
Commentary

Of Olympic Chains and Flags: The Debate Continues

With respect to the last two publications of *Olympika* (Volumes V-1996 and VI-1997) which included two research notes on the subject "Olympic Chains," and, obliquely, "Olympic Flags," by Robert K. Barney and Karl Lennartz, respectively, the editors have received two commentary responses on the subject which are deemed advisable to share with the journal's readers. The decision to include the remarks appearing below is due, in part, to a contemplation of the nature of historical evidence.



**Adolf Hitler receives flowers from Gudrun Diem
Baillet-Latour (left) and Theodor Lewald (right) wear their Olympic chains**

From John Loaring, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

I noticed the Vol. V article "Olympic Chains . . ." by Barney, and Lennartz's Volume VI follow-up article. Lennartz' endnote 3 doesn't clarify that Barney's statement was based on information provided by Wolf Lyberg, per endnote 18. I, too, have for many years had a 1936 Berlin Olympic Gold Chain; it was included in my 1936 Berlin Olympic Games exhibit as part of the Cultural Olympiad in Atlanta in 1996 . . . I am in touch with several collectors who have 1936 Gold Chains, and, roughly once every two years, I see one offered in an Olympic Collectibles auction catalog. I have never seen Diem's modified chain--for the Chancellor of the German Sports University. Including press photos and sport cards, but excluding postcards

and amateur photos, I have roughly 4,000 to 5,000 different photos covering the XIth Olympiad, plus an enormous additional number of roughly 2,500 publications (including periodicals) . . .

JL - Windsor, February 18, 1998

From Ture Widlund, Stockholm, Sweden

Referring to *Olympika* articles in Volume V and Volume VI about the Olympic chains I would like to add the following:

Carl Diem, in his memoirs, "Ein Leben für den Sport" (A Life for Sports), pages 232-233, has a good account of what happened to the 1936 Olympic Chains and the Olympic Flag after the surrender of Germany in May 1945. See below, a copy of my translation from German to English:

One of the first things I did after the collapse was to look for the Olympic Flag, which had been given to us for safekeeping. It was found in the safe of the Stadtbank (City Bank). What saved it was its plain case. At the careful search for weapons, which the Russians undertook in all safes to disarm Germany&is silk banner was disrespectfully thrown aside because it did not contain any machine gun parts. However, the sixty golden chains of the Olympic Committee were commandeered as spoils of war and they were sent to Moscow to make sure they did not contain any nuclear uranium. Only six of the sixty (chains) were found, in dusty condition.

I at once contacted an artistic founder. The Berlin Magistrate admitted its duty and, although the 1936 Games were purely capitalistic, took on the costs of restoration. I did also tell all this to the President of the International Olympic Committee when the Flag was commandeered by the military. Yet another time I had to gallop to the Deutschlandhaus. A major asked me whether I could bring forward the Olympic flag. I asked him not to think too highly of me and referred him to the Lord-Mayor, in whose cabinet the Flag had been put away. Then he asked me to go with him, which I declined. I did not want to have anything to do with the administration of the city. Then, in accordance with his wishes, I put him in contact by telephone and the Lord-Mayor answered, as would be expected, that he could not oppose the military commanding in the Russian sector because only the Russians had a right to do that. At that time there was still unity among the Allied forces.

Anyway, the outcome was that the Olympic Flag was at its place in London but it was not as usual handed over by the Secretary-General of the previous Games but was carried forward by an officer. The military feature was an English innovation while the German military, as well as myself, had not

degenerated to that level. The Olympian Zeus in heaven must have shaken his curly hair and scratched his mighty beard. This military commandeering of the Olympic Flag, which in sporting ways had always been passed along, does not belong to the harmonious sound of the bell of Olympic peace. Zeus growled to himself what we had better not translate into English, took Thetis, the Goddess of Justice, under her virgin arm and went away shaking his head.

I have not heard anything about the Olympic Chains. They were not used in London. Subsequently, I had one of the chains that was in my possession as a souvenir, remade as the Principal's Chain of the Sporthochschule.

When did Carl Diem look for the Olympic Flag and the Olympic Chains? "It was "one of the first things I did after the collapse," reported Diem. That must mean May 1945. He found the Flag and 6 Chains. In April 1947, according to *Sport Zürich* (Lennartz, endnote 14), 9 chains had been found. Either another 3 chains had been found between May 1945 and April 1947 or the number of chains found is not correct, either in Diem's memoirs or in *Sport Zürich*, or incorrect in both of them.

Diem apparently deposited the Flag and the remaining 6 chains at the Berlin magistrate, which took on the cost of repairing the damaged chains. Thus, they were in the hands of, and the responsibility of, the Lord-Mayor.

What happened to the missing chains? According to Diem they "were commandeered as spoils of war (by the Soviet Army) and sent to Moscow to make sure they did not contain any nuclear uranium." That they were taken by the Soviet Army seems highly probable, but then, Diem is speculating. He cannot possibly have known whether they were sent to Moscow or somewhere else in the Soviet Union or were taken away by individual soldiers as souvenirs. Then Diem's imagination ran totally astray. In May 1945 neither he, nor anyone else, except for a few within the Manhattan Project, had ever heard of the atomic bomb. The world did not learn about it until after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

In this part of his memoirs Diem appears as a bitter, reluctant, hostile, and uncooperative person. He sees himself as the foremost guardian of the Olympic idea and takes on the role of Olympian Zeus to condemn what he does not approve of. Besides, he is wrong when he says that the Olympic Flag is handed over by the Secretary-General of the previous Games. This is done by the Mayor of the previous host city. Diem must really have longed to play that part at the 1948 Games in London. Those who study the complex personality of Carl Diem should take notice of this particular part of his memoirs.

Karl Lennartz says: "The Olympic flag (the Olympic flag in use in Berlin in 1936) still survives and is at present stored in Atlanta until the year 2000 at which time it will be sent to Sydney." Lennartz has it all wrong.

1. The Antwerp Flag was retired after Los Angeles 1984. It was worn, torn, and had lost its lustre. The Antwerp Flag is now in the Olympic Museum in Lausanne.
2. The Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee made a new Olympic Flag. In fact, they made two flags, one to circulate between Olympic host cities and one to be permanently kept at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne.

3. The Olympic Flag, the one circulating, is not stored in Atlanta. It is already in Sydney. At the closing ceremonies in Atlanta on August 4, 1996, the Olympic Flag was handed over by the Mayor of Atlanta, William Campbell, via Juan Antonio Samaranch, to Frank Sartor, Mayor of Sydney. It will be kept by the mayor of Sydney until the closing ceremonies in 2000, when it will be handed over to the Mayor of Athens.

The itinerary of the new Olympic Flag is as follows (see *Olympic Review*, No. 208, February 1985, and No. 215, September 1985):

September 27, 1984 - The new Olympic flag is presented to Juan Antonio Samaranch at the inauguration of the Seoul Olympic Stadium.

May 5, 1985 - At the 90th Session of the IOC in East Berlin, Juan Antonio Samaranch hands over the Olympic Flag to Roh Tae-woo, President of SLOOC.

July 11, 1985 - Roh Tae-woo hands over the Olympic flag to Yum Bo-hyun, Mayor of Seoul.

October 2, 1988 - At the closing ceremonies in Seoul, Kim Yong-nae, Mayor of Seoul, hands over the Olympic flag, via Juan Antonio Samaranch, to Pasqual Maragall, Mayor of Barcelona.

August 9, 1992 - At the closing ceremonies in Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall hands over the Olympic flag, via Juan Antonio Samaranch, to Maynard Jackson, Mayor of Atlanta.

TW - Stockholm, October 22, 1998