

Tokyo 1964: Not All Olympic Champions Receive a Medal

By Roy Tomizawa

Award ceremony at the Metropolitan Gymnasium men's team gymnastics in 1964. Japan won, beating the Soviet Union and the united German team. It was the farewell appearance by Takashi Ono, who had also spoken the Olympic Oath. After injury on the high bar in the mandatory competition, he competed in remainder of the competition although in great pain, so as not to let his team down.



Gymnast Shuji Tsurumi emerged as one of the most decorated Olympians of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, winning a gold medal for Japan in the team competition, and three silver medals in the individual all-around, the pommel horse, and the parallel bars. And yet, the two-time Olympian has in his possession only the three silver medals from 1964.

Gymnast Toshiko Shirasu-Aihara held it in her hand – the bronze medal awarded to Japan for the women's team's third place finish at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. But she has no medal at home. While individuals of winning volleyball, basketball, and water polo teams, for example, took home their own medals, individuals of teams that finished first, second, or third in the team category for artistic gymnastics were awarded only a "diploma," an official document recognizing the individual's participation in the team's medal award.

There is actually a single medal awarded to the gymnastics team in this case, awarded to the nation. At the 100th anniversary of gymnast great, Masao Takemoto,

on 29 September 2019, the medals of the gold medal winning men's gymnastics team, and the bronze medal winning women's gymnastics team were on display.

Shirasu-Aihara, who had won the inaugural NHK Cup Championship in women's gymnastics in 1962, saw the team bronze medal for the Japan women's Tokyo Olympic achievements for the first time at the Takemoto anniversary event, nearly 55 years after helping her team win it. She told me it would be wonderful if somehow the IOC could reconsider their decision and provide a medal to members of her team and the Japan men's gymnastics team that won gold.



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A few weeks later, I contacted David Wallechinsky, Olympic historian and President of the International Society of Olympic Historians. He graciously agreed to send a note to the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). A few weeks later, he got a clear and logical response from the IOC:

While we very much appreciate your thought for each team member of the 1964 Japanese gymnastics team events to be handed an Olympic medal retroactively and the symbolic gesture that such an initiative would send, we have to respect that the rules of the sport in force at the time for the team competition were: "To the team classed first: Olympic medal in silver-gilt for the nation: diploma for each team member and leader". See Olympic Charter 1962, Rule 41 Prizes.

We also have to stay sensitive to the fact that similar rules of "one medal for the whole team and only diplomas for the team members" is not unique to the Tokyo 1964 Games, but also were applied to other sports and Games editions.

According to the Olympic Charter of 1962, in cases where individuals compete as a team with the purpose of winning a team competition, then the individuals whose teams place first, second, or third receive their own medal. Thus individuals on teams that medalled in volleyball or basketball received medals.

But victory for the team category in artistic gymnastics was determined by the total scores of performances in the individual competitions, in which medals were also awarded.

Here is how the Olympic Charter of 1962 described Rule 41, which dictated which individuals and teams are awarded medals:



Melbourne 1956: Japan's gymnasts and their coach. They won 17 medals across the competitions: from left to right Takashi Ono, Nobuyuki Aihara, coach Takashi Kondo, Masao Takemoto, behind: Shinsaku Tsukawaki, Akira Kono. The IOC decided to contain the flood of medals. In 1960 in Rome the all-around was separated from competitions on the apparatus. The best six each on each piece of equipment qualified for the finals.

In team events, except those of an "artificial" nature (one in which the score is computed from the position of the contestant in the individual competition) each member of the winning team participating in the final match shall be given a silver-gilt medal and a diploma, of the second team a silver medal and



Yukio Endo was the first Japanese gymnast to win the Olympic all-around title. Three silver medals were awarded to (from left to right) Japan's Shuji Tsurumi, Boris Shakhlin and Viktor Lisitsky (both Soviet Union).

Photos: Official Reports, Melbourne 1956, Tokyo 1964

a diploma and of the third team a bronze medal and a diploma. Those team members who have not participated in the final matches are given diplomas but no medals. In "artificial" team events one medal only shall be given to the team and the members shall receive diplomas only. Members of teams placed fourth, fifth, and sixth receive diplomas only.

In today's world, time for a separate team competition is carved out for gymnastics, so individuals can receive team medals.

A decade later, the IOC did indeed issue a special recognition to the individuals of such "artificial teams"—Olympic rings made of silver. ■

References

- Article by Singapore National Olympic Committee about me and book
- NHK World video about me and book
- The Olympians blog
- Instagram: You can see many of the Olympians I interviewed and/or wrote about.
- Roy Tomizawa LinkedIn Profile
- Link to book: https://geni.us/1964_RoyTomizawa



The team medals for gymnastics. Japan's men won gold (left) and their women took bronze (right) at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In each case only one medal was presented.



Hermann Weingärtner took second place on the rings in Athens in 1896. The three-time Olympic champion died in 1919 at the age of 53.

Photo: Albert Meyer/Volker Kluge Archives

How Yukio Endo "Won" an 1896 Medal

With three gold and one silver, Yukio Endo of Japan became the most successful gymnast of the 1964 Games in Tokyo. After the competitions had ended, the 27-year-old received yet another silver, which was presented to him by a journalist from Hamburg.¹

It was a medal that had belonged to the German gymnast Hermann Weingärtner, which the latter had won on the horizontal bar in Athens in 1896. It was the only Olympic silver from his estate – the Greek organisers could not afford gold at the time.

For the both other victories that Weingärtner had achieved together with his comrades in the two team competitions, he received only a diploma. Where this disappeared to is as much of a mystery as the whereabouts of the bronze medals he received for second places on the pommel horse and on the rings.²

Endo initially refused to accept the medal. Only when he was told that it was a present from Weingärtner's son Erich, and that the reporter was acting on his behalf, did he acquiesce. Holding the relic carefully between his fingers, he thanked the man politely. However, conscious of tradition, and in honour of his ancestors, he let it be understood that he would never give his father's medal to a stranger.

The former flight captain Erich Weingärtner, who transported Leni Riefenstahl's film material of the first Olympic torch relay from Athens to Berlin in 1936, justified his generosity with the lie that he had no heir himself. In reality, he had a son named Erik, whom he had disowned. When, after the divorce, the mother sued for many years of failed alimony payments, he cleared off to Rio de Janeiro in 1937, where he worked as a private pilot.



Shuji Tsurumi (far left) was one of the most decorated Olympians of the Tokyo Games. Right: Haruhiro Yamashita, who won the vault. Left: Tsurumi's silver Olympic Rings.



Far left: Gingko Abukawa Chiba and Toshiko Shirasu-Aihara from women's team, alongside Tsurumi. Left: Toshiko Shirasu-Aihara in 2019, for the first time wearing the bronze medal.

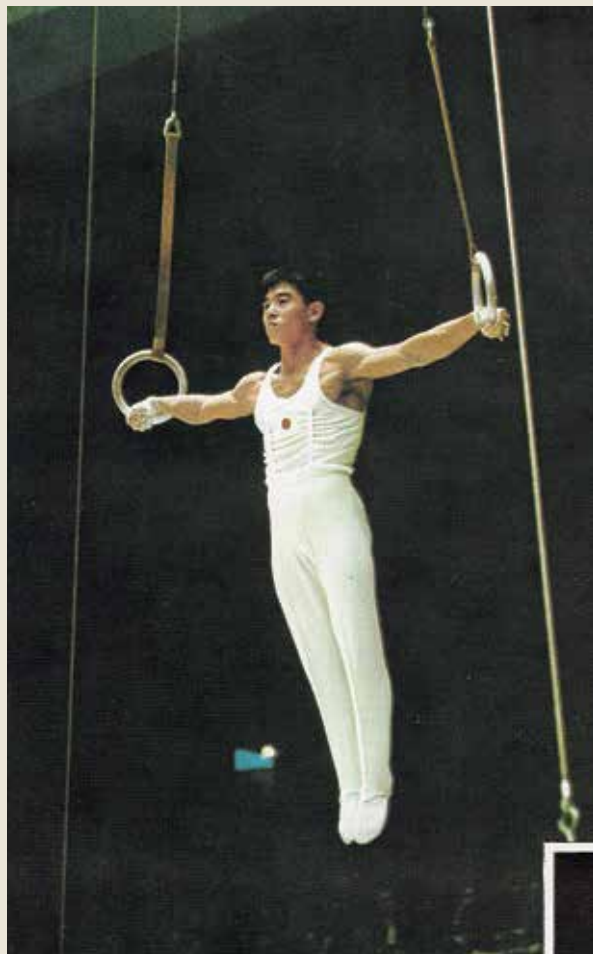
Photos: Roy Tomizawa

After sinking into financial distress, he previously offered his father's memorabilia to Carl Diem, because he had heard that the former chief organiser of the 1936 Olympics was planning a museum.³ Diem did show interest, but then went on a ten-week trip to Bulgaria. Since Weingärtner was in a hurry, he turned to the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, but he only bought the winning prize from the Italian national gymnastics festival in 1895, which was made of pure gold.⁴

After Weingärtner Jr. was left sitting with the Olympic memorabilia, he tried in 1964 to once again draw attention to himself with his gift for Endo. But things spiralled rapidly downhill after this brief feeling of happiness. At the end of his life, he bartered the rest of his Olympic inheritance – including 28 original photos from 1896 – for food and alcohol.⁵

Some time after his death, his legitimate son wrote a letter to Endo asking what had happened to his grandfather's Olympic medal. He got no answer. Perhaps the letter never reached Endo, who died in 2009.

Volker Kluge



Yukio Endo won one of his three gold medals in 1964 on the rings.

Photo: Official Report Tokyo 1964

1 BILD, Hamburg, 27 October 1964.

2 Hermann Weingärtner (1864–1919) also finished third on the vault and the parallel bars. The latter is contested, as third places were usually not published. There was also no award for this.

3 German Federal Archive (BArch), R 8077/104. Letter from Erich Weingärtner to Carl Diem, 31 August 1937.

4 Ibid, 17 September 1937.

5 Volker Kluge, "Six Bottles of Red Wine for a Collection of Original Photos of the 1896 Games", in: JOH, vol. 21, no. 1, 2013, pp. 36–39. Erich Weingärtner died destitute in 1993.