

The Commemorative Medal From Amsterdam, 1928

By Anthony Bijkerk



When, in early 1999, Karl Lennartz asked me to assist him with the research for information for an upcoming exhibition on Olympic medals, Olympic diploma's and other Olympic memorabilia at his Sports University in Cologne, entitled "Olympische Siege: Diploma's, Medal, Honours," I could hardly refuse. Especially since he wanted my expertise on the material produced for the Games of the IX Olympiad, in Amsterdam 1928. The exhibition, planned to be held in various locations in Germany, during the year of the Olympic Games in Sydney, 2000, was intended to be the most complete set of materials ever gathered on the subject covering the whole 104 years of Modern Olympic Games.

During the rest of the year 1999, I contacted several sources to gather material on the designers of the medals, produced for, or related to, the 1928 Olympic Games from Amsterdam, and on the medals themselves. This included the designer for the 1928 diploma, Christiaan Johannes van der Hoef, because he had not only designed that diploma, but the cover for the official daily programs as well. He then entered the Art Programme of the 1928 Olympic Games with his design for an Olympic medal, for which he won a bronze Olympic prize medal.

During my contacts with, among others, the Dutch Numismatic Museum in Utrecht, I received a copy of an article, written by one of the experts from that museum, Mr. L.M.J. Boegheim, entitled "Olympiade Medailles Amsterdam 1928" (Olympic Medals Amsterdam 1928). It was published in a 1997 issue of the numismatic magazine *Munt-Koerier*. In the article, much information on the 1928 Olympic medals had been collected, most of which was known to me, with one exception. And that exception was that Mr. Boegheim mentioned the existence of a book "Olympic Coins and Medals," by Victor Gadoury. It was published in Monaco in 1996. I didn't, and still don't know the book.

According to Mr. Boegheim, Victor Gadoury, in his book, claimed the existence of not only the bronze commemorative medals for the Games of the IX Olympiad, Amsterdam 1928, but he also explicitly stated that this medal existed in a silver and gold (gilt bronze) version.

I then asked myself: "Who, in our country, would have received a possible gilt version of this medal, in the first place?"

In all my years as an Olympic collector, I never had come across the existence of a 1928 Amsterdam commemorative medal in a silver and/or gilt version. I immediately contacted other experts on this matter—people like Pim Huurman, Jaco Treurniet, and Ruud Paauw, all of them well-known Olympic collectors and historians (and members of ISOH), and all with an extensive and special knowledge about the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, in 1928. However, none of these collectors had ever seen anything else than the bronze 1928 commemorative medal. But Huurman and Treurniet both told me that sometime ago they had been surprised, because in an auction in the United States, a gilt copy of the 1928 commemorative medal had been sold for an exorbitant price.

I informed Karl Lennartz about my findings, and when he, with co-authors Walter Borgers and Andreas Höfer, published their new book, "Olympische Siege: Medaillen-Diplome-Ehrungen" in 2000, they mentioned that I had been rather doubtful about the existence of the gilt and silver version of the 1928 commemorative medal. However, at the moment I had no actual proof to substantiate my doubts!

Later, I came in contact with Jim Greensfelder, who, together with Oleg Vorontsov and Jim Lally, (all of them ISOH members) are co-authors of the beautiful book, "Olympic Medals: A Reference Guide." In their book, the gilt bronze and silver version of the commemorative medal from the 1928 Olympic Games, in Amsterdam, are shown on page 43, but when I contacted Mr. Greensfelder about this, he informed me that his material also came from the same source: Victor Gadoury's book.

I then wrote a letter to the firm, which had taken over the heritage of Gerritsen & Van Kempen in Zeist, the firm where the medals originally had been struck in 1928.

Gerritsen & Van Kempen had merged in 1960 with another firm Van Kempen, Begeer & Vos and today call themselves: Koninklijke Nederlandse Fabriek van Gouden en Zilveren Werken Van Kempen & Begeer. Unfortunately, they never answered my request for information on this subject, because probably they cannot find the requested information in their archives.

Thinking about the matter, I asked myself: "Who, in the first place, would have received one of the gilt bronze or silver commemorative medals?" The answer to this question was given with an earlier version of this medal, the one issued for the Games in 1908 in London: "Royalty and IOC mem-

bers" received the gilt version, and high officials received the silver one.

That gave me a new opening!

I then asked myself: "Who, in our country, would have received a possible gilt version of this medal, in the first place?" The answer was simple: "Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, and/or her spouse Prince Hendrik of the Netherlands".

Having been in contact with the personal secretary of Prince Bernhard several times in the past (this secretary of Prince Bernhard used to be a retired naval officer, but had left the Prince's service about a year ago), I wrote to the current personal secretary of the Prince. After explaining the matter to him, I requested him to check into the Royal Archives to see if the commemorative medal from the Games of the IX Olympiad, Amsterdam 1928 could still be found and, if so, what kind of metal this medal consisted of.

The answer to the letter took some time in coming, but when it arrived on October 5th, 2000, it stated: "In answer to your letter of 27 August last, which letter was sent to us to be dealt with, by the private secretary of H.R.H. Prince Bernhard, I herewith inform you that within the available collection of medals and coins in the Royal Archives, only a bronze commemorative medal from the Games of the IXth Olympiad Amsterdam 1928 exists. This is the medal originally coming from Queen Wilhelmina. We could not find any information about the occasion by which the medal was presented to the Queen. Within the collection of medals and coins, coming from Prince Hendrik, no such medal could be found. Because the medal presented to Queen Wilhelmina is made in bronze, one may assume, in my opinion, that no gilt or silver versions have been produced."

Signed by the Head-Archivist: Mr. A.F. Ubels

Although this letter still is no definite proof the gilt and silver versions do not exist, it comes very close to being that. If not even Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands received anything else than a bronze commemorative medal from the Games of the IX Olympiad who in the world would have deemed him/herself high enough to deserve a gilt or silver one?

It now appears to me that somewhere in the world, a very clever collector of Olympic memorabilia, must have gilded a bronze commemorative medal from the Games of the IX himself, and then sold it for a steep price.

In my dictionary, we call this pure fraud!