

# A Sure Gold Medal, A Terrible Disappointment

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When Eleanor Holm Jarrett, amid a throng of photographers and sportswriters, boarded the S.S. Manhattan for the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936, she was confident of defending her 1932 Olympic backstroke title. Mrs. Jarrett was a product of the Women's Swimming Association of New York, America's leading producer of female Olympic swimmers and divers. The beautiful swimmer, on the brink of her third consecutive Olympic appearance, had become accustomed to parties, champagne, and night clubs since her marriage to singer-actor Arthur Jarrett. Swimming practices and even competition sometimes followed all night parties. The champion backstroker boasted that she trained on champagne and caviar. Despite her unconventional training schedule Eleanor Jarrett held the 1936 world record in the two hundred meter backstroke. She was primed to meet Holland's Dina Senff, the best one hundred meter backstroker in the world. However, America's chances of claiming a gold medal in the backstroke were diminished when Eleanor Jarrett was dismissed from the Olympic team for drinking champagne and attending a party after curfew while enroute to Berlin. The controversial swimmer became the first American woman to be expelled from a United States Olympic team.

Claims and counter claims by Mrs. Jarrett and American Olympic officials received daily coverage in *The New York Times*. The American Olympic Committee's team handbook stated "that all members of the American Olympic Team shall refrain from smoking and the use of intoxicating drinks . while in training." On the other hand, Eleanor Jarrett explained that team members were instructed to continue their regular training routine and that Olympic officials were aware of her reputation. After all, recalled the backstroker, "I was on my third Olympic team and was not a young kid on my first Olympic trip. "

Eleanor Jarrett's saga of the Berlin Olympic Games might have been different had alterations in coaching personnel not occurred. The Women's Swimming Committee had selected Louis de Brada Handley as diving coach and Alice Lord Landon as head chaperone. Both Handley and Landon were affiliated with the WSA and were highly respected by Mrs. Jarrett. Neither Handley nor Landon went to Berlin. A ten thousand dollar donation had been offered to the American Olympic Committee so the donor could name the swimming coach. After learning that Avery Brundage dismissed Handley, Alice Landon resigned as chaperone. Hints of jealousy on the part of chaperone Ada Taylor Sackett resulted in a strained relationship between the chaperone and the highly publicized swimmer. Other factors which contributed to Jarrett's dismissal included her dissatisfaction with the accommodation on board ship and the manner in which she was treated by American Olympic officials.

Eleanor Jarrett enjoyed her celebrity status in Berlin where she became a reporter for the International News Service. The Games of the Eleventh Olympiad when recalled by Eleanor Holm Whalen, represented "a sure gold medal, a terrible disappointment. "