

Obituaries



Adolph Gustav Kiefer (USA), *27 June 1918 in Chicago, Ill.; †5 May 2017 in Wadsworth, Lake County, Ill. With the death of this charismatic American, the last of the 1936 Berlin Olympic champions is now gone. Kiefer won 100 m backstroke gold and revolutionised the backstroke. His strength was the "Kiefer turn", also called the "flip turn", which teammate Albert Vande Weghe had first demonstrated at the 1934 AAU Nationals.

Kiefer was the first swimmer in the world who covered the 100-yard backstroke under a minute. In his career he set 17 world records – all in the backstroke. Had the Games taken place in 1940 and 1944, he might well have added to his gold medal tally. His 1944 world records over 200 m and 400 m backstroke suggest he would have been a strong contender. In all he competed in some 2000 races and lost only twice.

Kiefer's parents were immigrants from Germany. His father Otto came from Alsace and had served as an artilleryman in the fortress of Spandau near Berlin. His mother was born in Stuttgart. The elder Kiefer was very keen that his son should learn to swim early in Lake Michigan.

At nine years old, Adolph was allowed to compete against older and bigger children for the first time. Soon after that, unfortunately, the

father died so Adolph was forced to bring in money to support a family of seven. He sold newspapers and worked in his free time on his uncle's farm.

In 1933, he got a job as lifeguard at the Chicago World's Fair, where he met three-time Olympic swimming champion, Helen Madison, and two-time Olympic diving champion, Peter Desjardins. A meeting with swimmer and water polo player Tex Robertson (1909–2007) proved decisive for his career. Robertson had graduated from the University of Michigan. When Robertson later founded a swimming team at the University of Texas, he allowed Kiefer to train under his instruction at the campus at weekends and during holidays.

Kiefer became internationally known when, in autumn 1935, he came to Europe and among other things set three world records in Germany, from 20th October to 9th November. As "Sunny Boy" and also because of his German descent, he attracted much sympathy a year later at the Berlin Games. His meeting in the Olympic Village with Hitler, on which he reported later in several interviews, is, however, almost certainly a myth. Hitler visited the Village only once – on 19th June 1936, about a month before the arrival of the US team – and then never again.

Kiefer attended the University of Texas and, in 1941, at the start of the Second World War, joined the US Navy and first served as a chief petty officer. He quickly moved through the ranks, becoming a first lieutenant by the war's end. He was allowed to implement new safety guidelines and a training programme to teach sailors how to stay alive in the water. During the remainder of his service, he trained 13,000 wartime instructors.

After the war he founded in 1947, his own firm called Adolph Kiefer & Associates, which specialised on the sale of swimming clothing and equipment. Later he expanded his

activities, setting up sports areas and sports equipment, especially for swimming pools as well as flooring for sports halls. His company developed inter alia, the long jump board, which gives a signal if a jump is invalid. He held twelve patents, including non-turbulent racing lanes, which he constructed for a coach at Yale. Another revolutionary product was a racing suit of nylon, instead of the customary wool or cotton. (VK)

Hubert Hammerer (AUT), *10 September 1925 in Egg in Bregenzerwald; †24 March 2017 in Vorarlberg. A trained carpenter with a sharp eye, Hammerer won Austria's only Olympic gold medal in 1960 in Rome, capturing the free rifle three positions at 300 m. In 1964, he carried the Austrian flag at the Opening Ceremony in Tokyo.

Motivated by his father, also a well-known marksman, Hammerer first made a name for himself in 1942 when he placed third in the German youth championships. During the Second World War he served in a mountain group, later volunteered in the elite SS "Brandenburg" Division that fought in Greece and Albania. During a German retreat he was captured and held as a Yugoslav prisoner of war. But after eight months he was released. Equipped with a Soviet weapons certificate he became an auxiliary policeman in Vienna. He then served on the Austrian border, protecting his country's frontier.

Hammerer had to show much patience until he could compete in the Olympics. In 1948, he missed the chance to compete in London because the only weapons he had available were out of date and thus ineligible according to Allied rules. Four years later, in 1952, he lost his left thumb due to an accident at work, preventing him from competing. Then, in 1956, the Austrian NOC had no money to send him to Melbourne.



But in 1958 he made an international breakthrough. Competing at the European Championships in crossbow shooting he won silver. Then in the World Shooting Championships he came in fifth in free rifle despite an error by a judge (another athlete had shot at his target).

The way to the Olympic gold medal was opened to him in 1960 by the young Swiss gunsmith, André Danner, who before the Rome Games had offered for 2000 francs the revolutionary "Danner Support". But at the time Hammerer, living as a journeyman carpenter was financially overburdened and could not afford the "Danner Support". However, the Tirol "Supreme Master of the Austrian Shooters" bought the weapon and lent it to him. After his Olympic victory he received the gun as a gift. (VK)

Steven "Steve" Holcomb (USA), *14 April 1980 in Park City, Utah; †6 May 2017 in Lake Placid; NY. Holcomb competed in three Winter Games, winning the four-man gold at the 2010 Olympics, piloting a sled he called the "Night Train" to victory, and bronze medals in both events at Sochi in 2014. He became a pilot after serving as a brakeman early in his career, and switched after failing to make the 2002 US Olympic team.

Early in his career, Holcomb served in the Utah Army National Guard (1999–2006). He won the Overall World Cup title six times, and garnered 60 medals on the world-cup circuit. He won five World Championships, winning the two-man in 2012, four-man in 2009 and 2012, and the mixed team in 2012–13.

During the middle of his career, Holcomb developed eye problems with a disorder called keratoconus, and his virtual blindness led to depression. He underwent experimental eye surgery to correct the condition, which was successful. He detailed his struggles in a book published in 2012, *But Now I See: My*

Journey From Blindness to Olympic Gold which also told how in 2007 he attempted suicide at the depths of his depression. In April 2017, Holcomb was still competing and was training at the US Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, looking towards the next world cup season and the 2018 Olympics. Sadly, although only 37 years old, he was found dead in his room at the training center. No cause of death was announced. (BM)

Margit Schumann-Esmarch (GDR).

*14 Sep 1952 in Waltershausen/Thuringia; †12 April 2017 in Oberhof. Margit Schumann, who played faustball and badminton, followed Olympic luge champions Anna-Maria Müller and Wolfgang Scheidel into learning the secrets of specialised toboggan on the all-natural track at Friedrichroda. In 1971, she became European junior champion and for the first time GDR champion. Then she was selected in 1972 for the GDR Olympic team, where in Sapporo she justified her selection with a bronze medal.

Four years later, in 1976 in Innsbruck, she took Olympic gold. At her third Olympic Winter Games in 1980 at Lake Placid she landed in sixth place, after she had broken her collarbone in a fall three weeks earlier at the European Championships in Olang.

The Thuringian was a four-time world champion (1973–1975 and 1977) and three-time European champion (1973–1975). From 1973 to 1976 she was GDR champion consecutively.

After her career she worked for the army sports club Oberhof as youth trainer. After German reunification she was part of the services. In 2005 she married the former press chief of the International Luge Federation (FIL) Harro Esmarch. (VK)

Yury Lobanov (URS), *29 September 1952 in Dushanbe, TJK; †1 May 2017 in Moscow. In 1972, Lobanov became the first athlete from Tajikistan to get an Olympic gold medal,

winning in the C2-1000 m with Lithuanian Vidas Česiūnas. At the 1980 Olympics, he was bronze medal winner in the C2-1000 m.

Born in Dushanbe to Russian parents, Lobanov and his older brother Mikhail, who would later become a two-time world champion, took up canoeing in their teens with a local club. He was on the national team from 1971–1980. Competing mostly in Canadian doubles, Lobanov was a 10-time world champion – C2-500 in 1974–1975; C2-1000 in 1974, 1977, 1979; and C2-10K 1973–1975, 1977, 1979. He also won three lesser medals at the Worlds.

He retired after the 1980 Olympics and later worked as a canoeing coach. In the 1980s and 1990s he was head coach of the Tajikistan team. At the end of 1990s he moved to CSKA Moscow. (TK)

Yelena Naimushina (URS), *19 November 1964 in Askiz, Khakasiya, RUS; †14 March 2017 in Krasnoyarsk. Naimushina was on the Soviet gymnastics team from 1979–1980, which won gold at the 1980 Olympics and a silver at the 1979 World Championships. Individually, her best international placement was 13th at the 1979 Worlds. She also won gold in balance beam and silver in floor exercise at the 1980 world cup.

She ended her career in 1982 after a serious back injury. Educated as a physical education teacher, Naimushina married Latvian cyclist Andris Zelčs-Ločmelis, the 1980 world junior track champion. They lived to Latvia where they raised three children. The couple divorced in 2001 and a year later Naimushina moved back to Russia. (TK/WR)

Frank Schepke (GER), *5 April 1935 in Königsberg, East Prussia; †4 April 2017 in Kiel. Together with his brother Kraft, Frank Schepke won gold with the German eight at the 1960 Olympics. That same line-up had already won the 1959 European and

