

1906 TENNIS AND THE TWO MISSING PLAYERS

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My primary hobby in Olympic history has always been the earliest Olympics, those before 1924. The Games are poorly documented with the Official Reports of that era being far cries from what we know today. I have enjoyed trying to find the complete results of those early Games, which heretofore have not been published.

Along with that, I have made some efforts to identify all the athletes competing in those earliest Games, a Sisyphean task if ever there was one, especially for 1900 and 1904. However, I have had some success. In all cases, I usually try to find the athletes' full names, dates and places of birth and death, and if possible, something about their lives. It makes the Olympic history come alive for me a bit, as it has been said that all history can be told via biography

I am in the process of publishing my works with a series of books detailing the complete results of the Olympics from 1896-1920. The books will include the results, description of all events, complete statistical summaries of each Olympics, and indices of all the competing athletes, giving the vital data as described above. This series will begin to appear in the fall of 1997, published by McFarland & Co, Publishers, of Jefferson, North Carolina. The 1896 book is co-written with Ture Widlund, the 1908 book will be done with Ian Buchanan and the 1912 book will be co-authored with Ove Karlsson, while the others will be mine alone. The 1896-1904 volumes are already at the publisher and I am currently (at May 1997) working on the 1906 book.

While working on the 1906 tennis results a problem arose in identifying two of the athletes, both of whom competed in men's singles and, as a team, in men's doubles. The athletes are listed in the Official Results as "M. Bryngton of Italy" and "Schauffler of Italy". In the singles, "Bryngton" lost in the first round to Ioannis Ballis of Greece by 6-1, 6-2, while Schauffler lost to Georgios Simiriotis of Greece 6-1, 2-6, 6-2. Playing doubles together, they had a walkover in round one and then lost to Bohemia's Zemla brothers by 6-

3,6-3. But what were their full names? Who were they?

I immediately checked the new source on early Italian Olympics, *La nascita del Movimento Olimpico in Italia* by Gianfranco Colasante (Rome: CONI, 1996), but to no avail. There on page 89 is the complete roster of the 1906 Italian Olympic team, but no mention of "Bryngton" or "Schauffler". No mention of any tennis players. I then went to the 1906 Official Entry List. For event 56, *Championnat de Lawn-Tennis simple messieurs*, they are both listed, with "Bryngton" listed as 'Italie', while this time, "Schauffler" is listed as from 'Hollande'. In the doubles, "Bryngton" is listed as partnering Demartino of Italy, while there is no mention of Schauffler. In the "Liste de Participantes" they are both listed as from Italy.

With "Schauffler" now listed as possibly from The Netherlands, I went to Tony Bijkerk's book, *Gouden Boek van de Nederlandse Olympiërs*, searching for one or the other, but came up empty. Tony did not list either athlete, but did have Gerard Jacobus Scheurleer as competing in 1906 tennis, but that is a different athlete, as he is also listed in the Official Results.

Now I was more puzzled. Perhaps the names were spelled wrong, which is a common occurrence in the early Olympic literature. A noteworthy case came in the early '80's when I was working on the 1904 Olympics, and trying to trace an archer who won a silver medal in the team competition. Erich Kamper listed the athlete as "Claude Allen" in his *Enzyklopädie der Olympischen Spiele*, then the best source available. But after some work on this, helped by Robert Rhode, America's top archery historian, this athlete turned out to be a famous archer and sculptor named "Cyrus Dallin". So I knew not to trust the spelling completely.

I began, as I often do, by writing to my friends and fellow ISOH members. In this case, I suspected that "Bryngton" sounded British, or at least Anglo-Saxon, and that "Schauffler" sounded Germanic. Thus I wrote to all the principles involved for the possible countries, asking for help -

Ian Buchanan (GBR), Tony Bijkerk (NED), Giuseppe Odello (ITA), and Heiner Gillmeister (GER). Heiner is well-known as the top expert on Olympic tennis and I had high hopes he could help, but to no avail. He pointed out that a German tennis player from that era was named Emil Schieffler, but he had no evidence that he (Schieffler) had competed at Athens in 1906. None of the four could help, and in fact, all four stated unequivocally that the athletes were not from “my country”. Ian conceded that “Bryngton” sounded British but no such athlete had ever competed at Wimbledon for which complete records of competitors are known. If he was a British tennis player, he wasn’t very good!

I was close to the end. As Butch and Sundance once said: “Who are those guys?” My only possible source seemed to be a forthcoming visit to the Library of Congress, where I hoped to read some early U.S. sporting magazines. Perhaps a tennis magazine from that era, possibly American Lawn Tennis Monthly, would provide some help.

But first I had other work to do on 1906. I was at the University of North Carolina library a few weeks later reading some early American newspapers for information on 1906. While reading *The Chicago Daily Tribune* from 17 April 1906, I came across the following in the description of the American Olympic team stopping in Naples on their way to Athens, “Thanks to Vice Consul A. Homer Byington, who secured the necessary permission, the members of the American team were enabled to practice on the grounds at Mount Vomero, where they devoted an hour to jumping, hurdling, and discus throwing”. Byington! Could it be?

It sounded close enough to Bryngton that I sought more information. I found a biography for Homer Byington in the *Who Was Who in America*, and also found his *New York Times* obituary. They described his career in the foreign service for the United States but there was no mention of tennis, sports, or the Olympics.

I then tracked down a grandson (Homer Byington, III) and son-in-law (Dr. Lawrence Hinkle) and spoke to them on the phone. They were excited - the son-in-law is writing Byington’s biography - he had spent his life in the U.S. foreign service. Both had heard that he had competed in the Olympics in tennis, but they were never certain of the year - they thought it was 1900. They were happy to get my information, and confirmed he was an excellent tennis player, golfer, and rower. They thought he might have competed in the Olympics as a rower as well, but he did not in 1900 or 1906.

So I had found one of them. Now on to “Schauffler”. Although Hinkle went through his records from Homer Byington’s papers, in which one letter by Byington from Athens confirmed his Olympic participation, he did not know the name of his doubles partner. He suggested to me,

however, that perhaps he was also in the U.S. foreign service, like Byington, and I could possibly trace him in that manner. I was prepared to start writing the U.S. Foreign Service for clues, but decided to start with American biographical dictionaries. If “Schauffler” was in the foreign service, perhaps he was famous enough to warrant a biography in one of them, as did Byington. In *Who Was Who in America*, there were several Schaufillers listed, but only one, Robert Schauffler, could have been the correct age to have played tennis at the 1906 Olympics. Reading his biography, it noted, “Decorated by Queen of Italy, 1906, for winning nat. tennis championship (doubles), Rome; played in Athenian Olympic Games, 1906; winner of Austrian handicap tennis doubles, 1931”. Eureka!

Now I had found them both, and none of the nationalities listed were correct - both were American citizens, and therefore, for my own files on U.S. Olympians, two missing American Olympic athletes. Following is all the pertaining data on these two Olympic tennis players.

Byington, Homer Morrison. (USA) *19 September 1879, Washington, DC. Died: 7 July 1966, Stamford, CT. Nationality: United States. Son of George Richmond Byington and Emma Marsalene Morrison. Married: Jeannette Lindsley Gregory (2 June 1903). Children: Homer Morrison, Jeannette Gregory, James Gregory, Joan Richmond, Janice Joy, and Ward Gregory. Educated in Naples by Private Tutors, did not attend college. Lived in Italy from 1897-1909, England 1909-1919, Italy 1919-1933, Antwerp 1935, Montreal 1935-1944, and then retired to Darien, CT.

Schauffler, Robert Haven. (USA) *8 April 1879, Brunn, Austria. Died: 24 November 1964. Nationality: United States and probably had Austrian dual citizenship by virtue of his birth. Son of Rev. Henry A. and Clara Eastham Gray (missionaries) [hence their presence in Austria]. Married Katharine de Normandie Wilson (21 December 1904 [died: 4 May 1916]). Education: Northwestern Univ., 1898-1899; Princeton Univ. ‘02 BA, Univ. Berlin 1902-03. Pupil of cellists Steindel, Schroder, and Hekking. Career was as an editor, author, and lecturer. Severely wounded in World War I on 26 September 1918 at Montfaucon. Settled in New York City where he lived until his death.

This episode has to be counted as either my best or my luckiest bit of research on early Olympic athletes. But then again, in the words of the American football coach, Darrell Royal, “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity”.
