

BOOK REVIEWS

OLYMPISCHE SIEGE Medaillen-Diplome- Ehrungen

*By Karl Lennartz, Walter Borgers, and Andreas Höfer.
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Cologne (Köln) and produced by Sport-Verlag, Berlin. ISBN
3-328-00865-9. 474 pages, in German. Price: DM 127.00.
Reviewed by Wolf Lyberg.*

The book can be ordered from Sportverlag Berlin GmbH, Charlottenstraße 13, 10969 Berlin, Germany. Published as the catalogue for an exhibition, which was organised in Siegburg, then in the German Sportsmuseum in Cologne, and finally in Leverkusen.

The Olympic Movement - and Olympism - has for decades fascinated authors. Hundreds of books of various quality have been published.

I am sorry to say that most of them are the result of a hasty job, mostly in connection with wonderful photographs and containing nothing of real value or Olympic connoisseurs. The authors mostly just use old material, which they skimmed off from other books, hoping to make some quick and easy money.

There are of course, brilliant exceptions. Authors who have spent years of research wishing to find as much as possible about details which are as yet unknown, or documents written about happenings around the Olympic Games or in the Olympic Family.

Such authors as Volker Kluge, Karl Lennartz, Bill Mallon and a few more.

It is a fact that especially in Germany and the USA, the best historical books on the Games have been published.

This new book, with 474 pages, produced by Karl Lennartz and his friends at the German Sporthochschule in Köln, is certainly by far the best book ever written and published on these Olympic matters. The only regrettable thing is that the book is published - so far - only in the German language. I hope the authors will try to have the IOC sponsor an English edition.

This catalogue, because that is what the book actually is, differs from most of the others, because the Olympic athletes are not the main subjects of the volume. Of course, they appear on a series of remarkable photographs, many of which have never been seen before. The main objects dealt with are all the different Olympic awards which have been handed out through one hundred years.

Karl Lennartz gives the honour for coming up with this idea to his compatriot Bernd Wagner, one of the leading collectors of Olympic memorabilia in the world.

Now we can see all the magnificent diplomas for medalwinners since the Games started. There is no award or medal that has not been described and published. Even the various creators have received the full attention and from each of them full curricula and photographs, but also the backgrounds of how everything was created, have been described.

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Each diploma, and each medal, is in fact a fine piece of art, and so are the old Olympic challenges, which were handed out in the period from 1906 to 1920, donations by emperors, royalties and other VIP's.

I had to smile seeing on a page the trophy from the Russian Tsar, won by Thorpe in Stockholm in 1912, and above the signed certificate by Thorpe (and his NOC), in which he stated that he was aware of that he had to return the trophy before the Games of 1916.

Having received the goldmedals from Stockholm 1912, in 1983 from the IOC, his family wanted more for the Thorpe-Museum and tried to claim the Tsar's trophy from the IOC. They even used lawyers for this claim.

The IOC-President sent me an S.O.S. and I then managed to find all the documents signed by the winners of the various challenges, in which was confirmed that they were all aware of the fact that they had to return the trophy.

I even found the freight-papers and the name of the steamer, with which the trophy had been returned to Stockholm.

Especially interesting is the chapter about the history of the so-called podium, from which the medals are awarded. I suppose many people think it has always been done this way, but the fact is that the first podium - or winner's stand as the New York Times called it - was introduced in Lake Placid in 1932 - to be exact on February 4th, 1932.

Earlier, all medallists had paraded after the Games, and had been awarded the medals by royalties, or by others, and without flagceremonies and national anthems.

In May 1931, the IOC ordered the Americans to prepare for this ceremony and the first one to be celebrated in this way was the speedskater Jack Shea. His debute had, however, been earlier that same day, when he took the Olympic Oath from the same podium, but on the "bronze medallist"-step.

Karl Lennartz describes how he managed to find a photograph of the ceremony in a local Lake Placid newspaper, and he even reports that the Norwegian silver-medallist Evensen received his medal standing as a bronze medallist.

However, it is regrettable that the book does not contain the whole list of recipients of the "Olympic Orders" - but only the German recipients. Wouldn't it have been worthwhile to sacrifice two or three pages at the end of the book, with the names of all those people, who received the "Olympic Order"?

In the whole book, every photograph has a text giving information about those published. But the only photograph showing President Samaranch handing out an Olympic Order has no names attached.

In fact, the photograph was taken on May 10, 1982 in Stockholm and shows Honorary IOC member Bo Ekelund receiving the Order.

Witnesses are Bo Bengtson (Swedish NOC General Secretary) and the Swedish IOC member Matts Carlgren, ... and the author of this text.

I had the idea to look for suitable superlatives in my English dictionary in order to give the best praise to this superb book, but decided to use FANTASTIC or - in order to use the German language - ET WAS NO CHNIE DAGEWESENES

You, the authors, deserve to receive one of the trophies, you have described so well: THE OLYMPIC CUP!