

# ***OLYMPIC MEMORABILIA COLLECTING***

*by Robert J. Christianson*

## ***Introduction***

It is an honor to speak to you today. Over the past three days, you have heard about many specific aspects of Olympic memorabilia collecting. I guess I was asked to speak because, unlike the others who collect only stamps or coins or medals or pins or badges, I collect all of those, as well as everything else related to the Olympic Games. When asked what I collect, my quick response is “anything with five rings or the ‘O’ word (Olympic) on it.”

## ***How I Became an Olympic Memorabilia Collector***

Of course like almost every other Olympic Collector, I started out ‘with a single item. Here it is! Looks innocent enough, doesn’t it? It is similar to a pin but stays affixed with a bit of adhesive strip. Here is one of the newest additions to my collection -- an official Lillehammer Olympic condom kit that was available to athletes and other accredited individuals. The journey from here to there is interesting to me and I hope to you too.

## ***Very First Item Acquired***

I came home from the 1976 Games in Montreal with a lot of fond memories, a few ticket stubs and programs and this little plastic trinket. First thing upon our arrival at Olympic Park, a pretty young hostess approached us and placed these on our shirt pockets. Upon our return home, they were put in a drawer with the few other things we picked up. My collecting urge then lay dormant for five months. Shortly before Christmas, while doing some last minute shopping for stocking stuffers, I spotted a packet of Olympic stamps and thought my son Bob might like them since we had gotten a lot of enjoyment out of reliving our trip to Montreal. On Christmas morning, Bob went first to his stocking on the mantle, was suitably impressed with the Olympic stamps, tossed them aside and moved onto the other gifts under the tree. Much later while helping clean up, I picked up the stamp packet and looked through it, Something must have clicked; the stamps really struck my fancy! I had never collected anything in my life up to that point, but before I knew it, I was buying stamps from dealers, subscribing to stamp journals, going to stamp shows, joining philatelic organizations and enjoying myself immensely. As with any first venture, I made a few mistakes, but I also learned very quickly what had value and what did not, in large part thanks to some very good acquaintances I made along the way.

## ***State of My Collecting Today***

At Montreal I had noticed people trading pins in Parc Olympique, but really paid no further attention to them. Once I decided to strive toward going to Moscow, I began writing to their Organizing Committee, the NOCs and even some athletes. In the process, I got a lot of official publications and free pins. By the time Lake Placid arrived, I had amassed a good stock of trader pins and really got into trading there. At Moscow, pin trading was great and I was also able to pick up lots of pins for only pennies apiece. By that time, I was also developing a fondness for books. The nice thing about Moscow was that an awful lot of paper

material was free for the taking, and the prices (when you actually wanted to buy something) were low. At the various “Knigi” or bookstores I visited, I found Moscow posters could also be obtained for practically nothing. I loaded up on posters and got hooked on another aspect of Olympic Memorabilia collecting. Shortly after returning home from Moscow, I joined a group of New York collectors that met informally once a month. The group started out interested only in philately, but was just discovering the wide range of other memorabilia associated with the Games. When I joined, there was one member who collected only Olympic books, another who expanded his collecting to include medals and badges and focuses on the 1936 Games, one who is primarily a philatelist but delves into tickets and Olympian’s autographs, and a gentleman who is a purist even today and only collects stamps. By this time, I had three Olympic Games under my belt and had begun branching out beyond stamps and postmarks too. We have been meeting for almost fourteen years and I have missed only one meeting. Because we share insights into each of our favorite areas of collecting, my collecting interests have shot out in every direction to the point that now there are too few limits and so much material that I have to store it in both my homes, my office and a large store room.

### *My Olympic Games Attendance*

I have now attended ten Games in a row, been to all but ten Olympic Games sites and do not intend to miss a Games in the future. Over the years, I have worked on my own Olympic Memorabilia database, attended several Olympic Academies, bid in far too many auctions, conducted a few auctions of my own and, in the process, gathered a lot of information to the point where some even consider me an expert. I am sure there are a lot of people in this room who could easily discuss this subject better than I, so I beg your indulgence, in advance, if I occasionally state the obvious.

### *Various Aspects of Olympic Collecting*

Unless you have unlimited resources, you first have to establish some priorities regarding your collecting. The first decision I had to make was where to spend my fairly limited resources. I am an Olympic fan first, and I have had to pay my own way to every Games I’ve attended. I have chosen to spend a good amount of money to be at the Games, therefore my collection comes second. This does not mean they are mutually exclusive. Being at the Games affords possibly the best opportunity to add to a collection. I do, however, know a lot of advanced collectors who have never experienced an Olympics firsthand and I feel a little sorry for them. Once you get by that decision, there are so many other choices you must make.

### *What to Collect and How to Collect It*

While the first temptation is to try to collect everything, at some point, hopefully, common sense sets in. Limitations must be established. You must choose what Games to collect and what areas to concentrate on or vice versa. Generally the wider the parameters are on the Games, the tighter the limitations must be on the types of material. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln: You can collect some of the material on **all** of the Games or **all** of the material on some of the Games, but you cannot collect **all** of the material on **all** of the Games **all** of the time.

## *Collecting by Games*

When choosing which Games to collect, you can limit it to Summer only, Winter only or all. If you choose all, do you include the 1906 Interim Games and do you include all Olympic areas unrelated to specific Games such as Sessions, Congresses, and the other things with which the IOC involves itself? Further choices can include collecting only a single Olympics, certain Games, or any other combination, i.e. European Olympics, Games in a single country, Games you attended, Games a family member competed in, or even the ancient Games. There are a lot of possibilities!

## *Types of Material to Collect*

Let's now move on to what to collect. As I said before, most Olympic Collectors start with a specific category. Stamps, coins and pins are probably the most common. In the process of advancing through a specific area, especially if you attend the Games, you are exposed to numerous other collecting areas. The inclination might be to get into everything. This is not entirely unreasonable, if you can set limits such as seeking representative examples in each category, i.e. one ticket per Games, one pin, one credential, one poster,...one of every other category. Even that limitation could get costly, as early material is almost always high priced. Certain material will strike your fancy more than others and it is likely you will want to amass a deep collection in those areas. In my own case, Mascots and Posters fit into that category while, right now, I am happy with a single example of a Torch and a Winner's Medal. I collect just about everything else to varying degrees. Categories to collect include - in no particular order: Medals, Torches, Books, Posters, Documents; Pins, Badges, Clothing Decorations, Tickets, Programs, Photographs, Autographs, Art, Seals and Vignettes, Films and Videos, Music, Cards, Souvenirs, Plates, Scarves, Mascots and Ephemera.

## *Medals*

**Winner's** medals are the biggest prizes among Olympic Memorabilia collectors. They are the heart and soul of the Games as they are the thing athletes devote entire careers pursuing. I find it hard to believe that anyone could part with such treasures, but they are available in relative abundance. All Olympic Games **participants** are generally given a medal recognizing their part in the Games. Often athletes, officials, journalists, volunteers and OCOG employees receive the same medal but sometimes there are different medals for different participants (torch run, ceremonies, Arts Festival). These are all highly sought. Beyond these, which have a direct connection with the Games, many more commemorative, fund raising, and souvenir medals were produced to note the Games. There is no shortage of materials for those who want to confine their Olympic collecting to just medals.

## *Torches*

The torch is the second most important symbol of the Games after the rings. A torch runner can be chosen for any reason, you do not have to be a great athlete to carry the torch, you do not even have to be famous; a common man can do it. Perhaps, that is why it epitomizes the Games. Many torches were produced for most of the summer Games torch runs. While they are not inexpensive they can be readily be found. For various reasons, cold weather, the mountainous terrain of Olympic Winter Games sites and the smaller budgets among them, Winter Games torches often have been produced in very small quantities and consequently they are difficult to collect. Also included in this category would be the miners' lamps that have been used to safeguard the Olympic flame when in transit, as well as other torch like devices used in various ceremonies over the years.

## ***Books***

Books described simply by a good friend as “anything bound between two covers or with a staple in it” are another highly favored area of mine. Foremost in this category are the official reports each OCOG produces after their Games which detail all that went into conducting the Games. After that there are all manner of Olympic history books in a variety of languages that range from those which examine wide areas of the Games to very specific areas. Most candidates for hosting the Games produce books on their qualifications (bid books). There are also statistical analyses, picture books, children’s books, doctoral theses, joke books and exposes. Many Olympians have also had biographies written about them. There even have been many works of fiction that use the Games as backdrop and even a few non-fiction works that are more fiction than not.

## ***Tickets***

Collectors of tickets can look for those to the opening ceremonies, closing ceremonies, to specific sports, or to all of them. Cultural events, rehearsals, or season tickets in booklet form or pass type, press passes, used, unused, team trials, pre-Olympic events, variations, complimentary and most recently with technology’s help, personalized tickets. Sometimes tickets purchased in advance are far different than general admission sold on site for preliminary round events. There are also transportation tickets and lottery tickets. At Lillehammer, I even got a betting slip which shows I bet on the outcome of an Olympic event.

## ***Documents***

The Games’ Organizing Committees produce an awful lot of documents, invitations, application forms, identification cards, transit passes, credentials, diplomas, rules booklets, instruction of all types and results. Just about anything printed by the OCOG can fall into this category.

## ***Posters***

Since 1912, each Organizing Committee has used posters to promote interest in the Games. There is usually a primary design (often in a variety of languages) and sometimes there are a few additional secondary designs used. Travel posters are also prepared separately by tourist and transportation organizations. Art competition at the Games also produced limited edition posters. In the last 30 years or so, there was a tremendous increase in the number and varieties of posters produced. Grenoble saw many posters noting the various venues of the events. Mexico City saw whole series produced highlighting the various sports as well as the cultural events. Commercial promoters, sponsors and the media have joined the list most recently. There were even protest posters produced with obvious political overtones against the Berlin and Moscow Games, and I even have in my collection an election campaign poster with the rings on it - used by the incumbent mayor of Lake Placid.

## ***Pins***

Pin exchanging has been an integral part of the Games from very early on. Primarily confined to athletes, coaches and other participants, the 80s saw the phenomenon expand to the media and sponsors and, finally, the fans. I have to admit that while I thoroughly enjoy this pursuit at the Games, once I return home, I put all my pins on a board, frame it, and consider

it a wonderful souvenir of the Games. I understand others take this aspect of Olympic collecting more seriously.

### *Badges*

Badges are bigger pins and what I said about pins basically applies to badges.

### *Uniforms and Clothing*

The uniforms worn by officials and volunteers are usually very attractive. Uniforms worn by athletes and team members often are unique to a specific Games. The problem with uniforms is that they are difficult to display. Many collectors will seek only items they can wear themselves. For reasons that may be obvious, I collect only Olympic ties. Also included in this category are the identification numbers worn by athletes, official and other support personnel at the competition sites, which could be made of cloth or paper and take the form of bibs, vests or arm bands.

### *Programs*

I really enjoy Olympic Collectibles that connect you directly to the Games. Programs offer that connection perhaps better than any other category of memorabilia. They offer contemporary information on the Games and direct contact with historic moments, especially if they are hand scored. **General** or **souvenir** programs are intended to acquaint an Olympic visitor with all aspects of the Games. **Guides** serve the same purpose but are designed for regular use and are smaller so they can be carried around. **Ceremonies** often have **special programs** devoted to them. **Daily** programs were used early on at the Olympic Winter Games and some Summer Games (e.g., London 1908 and Berlin). **Sport specific** and **venue** programs often both appear at some Games, e.g., Paris 1924, Los Angeles 1932 and Montreal was probably the last to do this. In recent years, traditional daily and sports programs has been replaced by newspaper-like **Start and Result** publications. Moscow's were given free to visitors. At Los Angeles and Seoul these publications had to be bought. At Moscow there were also single page **event lists** in Russian intended for local residents sold at some venues for 40 kopecks. Single page **start sheets** were the norm at the two most recent Olympic Winter Games. Barcelona seemed to have an aversion to daily programs and start lists. The only ones of any substance I saw were at Equestrian events. There might have been more, but I did not find them. At some, Xerox copies of start lists were sporadically available.

### *Photographs*

Whenever I go to the Games, I take dozens of rolls of film. Photographs of past Games offer different perspectives on those Games. I have seen thousands of books on the Games and they contain a lot of photographs, many of which are often repeated. News agencies took thousands of original photos at each Games and their morgues are filled with them, usually with accompanying text. These are great finds for a collector. Even better are photos taken by team members that occasionally pop up in scrap books.

### *Films and Videos*

The advent of the VCR now allows us to add to our collections copies of the official films of the Games and other films about the Games that would have been difficult to amass and enjoy years ago. Films like Leni Riefenstahl's "Olympia," Munich's "Visions of Eight,"

'Tokyo Olympiad,' and Los Angeles' "16 Days of Glory" enjoyed various modes of theatrical release and are readily available on video cassette and laser disc. The other official films were much less popular but some can be found. Summaries of U.S. network broadcasts of the Games since 1976 are readily available and I imagine from other countries too.

Bud Greenspan, the producer of the Los Angeles and Calgary official films, has produced an impressive series of television documentaries on the Games which are available on video as the "Olympiad Series." Every four years there seems to be a new Olympic History film made for TV and subsequent video release.

One American network cleaned out its sports library and an enterprising collector was at the trash collectors truck and salvaged hundreds of unique videos before they hit the trash heap. From that find, I have in my collection an interesting short video made to support the bid to be host broadcaster for the Los Angeles Games.

There have been a number of fictional films made about the Games or Olympians that are available on video too. Everyone knows about "Chariots of Fire" and "Cool Running," but some of my favorites are "Wee Geordie," "The 500 Pound Jerk," and "Charlie Chan at the Berlin Olympics."

In the past few years, Bid cities have included video presentations in their Bid files. I like to think that video material I loaned to the producer of the Atlanta video pieces was partly responsible for them winning the bid, but I could be wrong on this.

### *Music*

Some of the most emotional moments at the Olympic Games involve music. The presentation of the Olympic flag is usually done to the accompaniment of the "Olympic Anthem." Medal presentations are usually preceded by Fanfares composed for that specific purpose and afterwards the national anthem of the winners' country is played while its flag is raised. Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" is perhaps the most stirring part of any Games ceremony. Beside these classic pieces, Olympic Ceremonies have special music composed, selected and/or arranged especially for them. The Olympic Games have also been the theme for popular songs going back to the turn of the century. Noted composer Irving Berlin's first hit was "Dorando," about the disqualified marathoner in the 1908 London Games. The theme from "Chariots of Fire" by Vangelis was a huge hit and won an Academy Award in 1983. In recent years, there have been albums of music tied to the Games produced by the OCOG or international broadcasters that included such popular stars as Whitney Houston, Madonna, Freddy Mercury and Montserrat Caballé, and José Carreras and Sarah Brightman. The latter two also took part in the closing ceremonies at Barcelona, 'as had Lionel Ritchie at Los Angeles in 1984 and k. d. lang at Calgary in 1988. (*Editor's Note:* Gordon Lightfoot also played at the 1988 Calgary opening ceremonies, and the 1994 Lillehammer opening and closing ceremonies were graced by the golden voice of Norwegian songstress Sissel Kyrkebjø.) There are dozens of albums of Olympic music available as well as 45 singles, tapes, CDs and sheet music, too.

### *Cards*

An area of collecting extremely popular in the U.S. is cards. I collected baseball cards as a youth, so when I discovered there are many Olympic related cards, I was hooked on another branch of Olympic memorabilia. Two series of tobacco cards, Mecca/Hassan in 1911, and Pan Handle Scrap in 1913 featured many Olympians who competed in the Games between 1900 and 1912. A series of cards issued in 1933 called Sports Kings features 10 Olympians, including Babe Didrikson and Jim Thorpe, (probably the most expensive item in this category at almost \$2,000) is especially valuable to U.S. collectors because of Babe Ruth and other

baseball greats also pictured on them. Tobacco cards from England were popular in the '20s and '30s with one series on the Amsterdam Games of particular interest. Recent years have seen many different sets authorized by the USOC, the COA, the BOA and others. In some countries cards are produced as calendars (Russia, Spain and Portugal). The latest entry into the card category are telephone cards which I first saw in Seoul. I believe this area will expand geometrically in the next few years.

### *Autographs*

I love the direct connection with the Games and Olympians that autographs afford. They are unique and personal. When they are tied to the right element, or are prefaced by personal comments, they really tell a story. Two of my prized pieces are autographs. One is a postcard handwritten and signed by Baron Pierre de Coubertin offering insight into the Olympic practice of awarding a Games to a city, not a country. The other is an unused Moscow ticket signed by U.S. President Jimmy Carter that I have framed together with a postal cover bearing an Opening Ceremonies cancellation.

### *Art*

An Arts Festival has been a part of each Games at Coubertin's direction. Original art from the early competitions, or even the later exhibitions, as well as art objects presented to winners as at Stockholm, Antwerp and Paris are all unique and highly sought. Recently limited edition works of art have been produced as fund raisers, and for a short time were given as gifts to Olympic dignitaries from cities bidding to host the Games.

### *Seals and Vignettes*

An Olympic Collectible that is often given little attention in the field in which it would appear to belong-Philately-is Seals and Vignettes. Baron de Coubertin himself is said to have designed the very first seal for the International Olympic Committee. They are usually tied to postal covers and intended to promote the Games or an Olympic event. While they often look like stamps, philatelic purists shun them. I have rarely seen them included as a separate entry at the OLYMPHILEXes and, in fact, I have lost points in philatelic exhibits because I had too many in my display. In recent years sponsors and suppliers have used them to promote their part in the Games. My favorite is one that came affixed to the official Olympic banana in Lake Placid.

### *Souvenirs*

Every traveler always returns home from a trip burdened with Souvenirs for friends and family. Visitors to the Olympic Games are no different. All of the material so far mentioned could be considered souvenirs from the Games, but they all have distinct purposes. A true souvenir should have to be bought for its own sake. There are all kinds of souvenirs available at the Games and they take the same form as materials available to travelers to any event or locale: Plates, mugs, steins, glassware, scarves and handkerchiefs, T-shirts, pennants, wall plaques, miniatures, jewelry, ashtrays, lighters, knick-knacks, spoons, decks of cards, slides, key chains, wallets, purses, etc. Anything a smart promoter can imagine, can turn up at the Souvenir stands at the Olympics.

## *Mascots*

My personal favorite Olympic Collectible of all are the Mascots. They have only been around since 1968 in Grenoble where an orange ball on skis named Schuss was used to promote the Olympic Lottery. This was an unofficial mascot. He appears on a pin and I have seen him as a small toy about two inches in height. In fact when I leave Lausanne tomorrow, I am driving straight to Albertville and a small tobacco shop where I, again, will plead with the owner to part with her Schuss. Since the München Olympics, every Games has had at least one official mascot. **Waldi**, a dachshund, was produced in dozens of forms--but not as a pin until many years later. Innsbruck in '76 saw the first official mascot, **Schneemann**, appear on a pin. He appeared in other forms and I am still looking for him as a plush toy. **Amik**, Montreal's beaver mascot was one that I sought for years and eventually found in a Salvation Army thrift shop for a dollar. I know collectors that will pay hundreds of dollars for one of them today. **Roni** raccoon from the Lake Placid Olympics is the first transvestite mascot. His predecessors usually took one general form even if constructed of different materials. Roni appears in different sports poses in various products, and one of them is as pairs ice skaters in which one partner has to be a woman. Moscow's favorite son was **Misha** the bear. He was probably the most liked mascot to date. The Moscow Games also saw a second mascot who most folks do not remember. It was a seal named **Vigri** who represented the Yachting events in Tallinn. Vucko, the Sarajevo wolf, was a sly little devil and a bit of a womanizer if what I read about him in a Sarajevo humor magazine can be taken seriously. **Sam the Eagle** was all decked out in red, white and blue for the Los Angeles Games. Designed by artists from Walt Disney Studios, he looked suspiciously like a parrot from earlier Disney cartoons name José Carrioco but no one ever looked into Sam's past. Calgary saw the first male and female mascots - **Hidy** and **Howdy**, who were polar bears. Seoul also had male and female mascots, but **Hodori** the tiger hogged the spotlight and his female counterpart, **Hosuni**, was seldom seen. Albertville saw its first mascot **Chamois**, a mountain goat common to the Savoie region of France, unceremoniously dropped about two years before the Games in favor of a Snow Imp named **Magique**. **Cobi** the surreal dog from the Games of Barcelona started out in disfavor. A creation of local cartoonist Javier Marascal, he was universally despised by the Spaniards, but he later grew on them and by the time the Games were over, he was loved all over the world. The Barcelona Games had a whole group of similar characters including Paralympic Games mascot **Petra** to support **Cobi** that were part of a popular TV show in Spain. Lillehammer had the first human mascots, two children from Norwegian folklore named **Håkon** and **Kristin**. Atlanta will have the first amorphous mascot. No one knows exactly what **Izzy** (née "Whatizit") really is, and he has changed appearance three times since first showing up at the closing in Barcelona - most recently he grew a nose. The Nagano mascot was originally a weasel names **Snowple** but I guess there were those that felt a weasel was not a good Olympic role model, so he was replaced by four snow owls, yet unnamed as far as I know. For reasons I cannot explain, these characters strangely appeal to me and I must have them in my collection in every form imaginable. Just try to picture me flying home from Albertville on Air France with a four foot tall Magique occupying the seat next to me.

## *Ephemera*

The last category known as ephemera could really be called everything else. The word comes from the Greek EPHEMEROS which means lasting a day and can be applied to anything intended for fleeting use and then to be discarded. This can include napkins, paper and plastic cups, edible plates, hot dog wrappers, signage, information brochures and fliers, maps, bottle caps, sugar and condiment packets, washcloths, plastic shopping bags, drink

stirrers, all sorts of packaging materials, computer paper and luggage tags. A strange lot, but examples of each occupy cherished spots in my collection. The list can go on and on, but I presume you get the idea.

### *Hierarchies Within Olympic Collecting*

There are several **hierarchies** or levels of importance in Olympic Memorabilia collecting. The highest level would be those items considered official, or produced by and/or for the use of the IOC, OCOGs and to a lesser extent the NOCs and IFs.

Material **authorized or licensed** by an official Olympic entity is the next in order of importance. Generally, such material is commercially produced and intended to raise funds or produce revenue for the authorizing party. This also includes material produced by or for the use of sponsors and suppliers.

In the early days of the Olympic movement, very little control was exercised over the use of the Olympic symbols or words resulting in the production of unofficial or **unauthorized** material by parties wishing to take advantage of the growing interest in the Games. Material in this category is held in as high esteem as the authorized material of recent years.

With the Games becoming universally recognized, their symbols and words bring with them instant recognition and positive and profitable possibilities. Unscrupulous parties have employed those symbols and words to produce **illegal** material or copies of legitimate material. To some, even this is collectible. A classic example is the high value given to forgeries of the first Olympic stamps from Greece. More recently, at Los Angeles in 1984, the pin collecting frenzy pushed the value of a pin showing their mascot, Sam the Eagle, holding a bottle of Coca-Cola, up to \$1000. Fakes quickly appeared thereafter and had a devastating effect on high valued originals.

### *Sources of Current Material*

After deciding what you want to collect, all you have to do then is go out and find it. Good sources of newer material are pretty obvious: the IOC, COJO/OCOGs, NOCs, IFs, Bid Cities, sponsors, suppliers and the media. They all have an interest in promoting their part in the Olympics and may often give you material just for the asking or sell to you at reasonable prices. The tourist offices, embassies, and government information offices of the country in which the host city is located on occasion can provide material.

As I stated earlier, attendance at a Games always affords an opportunity to pick up a lot of things. I always bring several large empty pieces of luggage just for that purpose. I am always one of the last people to leave an Olympic venue, especially the ceremonies. While I love to just stand there and take in the atmosphere, I also use the opportunity to look for valuable material. The high security around the VIP and Media seating generally ends quickly after an event. These folks do not always appreciate the material given to them and often leave it behind. I can count on picking up dozens of programs and other goodies in this manner. At Los Angeles, I knew a sponsor who offered to give a free pin for every two of their film packaging boxes. I took a large plastic bag with me to the Opening and picked up over 1,000 discarded film boxes. I later obtained 500 pins for future trading, worth at least \$2,500, which was not a bad return on my investment in time.

A visit to a host city either before or after the Games can also be rewarding. You can get your souvenir shopping out of the way early and leave more room when you attend the Games to pick up the types of material only available at that time. Afterwards, you can get good future trading material at reduced prices.

The new collector's organization, The Atlanta Centennial Olympic Pin Society, which is sponsored by Coca-Cola, will likely be a source of information on Atlanta material.

## *Sources of Older Material*

Finding older material is a lot harder. The best sources are **auctions** devoted exclusively to Olympic material. There are only a handful of dealers who offer such auctions, and their catalogues are anxiously awaited. Because of the high exposure of these few dealers (primarily Ingrid O'Neil, Heinrich Winter, Heiko Volk, Ulf Ström, and Christine Eberhardt). There are relatively few bargains to be had, but the material is certainly first class. The best chance for bargains however, is in the lots that are not pictured in the catalogues but only have written descriptions.

A better chance at a bargain can often be found in the auctions and sale lists obtained through membership in the few collectors' organizations - Olympian and Sports Philatelists International in the U.S. and The Society of Olympic Collectors in the UK.

After that it gets more difficult. There are auction and dealers that cater to all sports of specific types of collectibles (books, posters and the like) which, may occasionally offer Olympic lots. These are often hit or miss but a good collector keeps all doors open. These dealers often lack sufficient knowledge about Olympic Collectibles and frequently misdescribe lots and for their own convenience will sometimes offer box lots (with all different types of material in them). These can contain real treasures!

Flea markets, antique shops, bookstores, sportcard shows and other specialized collectible shows offer even more remote possibilities for locating Olympic collectibles, but the chances of finding real bargains are inversely proportional to the amount of non-Olympic material you have to wade through.

Sometimes dumb luck or fortuitous happenstance is the only thing that helps. Running into an athlete or media representative, or even service personnel or volunteers who were involved in the Games, but have no lingering interest in them, can be a great source of material. Unfortunately, you never know when you will come across them. It is always wise to wear a pin that will subtly let the world know you have an interest in the Games. You never know where a casual conversation will lead.

As you amass quantities of extra material and refine your collecting limits that allow you to begin to part with otherwise desirable material, you can explore the possibilities of exchanging with **Museums** and other **Olympic Organizations**, and more importantly, other **collectors**. Joining some or all of the collector organizations (Olympin, SPI and SOC) I mentioned earlier affords the best opportunity to find collectors with similar interests. Often membership lists are issued regularly, and reasonable or free advertisement space are sometimes offered to members. It is my hope that the first Olympic Collectors World Fair will open up avenues heretofore never dreamed of.

Also, do not underestimate the value of visiting an older Olympic host city. The Montreal Games were held almost twenty years ago, but there are many places there where good items are still available. OLYMPINS holds a collectors event every year in Lake Placid, and the local town folk walk in every year with unbelievable caches of material, some of which has been sitting in their attics since 1932.

When all else fails, a small advertisement in a local newspaper can bring surprising results. A friend just got a lead on a 1904 football gold medal in this manner.

## *Enjoying Your Collection*

Once you have a collection, what do you do with it? I am fortunate to have that small group of friends I mentioned earlier-a psychologist might call it a "Support Group." A regular part of each meeting is what my grandchildren in grade school call "Show and Tell." We all bring out our latest acquisitions for the group to see. Sometimes just seeing what an

item looks like will later enable you to pick a similar one out of a roomful of odds and ends. Sharing these finds also results in adding to our collective knowledge base, and just seeing what can be found in a period of a few weeks spurs us to continue the pursuit.

Local libraries usually welcome a small exhibit. I have done this on several occasions and it was always warmly received. On occasion a corporate sponsor or supplier will want to promote their part in the Games. I have loaned them material to enhance their displays.

Currently a large part of my collection is on loan to ACOG, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. It assembled an Olympic history exhibit to welcome the Olympic flag to Georgia from Barcelona in 1992. Since then, the exhibit has toured many cities in the USA and is now on a five months, five city tour of Europe. Seeing other people get enjoyment out of looking at those exhibits is an unbelievable joy to me.

### ***Conclusion***

I hope I have conveyed some of the joys of collecting Olympic memorabilia. I am sure my own collecting strayed so far and wide because once I attended my first Games, I came to appreciate what the Olympics are all about. This is just my way to capture tangible elements of the Games and to extend my enjoyable contact with them. In effect I feel I am touching and owning little pieces of history, and a glorious history at that. I have met and gotten to know some wonderful people, both ordinary and famous. When I try to explain my feelings for the Olympics to someone who has not been to a Games, it is difficult to find the right words. Being at the right place where the whole world's attention is focused for two weeks every two years is part of it, but there is so much more to it as I am sure you know. Seeing how I am "afflicted" with this wonderful hobby, I hope you will begin to appreciate what draws you to it, too. Further, I hope you will realize that your experiences are not all that unusual, and you will appreciate the hobby even more.

*[Editor's Note: The above story is basically the text of a speech given by ISOH Member Bob Christianson last October in Lausanne to the First Olympic Collectors World Fair. The music section was added after Bob's speech, and was done at the suggestion at President Juan Antonio Samaranch, who correctly noted that this was one area of Olympic collecting which Bob had omitted.]*