12 are listed under Australia. Athletes from Ireland are listed under Great Britain before 1920.

OLYMPIC COMPETITORS IN TRACK & FIELD ATHLETICS: 1896 - 1936
(Including the 1906 Games - not including Tug-of-War)

Nation	Men	Women	Totals	Birthdate Known	Birthyear Known	Unknown Birth	%Known DOB/YOB
United States	649	39	688	594		53	92.3
Great Britain	384	15	399	267	58	74	81.5
Sweden	265	7	272	272	-	-	100.0
France	247	12	259	171	43	45	82.6
Germany	176	30	206	190	10	6	97.1
Greece	169	1	170	10	31	129	24.1
Canada	144	20	164	88	41	35	78.7
Finland	153	4	157	157	-	-	100.0
Italy	124	11	135	118	10	7	94.8
Hungary	116	2	118	109	4	5	95.8
Netherlands	85	23	108	64	14	29	73.1
Japan	84	17	101	91	6	4	96.0
Belgium	88	9	97	55	5	37	61.9
Norway	80	-	80	80	-	-	100.0
Denmark	74	-	74	73	-	1	98.6
Czechoslovakia	72	1	73	64	6	3	95.9
South Africa	60	1	61	52	1	8	86.9
Austria	50	10	60	48	2	10	83.3
Switzerland	50	-	50	38	10	2	96.0
Mexico	46	1	47	3	9	35	25.5
Australia	43	3	46	19	10	17	63.0
Poland	37	8	45	43	2	-	100.0
Russia	34	-	34	26	7	1	97.1
Spain	33	-	33	24	5	4	87.9
Argentina	33	-	33	10	20	3	90.9
Brazil	32	-	32	10	10	12	62.5
Yugoslavia	24	5	29	24	4	1	96.6
Chile	27	1	28	17	4	7	75.0
Estonia	25	-	25	25	-	-	100.0
India	23	-	23	4	5	14	39.1
Ireland	22	-	22	4	12	6	72.7
china	21	1	22	22	-	-	100.0
Luxembourg	20	-	20	9	3	8	60.0
Latvia	17	2	19	12	6	1	94.7
Bohemia	18	-	18	10	4	4	77.8
Romania	16	2	18	5	1	12	33.3
New Zealand	12	2	14	6	2	6	57.1
Portugal	12	-	12	9	1	2	75.0
Peru	9	-	9	8	-	1	88.9
Turkey	9	-	9	2	7	-	100.0
Egypt	8	-	8	2	3	3	62.5
Philippines	8	-	8	8	-	-	100.0
Colombia	6	-	6	5	-	1	83.3
Bulgaria	6	-	6	2	4	-	100.0
Lithuania	4	1	5	-	5	-	100.0
Iceland	5	-	5	5	-	-	100.0
Haiti	3	-	3	2	1	-	100.0
Ecuador	3	-	3	-	3	-	100.0
Afghanistan	2	-	2	1	-	1	50.0
Cuba	2	-	2	2	-	-	100.0
Liechtenstein	2	-	2	2	-	-	100.0
Malta	2	-	2	2	-	-	100.0
Monaco	2	-	2	2	-	-	100.0
Serbia	2	-	2	2	-	-	100.0
Totals	3,633	228	3,861	2,864	410	587	84.8