

# LETTERS

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*The Editor received the following letter, dated July 5th, from ISOH member Mrs June Wuest Becht:*

In the May-issue of the Journal of Olympic History is written: "so please research, and then come back to us with your stories!" about the subject of war and the Olympics.

When I was growing up in St. Louis, my Father took me to Jefferson Memorial once a year to see the names of his fallen friends from WWI chiselled on the wall. The Memorial was built with money left after St. Louis' World's Fair and Games of the Third Olympiad expenses were paid.

Listed with the dead for the 89th Division, 356th Infantry, is the name "Arthur Wear."

My father had been a sergeant in the 89th Division, 354th Infantry and knew Captain Wear, an Olympian, who won a bronze medal in the tennis doubles competition with Clarence Gamble here in 1904.

Before my Father's death in 1980, he gave me his history of the 89th Division, 1917, 1918, and 1919 (a part of the AEF and Army of Occupation). He was with the Division for the entire time it was on duty in the USA, France, Belgium and Germany.

There I discovered an account of Captain Wear's death which has never been published:

(page 205, History of the 89th Division)

Trying to cross the Meuse near Pouilly on November 5, 1918. The crossing could not be made at that time.

"Captain Wear had recently been discharged from the hospital and was weak and nervous. His command had been through severe fighting and had had an exhausting march beginning in the early morning. Evidently his mind gave way under the strain of the events and of his depleted physical condition. He ordered his battalion to withdraw from its position along the railroad tracks and bank of

the canal to a position in the woods above the town; he sent word to. . . . "Take command of the battalion". . . . then going a little aside from his headquarters in the dismal woods, at about 3 o'clock in the morning (November 6) he ended his life by shooting himself through the head. This was one of those tragedies of the war indicative of the frightful strain of the times. Captain Wear's abilities and courage had been tested in the previous fighting and had given promise of a glorious career as a soldier. As a result of his own over-zeal in coming back to hard field service before he was physically fit, the Division lost one of its promising officers."

The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, just days after Captain Wear's death.

His name appears in memory as a soldier not far from the tennis venue where he competed in the Olympic Games of 1904."

**June Wuest Becht**

*The Editor received the following letter, dated 16 May, 2000, from ISOH member Séamus Ware.*

"The Olympics in the Next Millennium"

The report in Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 2000) of the above Conference, held in the University of New South Wales in September 1999, was most interesting. It prompted me to offer some observations as someone "on the fringe", since I fit into none of the categories of those who have given long service to the Olympic movement, distinguished academics, or Olympic athletes. In my opinion, the greatest challenge facing the Olympics is the pressure of commercialism, of which the following are various examples:

- Was it not commercial interests that won the Centennial Olympic Games for Atlanta, instead of Athens ?

- T.V. networks can influence the timing of major events, e.g. track finals, sometimes to the detriment of the participants;
- The widening gap between "elite athletes" (who are involved for money) and "ordinary" sports people ; top athletes will not stay in the Olympic Village and bring their own coach with them;
- Is it not due to T.V. influence that "pseudo-sports" such as synchronised swimming and beach volleyball are included ? they do not meet the criteria of being widely practiced around the world;
- When tennis was re-admitted to the Olympic Games and Olympic cycling opened up to full-time professionals, many of the top world competitors do not bother to compete in Olympic competition; their attention is on "classic" money-making events!
- In my country, a row arose in 1996 between B.L.E. (now A.A.I.) (the national athletics body) and the Olympic Council of Ireland re sponsorship of clothing; this resulted in one of our top female athletes being told just before her event to change her "kit"; the same row has "boiled up" again this year, and has involved the Irish Sports Minister and correspondence with I.O.C. President Samaranch; this raises the issue of who controls the Olympic Games - IOC/ NOCs or commercial interests?

Can one truly say any more that the spirit of the Olympic Movement established by Pierre de Coubertin exists today?

**Séamus Ware**

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## SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES

### GOLD MEDAL (front and back)

