

Helmut Bantz

* 14 September 1921 - † 4 October 2004

Helmut BANTZ died at the age of 83 on October 4 2004. He had been an Olympic champion in Gymnastics at the Melbourne games in 1956.

BANTZ was born in Speyer September 14, 1921 and soon began to take part in sport. In his early years he was a swimmer, diver and pole vaulter. Later his passion became gymnastics. He was German Youth Champion in apparatus gymnastics for his club TV Speyer in 1939 and 1940. Further titles followed: 1942 he won an international contest against Hungary and Italy, and became German Champion. 1943 he was first on in the Vault, in the Floor Exercises and on the rings. At the time the Germans were amongst the worlds top gymnasts, a position they'd occupied since 1936.

In the Second World War BANTZ was a paratrooper in the German army and was taken prisoner by the British. In different interviews and on many occasions he himself described what happened to him during that time: He had to work on a farm on the British island. There was no chance for him to escape but BANTZ felt very free as PoW (Prisoner of War). He visited the British Gymnastics Championships in Leicester, introduced himself as gymnast and had to show his skills. So he did and became adviser and later trainer of the British team, which he prepared for the Olympic Games of London 1948. During these games he was a member this British Team, possessed an Olympic ID card, received the commemorative medal and was even offered the chance to participate in the parade of nations, but refused, believing this would have been unfair to his British team-mates. During the competitions of course he was with his team in the gymnasium and supported them. Beside Carl DIEM, honorary guest of the IOC, and a handful of journalists, he was part of a very small group of Germans who were permitted to "take part" in these Olympic Games.

After he was released from imprisonment he started to study at the Sport University in Cologne and became a Sports teacher. In 1953 he was employed by Carl DIEM as a lecturer in gymnastics. He taught several thousand sport students gymnastics in the 31 years until 1984.

After his return to Germany he was also able to resume his sports career and participate in the Olympic Games of 1952, helping his team take fourth and placing ninth in the individual competition. When the *German Gymnastics Federation* (DTB) decided to engage the Russian



Helmut Bantz performs his "golden" long horse vault

coach Alexander TANAKI who introduced the Russian gymnastics school to German gymnastics Helmut BANTZ improved decisively. When Tanaki was dismissed after a plot by the DTB management many German gymnasts "fought" for him, especially BANTZ. He was suspended for a half year. Later BANTZ had many confrontations with the conservative DTB leadership

Shortly before the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 his suspension was lifted - surprisingly BANTZ took Gold in the Vault alongside Soviet Gymnast Valentin MOURATOV. Four years later he qualified for the Rome Olympics, but went as a reserve and did not actually compete. He retired from competition. In addition to his Olympic success he had competed with distinction at the 1954 World Championships in Rome with silver in the vault, a shared second place with Boris SHAKLIN (URS) in the horizontal bar and won bronze in the Parallel bars. In this discipline, he took gold at the European Championships the following year in front of a home crowd in Frankfurt. He had also been German champion on 18 occasions.

From 1970 until 1986 he was leading gym instructor of the Gymnastics Federation of the Rhineland.

Working with the Cologne Football coach Hennes WEIßWEILER a colleague at the University, he published a handbook to soccer gymnastics and alone Bantz wrote several monographs on methodology of gymnastics. His autobiography written in 1958 was called *So weit war mein Weg* (This was how I did it).

Thomas Zawadzki