

The Centaur from Warendorf

By Volker Kluge



Half man – half horse: the centaur (represented here in the Metopen relief at the Parthenon in Athens). This people was considered a savage race, but among them there were also wise and kind centaurs such as Zeus's son Chiron.

Right: Hans Günter Winkler and "Halla".

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive, Wikipedia

Warendorf in Westphalia is Germany's number one horse town. One of its main streets is named in honour of Dr. Gustav Rau, the well-known hippologist. In 1912 he called into life the German Olympic Committee for Horseriding (DOKR) in preparation for the 1916 Games to be held in Berlin. Since 1950 the federation has had its headquarters in Warendorf.

The town has produced many well-known riders, but none quite as revered as Hans Günter Winkler. With five gold medals and one silver and one bronze, he is still the most successful showjumper in the world fully 60 years after his first triumph. This idol of German sport is often spoken in the same breath as "Halla", the brown mare with whom Winkler won gold at the 1956 Olympic Equestrian Games in Stockholm. He had previously become world champion twice on her back.

In fact both names could be spoken in a single breath. *Der Spiegel* once used the concept "centaur". This was the name in Greek mythology for the extraordinary creatures who were half man and half horse.¹ The magazine referred to the Tattersall theory of the poet prince Goethe. In 1801 he visited a hippodrome in Göttingen and observed: "human beings and animals merge here to such an extent into one that it is impossible to say who in fact is training whom."²

A guest in the "Birkenhof"

As befits his status, Winkler lives opposite the Olympic Committee in Dr. Rau Allee (Avenue). His extensive property "Birkenhof" lies hidden behind walls and tall trees. There is no nameplate. He was once highly tuned to the needs of public relations but no longer values inquisitive gawkers.

The books that have appeared about him and his horses could fill a small bookcase. Winkler himself has written extensively on his career. And yet "HGW", as he is also known, is willing to receive visitors.

His appearance on this particular morning was delayed so there was an opportunity to admire the well-tended garden with a pond in which 24 colourful kois splash about. Each of these are estimated at 70,000 EUR. Birds of prey, we learn, are held off by an electronic barrier.

Now the horseman himself is approaching – with short steps and bent with age, but nonetheless friendly and



with a lively gaze. His employers had revealed earlier that he was in good form. Herr Winkler – how else could he be addressed? – will be 90 years on 24th July. He is last of a line whose names echo like thunder: d'Inzeo, Jonquères d'Oriola, Goyoaga, Thiedemann ...

A decade ago Winkler was described as "unbelievably fit".³ But for some time his health has not been of the best. He speaks softly, but in clear sentences. To enquiries about his health he tells of a visit to the circus, where he sat in the front row. There was an act with an elephant, which let its leg hover over his head, without touching him. Good training, he thought, reliant on the fact that tamer and animal like each other. And so to his training and career.

All his dreams were destroyed

Winkler was born into an age when horses, not petrol vehicles dominated in the streets whether in front carriages or with a rider on their back. Apart from professional horse-racing, most riding was done by the army, provided one was an officer. The ordinary soldiers

came from the mounted artillery. This had been forced to disband as one of the conditions imposed on Germany by the victorious powers after the First World War. This was time of great crisis for Warmblood breeding. Dr. Rau did his best to solve this by introducing new incentives for breeders in 1919.

In civilian life, the horse was first and foremost a working animal without any higher calling. It had to earn its fodder by its own efforts. The farmhands rode

especially fond of Brinckmann of whom it was said that he had always sat best on his horse. The Second World War deprived Brinckmann of possible Olympic successes, but later on, he made his name as a showjumping course builder and trainer to the German team.

In 1939, Winkler moved to Frankfurt on Main, where his father managed a private competition stable in the hippodrome. From then on, he dreamed of becoming



The "treasure house" in the "Birkenhof": in a riding career of 38 years, Hans Günter Winkler won over 1000 prizes.

Photo: Peter Frenkel

mostly for pleasure at the most at country fairs. The nobility and the super-rich preferred English or Irish horses. They could afford to ride for sport.

Winkler did not belong in either category. And yet fate treated him well. When he was six years old, he moved with his parents to Dortmund, where he lived on a farm estate. His father, Paul Winkler did not inherit a farm in his East German homeland because it was always the eldest son of the family who inherited. Instead he found a job as a riding instructor, and thus free training was guaranteed for his only child.

"Hansi", as he was called by his parents, grew up amongst rich people. He was a well brought-up boy who could hold his own in polite society. This brought him his first contact with horse-riding. It came at the Westfalenhalle in Dortmund, where the celebrities of the Hanover Cavalry School appeared. Under Hitler, they had risen in prestige.

One of the "fill-in acts" was the young Winkler, who was allowed to ride in on his pony. After that he called the animal "Micky". This name the cavalry officers had given Hans-Heinrich Brinckmann. Winkler was

on of these proud cavalry officers. But instead he was called up and trained as an anti-aircraft auxiliary.

He saw out the war in Thuringia. His squad was just undergoing instruction on the subject "behaviour towards superiors", when American tank grenades landed in close proximity. Two days later he became a prisoner of war, but managed to escape. Dishevelled and suffering from serious jaundice, he made his way to Frankfurt, where he found his mother and a bombed-out apartment. His father had been killed on the Western front in the last weeks of the war.

Until then Winkler had enjoyed a wonderful childhood and adolescence. There was Hitler, but the dictator had appeared to him like a Fata Morgana. Now all his dreams were destroyed – he was 19 and unemployed. "I should have known all that", he says, looking back.

Stableboy for the Americans

Yet someone like him, well built and in love with life, was not to be subdued. Ambition always remained his strongest motivating force. His first post-war location

Hans Günter Winkler, who turned 90 on 24th July, in the garden of the "Birkenhof", where there is also a memorial to "Halla".

Photos: Peter Frenkel



was the destroyed racetrack in Frankfurt-Niederrad. Restored by August 1948, the American military government permitted galloping and trotting races. Otto Wehe, a well-known trainer, employed Winkler a starving returnee from the war as a groom and occasional jockey.

The horses belonged either to American officers or black marketeers, sometimes these were one and the same. The new currency of the time was Chesterfield cigarettes. But Winkler still had the image of the smart cavalry officers in his head and imagined greater things. He wanted to ride for the country that lay in ruins – for Germany.

To begin with it was about survival. Rescue came nearer with the silhouette of the upmarket climatic spa of Kronberg in the Taunus mountains, where a widow's seat had once been built for the German empress Victoria – Schloss Friedrichshof. After the end of the war the Americans had taken over this distinguished residence and installed a officers' casino there. It was also used on occasions as the residence of the Supreme Commander in Europe. A large number of German staff were needed to help run the place.

But mowing lawns was not to the taste of the outspoken young man. A position of stableboy however would be better. Chance helped Winkler, for the royal stables were managed by an acquaintance of his father. Herr Eckhardt, former head groom of the Countess of Hessen, had kept together a large proportion of the equine stock and handed it over to the Americans.

With this job Winkler not only earned his grocery ration card, but also received his baptism in the world of equestrianism. He cleaned out the stables, fed, saddled and generally looked after the animals – an autodidactic practice, which was cultivated by him more and more. Almost without guidance – purely through observation of other riders – he taught himself the most important dressage lessons. He was always the first into the stable and the last to leave.

As the horses were supposed to move about, he received permission to ride them out. These included the two horses which stood ready at 9 o'clock every morning for the Military Governor Dwight D. Eisenhower. To be sure Winkler still had no reputation, but always well-polished shoes and a decent haircut. After four weeks he was therefore allowed to accompany the general when he rode out into the country without an escort. From then on he was no longer called "Hey you!" but "Herr Winkler".

Seven years later, in October 1954 he was received in the Oval Office for Eisenhower had now become President of the United States. "That was a wonderful time", recalled the President. But when he offered Winkler adoption, he refused with thanks, thinking of his mother.

To ensure his daily bread on a permanent basis, in 1948 Winkler completed his training as a merchant in a textile wholesale firm in Frankfurt. He bought a chestnut gelding called "Falkner" for 500 Reichsmarks with the company owner's daughter. The two of them rode out each evening. At the weekends they travelled from arena to arena with the horse. At last on 10th October 1948 Winkler 'harvested' his first success.

In his last book he listed "Some of my most important horses" – the list contains no fewer than 37 names. Among others the gelding "Lausbus", which he acquired from an American. Others were entrusted to him, including the Holstein gelding "Orient" in 1948. This soon became a top class mount, on which Winkler won the "Grand Prix of Aachen" in 1954.

Plebeian but temperamental

Although he won medals on seven different horses at six Olympic Games, two World and five European Championships, even now everyone speaks only about "Halla", even though this horse died 37 years ago.

In Warendorf a way was named after her, and a lifesize statue created by the Berlin animal sculptor Hans

Joachim Ihle stands in front of the Olympic Committee offices. The model, whose height is given as 1.71 metres (17.5 hands), survived the inauguration.

The statue in bronze depicts the wonder mare in elegant pose, head erect and ears attentively pricked as was her wont when she approached a fence with Winkler. The Hessian mare conveys the impression of sovereign elegance, on the other hand she stands pleasantly unpretentiously and modestly. This is well known as the sign of true greatness.

History knows monuments to many horses, which were mostly ridden by kings and emperors. In the Berlin boulevard Unter den Linden it is still possible to encounter the favourite horse of Frederick the Great, which answered to the name "Condé". It was cast in bronze by Christian Daniel Rauch in 1851. The original mare, a fleabitten grey gelding, which died in 1804 at the age of 38 (and survived "Old Fritz" by 18 years) was then stuffed. The cadaver was destroyed by fire during the Second World War. Only the bones now remain.

By contrast "Halla" is of plebeian origin. Of her mother "Helene" it is only known that she was a "booty horse", ridden in the war by a German officer. Why he let allowed her to remain in the stable of Darmstadt farmer Gustav Vierling is unknown.

Vierling gave the horse to his son. At country tournaments the son demonstrated that the lady, although getting on in years, could still jump respectably. As Vierling thought it a shame to harness her to the plough, he wished for a foal from her, a duty entrusted to the trotting stallion "Oberst". After eleven months, on 16th May 1945, a 'peace baby' came into the world, entered in the studbook under the name "Halla".

The temperamental little horse began her career on the trotting track at Frankfurt-Niederrad, where she performed creditably. But it soon became clear that the mare, despite her speed, could not keep up with thoroughbreds. At the Helsinki Olympics of 1952, the Germans were readmitted to the Olympic fold. As the Games approached, a call for fresh equine material rang out, Vierling offered the Olympic Committee the chance to take over "Halla".

Meantime Dr. Rau, the Oberland head groom, had asked Winkler if he would like to come to Warendorf, with the prospect of a job. Thereupon Winkler made a quick decision and transported his three tournament horses and his small amount of luggage to Warendorf. When he arrived, he discovered he was not welcome. The job had been given to a former officer.

Before he travelled back to Frankfurt in disappointment, he was generously permitted to accommodate his horses in the former German Army stables, where there was not a single piece of wood left. Friends helped him out of the fix.

"Do you want the mare?"

In those days, anyone who wanted to achieve anything in equestrianism had to be versatile. People like Winkler were referred to disparagingly as "bush riders" or "all over the place riders". In reality they already incorporated the attributes of the modern sports rider. While others regarded themselves as legitimate only through their aristocratic origins, for people like him striving after records was a thoroughly honourable target.

Winkler contested races, and he was just as much at home in the military as in showjumping. He travelled the country with a chestnut gelding called "Rebell" and collected awards but these were not recognised in Warendorf.

Even if he was a nobody there, people remembered that he had been on his first meeting with "Halla" he had got along with her, the only one to do so. Three months later, on 13th July 1950, Winkler received a telegram, in which Dr. Rau asked if he could ride "Halla" at a three-day-event. Winkler was willing, but afterwards he had to return the horse back to the Military rider Otto Rothe, who had been selected for Helsinki.

But Winkler remained on the list. In 1951 he was called to a four week long Olympic course where which he received instruction for the first and only time. His trainer was Marten von Barnekow who had been the instructor at the main SS riding school in Munich-Riem.

A memorial to the "wonder mare" stands in front of the German Olympic Committee for Horseriding's building in Warendorf.

Photo: Peter Frenkel



The colourful opening of the Equestrian Games on 10th June 1956 in the Stockholm Olympic Stadium.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive



In 1936 von Barkenow was a member of the gold medal winning German squad in the Olympic Team Grand Prix.

Once Winkler had found a job in the joinery, he was allowed to back to the 'riders' town'. In time, Dr. Rau became accustomed to his presence. Yet for the gentlemen rider he remained an intruder. For all his competitive successes, second and third finishes had had qualified him for Helsinki – what he lacked was the real smell of the stable.

It was only a question of time until he was reported to the Olympic Committee, although he himself had previously informed them that in Kronberg he had been active for the Americans as "assistant riding instructor".

Without being interviewed he had to give up his international riding permit. Suddenly he was classed as a "professional", ineligible for the Olympic Games. To be sure the officers rode there, but they were "amateurs".

"Halla's" career seemed to be ended prematurely in a similarly ignominious fashion. On 16th October 1951 she was ridden by an unfamiliar rider with the intention of competing in the Military competition. But the result was devastating. In dressage she showed herself to be a total disaster. In jumping she lacked feeling for the obstacles and then she bolted with her rider. It was a bitter blow for farmer Vierling when Dr. Rau telephoned to ask him to collect his animal, because nothing sensible could be done with her.

Some time later Vierling came to Warendorf to take part in a breeders' conference. He met Winkler in the

street, where he spoke a few words, but they were to prove decisive ones for man and animal: "Herr Winkler, you were the only one who came to terms with the horse. Do you want the mare?"

Winkler was rather short of money that is certain, but he remained determined to finally own a horse that he would not have to give back on the next occasion to someone else. The deal was sealed with a handshake.

Winkler worked with "Halla" for a year and a half. By this time she understood what he wanted from her. He watched her for hours and came to the verdict that she was a mixture of "crazy goat" and "genius". *Der Spiegel* concluded: "She is a real child of the post-war period".⁴

But then everything came good. At a country tournament Winkler had got to know Inge Fellgiebel, who was ten months older than him. She was the daughter of Bad Harzburg-Bündheim's regional head groom, Hans Fellgiebel. His elder brother General Erwin Fellgiebel, chief of the Wehrmacht's Communications Troops, had been hanged by the Nazis as a co-conspirator in Stauffenberg's plot to assassinate Hitler on 20th July 1944. As a family member the brother was imprisoned as a "Sippenhaft".

Hans Günter Winkler and Inge were not yet a couple, but they agreed that they would found a "private stables" to make themselves independent from the Olympic Committee. Inge moved with her horses to Warendorf, and everything became easier. She took over the administration and conducted the correspondence, which later took on unexpected dimensions.

Good news came from Helsinki as well. Fritz Thiedemann, a down-to-earth farmer from Holstein who had emerged from the tournament stable of the Supreme SA Leadership (OSAF) in Potsdam-Krampnitz had surprisingly won Olympic bronze on "Meteor". "Fatty", as "Fritze" called the brown gelding, was later also cast in bronze.⁵

For Winkler, the most important target was a place at the next Olympic Games. To achieve that goal, he had first to regain his amateur status. The President of the German Sports Federation (DSB), Willi Daume, had put in a good word for him. The pair knew one another from their days in Dortmund when Daume had been a handball goalkeeper.

After that, Winkler's first foreign competition led him to Bilbao in Spain, and it ended in fiasco when he fell head over heels from his horse. And yet the year ended well. With 18 victories he topped the rankings and was regarded as "German champion".

Winkler's main horse at that time was "Rebell", with whom he rode the first international prize. Soon after that the horse was sold by its owner. "Halla", now seven years old, was still considered a newcomer. She was also regarded as "difficult". And yet it was clear: her future lay in jumping.

“Halla” was the diva

When it comes to the question of animal intelligence, there are usually more questions than answers. Generally the chimpanzee is thought to be our cleverest relative.

Although horses are not ranked in the top ten, Winkler remains convinced that “Halla” was very intelligent. As a foal, she was often alone on the farm. A wire fence 1.30 metres high separated the land from a railway embankment. Twice a day, the express thundered by. “Halla” was unmoved. The train raced, she grazed.

In Warendorf there arose then a sporting partnership, in which “Halla” was the diva, who knew what she could do. Like an actress she wanted to be left in peace an hour before performing. Then she approached her task professionally. And yet, like a real star, she remained unpredictable. If previously she was calm and concentrated, she could also freak out, for instance when the victory wreath was to be hung round her neck.

Winkler accepted this character and developed his own style. It was barely visible to any one watching but when he rode her, he used only his thighs and his knees and spread his bodyweight forwards, which became known as the “Winkler style”. Otherwise “Halla” knew neither whip nor spurs nor loud commands. On the course, looking at the last obstacle, the rider spoke to her: “Watch out!”, “Make an effort!”, “Don’t let me down!”. They merged like a mythical centaur.

Lifelong friendship with Raimondo d’Inzeo

Slowly the German riding world realised what had they had been missing by expelling Winkler. In Rome in 1953 came his first international victory on “Halla” after an intense contest. He later said that no other victory had given him as much pleasure.

Highlight followed upon highlight, especially at the World Championships. These had only been introduced by the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) in 1953. For that they had announced the rule that only four riders – one per country – could reach the final, which had as a consequence that the second best was excluded, even if he was superior to the representatives of other teams. Criticism was also levelled at the method of arranging the competition, that not only had the rider to ride his own horse, but the finalist had also to get on terms with being in the saddles of his opponents.

The ruling had shadowy sides. At the 2nd World Championship, which was held on 9th June 1954 in Madrid, Winkler’s heart bled at having to watch as his sensitive “Halla” was ridden by the Spaniard Jaime Garcia Cruz. After a failed test jump over the barrier, he held her so firmly that she took off much too early and landed in the middle of the barrier. Fortunately the

mishap had no lasting effect apart from a bruise on the front leg.

Before the decisive fourth round Winkler and 1952 Olympic champion d’Oriola were in front. The four faults each of them had were due to “Pagoro”, the gelding of the Italian Salvatore Oppes. While Winkler succeeded in manoeuvring the Spanish “Quoniam” over the course without fault, the Frenchman had to ride “Halla”, and was obviously trying to copy the German.

Jonquères d’Oriola led the horse slowly up to the obstacles, but in the triple combination his temperament let him down. In the third last jump he estimated the distance wrongly, so that “Halla” had the bar down and Winkler gained his first title. People were inclined to believe it was a conspiracy.

Anyone who still doubted Winkler’s ability had to be disabused of that a year later, on 7th July 1955, in Aachen. Again he reached the final, in which he again met d’Oriola as well as the Italian Raimondo d’Inzeo and the Briton Ronnie Dalles.

As Winkler still had the shock of Madrid in his bones, this time he left “Halla” in the stable. Instead he saddled up “Orient”. His competitors supposed that he wanted to make things especially hard for them, for the gelding was considered to be even more “complicated”.

Before the last round d’Inzeo led with four faults. To finish with he had to “Voulette”, the Frenchman’s horse and added a further four faults. After that d’Inzeo’s “Merano”, with which he had gone clear was waiting for Winkler who had eight faults at this stage.



Stockholm 1956:
“Halla” at the sixth
barrier – a water
jump with stationary
objects: height 1.50 m,
width 2.15 m

The competition went to a jump off between d’Inzeo and Winkler. As required by the rules, it was the turn of the second string horses. D’Inzeo rode well on “Nadir”, but at the double rick a bar fell off – four faults and a time of 76.6 seconds. Next came Winkler on “Halla” who had been short of exercise. He also had four faults, but a faster time 66.5 s.

Half dazed, Winkler lost control for a moment in the first round, whereupon "Halla" knocked down the last obstacle – four faults, and yet still in first place. Adjacent: lots of coffee was needed to revive the injured rider, Fritz Thiedemann (left) and Alfons Lütke Westhues (behind) were still worried about the team gold medal.



Photos: Official Report Stockholm 1956, Volker Kluge Archive

Another change of horses. Winkler had good control of "Nadir" a clear round in 72.7 s. Now d'Inzeo had to stake everything on one card. So as not to lose by having a slower time, he started so fast that he could no longer brake. Finally "Halla" even jumped into the wall, at which none of the horses had failed. Despite the defeat d'Inzeo fell into Winkler's arms, beaming with joy.

On that 7th July 1955 a friendship was sealed. It was to last all their lives. In November 2013 the telephone rang in Winkler's house, from which he heard of the death of the Italian. D'Inzeo had not wanted him receive the news through the media.

"Interlude Games" with royal ambience

A North American tour in autumn 1954, when the horses travelled by plane, brought with it many imponderables. These would have been even greater when it came to transporting them two years later to the Games in Melbourne.

At the 1953 IOC Session in Mexico, Australian organisers made it clear that foreign horse would be subject to a six month quarantine period. The IOC now had to decide whether to withdraw the Games from Melbourne or cancel the equestrian events. An alternative would be to seek a different location.

In the end the IOC Executive Committee resolved to invite bids to stage Equestrian Games separate from the rest of the Games held in Melbourne.⁶ This decision was reached in Athens in 1954. The result read: Stockholm 25 votes, Paris 10, Rio de Janeiro 8, Berlin and Los Angeles 2 each. Although London and Dublin had also expressed interest, they withdrew before the final vote.⁷

And so for the first and only time Olympic "Interlude Games" took place in Stockholm. They were held between the 10th and 17th June 1956. They took place between the Winter Games, which ended in Cortina on 5th February and the Summer Games which began on 22nd November.

What looked initially like a faux pas of the Olympic programme proved to be a fortunate stroke of fate. Held at the Stockholm Olympic Stadium, which looked more like a castle than a sports arena, the competitions had a beautiful atmosphere, which was enhanced by a splendid opening ceremony. After King Gustav VI Adolf had driven in with the young British Queen in a four-hand coach, a parade of noble steeds began, whose riders wore black or red coats or uniforms, as tradition demanded.

The showjumpers, whose individual results were also

The showjumping medallists ride through the Marathon Gate: from left: Raimondo d'Inzeo (silver), Hans Günter Winkler (gold), Piero d'Inzeo (bronze).



Photo: Official Report Stockholm 1956

taken into consideration for the Team Grand Prix (the division took place in Rome in 1960), had to be patient to the last. A course 775 m in length awaited them. It had 14 barriers and 17 jumps and contained many concealed difficulties. When after the first round 18 of the 66 participants were already eliminated, voices were raised describing the course as too difficult. In fact cavalry captain Greger Lewenhaupt had made a superb job of its construction, but not a few riders had underestimated its demands. In addition – unlike other competitions – there was no opportunity of getting used to it. After the days of waiting immediate performance was required.

Winkler entered the competition on “Halla” as favourite. He possessed that cool concentration to track down the ideal line envisaged by the course designer. His ride seemed the summit of perfection, when “Halla” at the 13th barrier, a 1.60 m high garden fence, gave a jerk during the jump, to avoid making mistakes. “In order not to be thrown out of the saddle, I pressed my knees together as quick as lightning, and at that moment I felt a stabbing pain in the lumbar region, as if someone had stabbed a dagger into my body”, Winkler recalled.⁸

Half numbed, he lost control for a moment and “Halla” knocked down the last obstacle, a 1.60 m high and 80 cm wide park wall. Four faults, and yet but he still led from d’Oriola who had seven faults. Thiedemann, the d’Inzeo brothers and the Britons Patricia Smythe and Wilfrid White, each with eight. In the team competition Germany (28) led from Great Britain (32) and Italy (39).

“Halla” – a myth is born

Winkler’s injury was worse than it had seemed. It turned out to be a serious groin strain, so there were worries Winkler would not be able to start in the second round, fixed for 4 p.m. The injury also put the chances of German victory in the team competition in jeopardy. The German camp was despondent. Winkler was handed a suppository by team veterinarian Dr. Willi Büsing himself an eventing bronze medallist in 1952. This brought short term relief.

After the jury had rejected the application to allow Winkler to start later in the competition, there began a race against time. Every delay was invoked in the hope that the medicines would finally work in Winkler’s body. The Swedish organisers had also understood. They slowed their tempo. Cavalry captain Dag Nätterqvist, responsible for obstacle 5 a/b, which was hit most frequently, applied the measuring stick again and again when rebuilding the obstacle, in order to gain time for the world champion, for whom he had a high regard.

Winkler had to be lifted into the saddle for a practice jump in the paddock but this showed however that “Halla” would not be able to obey him consistently.

A second suppository did reduce the pain, but left the rider so dazed that he could hardly recognise the obstacles. They poured strong coffee down him to reduce the pain-numbing effects. There seemed no possibility of a victory in the individual contest.

However as the British and Italians had made more mistakes than expected points and the two other Germans, Thiedemann and Lütke Westhues, had done a good job, the chances for the team suddenly increased. The Italians had been well placed but were now 26 points back, so that “Halla” could even have afforded to miss out on six obstacles.

In his own words, Winkler “hobbled in”, through the Marathon Gate and saluted in front of the Royal box, he looked remarkably different. The bell sounded the starting signal, whereupon “Halla” began to gallop – more cautiously and slower than usual, but thoroughly experienced. The rider only showed her the direction. He could be heard occasionally crying out – cries of pain, which spurred “Halla” on to jump even higher.

Because this time the usual assistance was missing, she sought out her line alone. The fears that she might stop at the triple combination proved unfounded. She measured it exactly and carried her injured rider safely across. This time it was not Winkler riding “Halla”, but the mare riding him. Weeping with joy, Inge Fellgiebel hugged the horse’s neck beyond finishing line.

The result was sensational. Despite his own personal torment Winkler had managed a tournament round. That meant gold in the individual and in the team



For the rider there was a gold medal, for the horse a winner’s ribbon.

Photo: Official Report Stockholm 1956



The medal case in the "Birkenhof": with five golds, a silver and bronze Hans Günter Winkler is the most successful Olympic showjumper.

Photo: Peter Frenkel

championship. Even the time – 97.4 s – was worthy of note. Silver medallist Raimondo d’Inzeo, had also gone clear but the eight penalties from his first round had cost him dear. Bronze went to his brother Piero.

At the end of that 17th June 1956 all were agreed: such a great event can never be repeated. Voices were raised demanding that independent Olympic Equestrian Games be staged in future. These calls were rejected by IOC President Avery Brundage. The showjumping Grand Prix was to remain as the grand final of the Olympic Games until 1980.

With the help of the mass media, a myth was born in Stockholm. On German radio Hans-Heinrich Isenbart gave an impressive report, in which he lent human qualities to the animal: "And Halla laughs, as if she knew what it's about."⁹ TV reporter Hans Steiner dared to go a step further: "Halla speaks to Winkler and laughs as she does so: leave me in peace. I can do it."¹⁰ This more informal reporting had consequences: Winkler received fanmail by the sackful and thousands of requests for autographs. Many letters were also addressed to "Halla". She received parcels with fodder and a large amount of cube sugar.

The pair remained faithful to each other for another four years. At the 1960 Games in Rome both received their third gold medal in the Team Grand Prix. On 25th October 1960 came "Halla"'s farewell after 128 victories. After that she brought eight foals into the world. She spent her declining years on the "Lindenhof" stud near Warendorf, where Winkler regularly visited her. When the mare died on 19th May 1979 at the age of 34, it worth a mention on the television news programme.

"HGW" – the maximalist

Winkler as a competitive rider had a long career. He did not take his leave until July 1986 at the World Championships in Aachen. In this time he had won more than a thousand prizes. For Germany he rode

105 Grand Prix competitions, of which he won 41, came second 28 times, and third 21 times.

Professionally Winkler had provided for himself early on: From the mid 1950s he was employed in the advertising department of a pharmaceutical company. He wrote books, delivered horse-riding sports reports and edited a magazine. He was team leader of the German showjumpers and advertised for an American mail-order firm. In 1991 he founded a sports and event marketing firm under the abbreviation "HGW". His motto is: "Anyone who has starved in their life knows how to value prosperity."

Yet he allows others to share in his prosperity. Winkler has a special affection for up and coming riders, whom he promotes as best he can. The town of Warendorf is also grateful to its honorary citizen. When the time comes it will inherit all his trophies.

Winkler loved variety in his private life. In 1957 married Inge Fellgiebel, the union lasted only until 1960. The following year she wed the dressage rider George Theodorescu, who had fled from Romania. Their daughter Monica became Olympic dressage team champion three times – from 1988 to 1996.

Winkler is the father of two children, bestowed on him by the Danish Countess Marianne von Moltke, with whom he lived from 1962 to 1970. His son Jørn lives in Denmark, his daughter Jytte in Belgium. This marriage was followed by one with a millionaire's daughter from Venezuela. As a result Winkler acquired an IOC Member as mother-in-law, Flor Isava Fonseca.

In 1994 he married for the fourth time. American Debby Malloy was 33 years his junior. Her death in a riding accident in 2011 was a terrible blow for him. His love for her has endured. In the house her beautiful portrait can be seen; the grave is in the garden.

The centaur of Warendorf is unmistakably aging – he has no connection to that, as he says. With his companies he has just concluded an agreement for the next five years. Even in his optimism for life "HGW" does allow himself to be surpassed by anybody. ■

- 1 Winkler. "Der Kentaur", in: *Der Spiegel*, No. 34, 17th August 1955, pp. 20–27.
- 2 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Tag- und Jahreshefte 1749–1806, in: *Goethe's Werke*, Vol. 31, Cotta, Stuttgart und Tübingen 1930, p. 98.
- 3 Karl Morgenstern, "Keine Langeweile mit 80", in: Hans Günter Winkler, *Halla, meine Pferde und ich*, FNVerlag, Warendorf 2007, p 11.
- 4 *Der Spiegel*, No. 34, 1955.
- 5 The statue, created in 1959 by sculptor Hans Kock (1920–2007), still stands in front of the regional chancellery in Kiel.
- 6 Minutes, IOC EC-Meeting, Lausanne, 17th January 1954, OSC
- 7 Minutes, IOC Session, Athens 1954, p. 21, OSC
- 8 Winkler, *Halla, meine Pferde und ich*, p. 112
- 9 Hans-Heinrich Isenbart, Reportage, Olympische Reiterspiele, 17th June 1956, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv (DRA)
- 10 Hans Steiner, Reportage, Olympische Reiterspiele, 18th June 1956, DOK 2734/3, WDR Archives