

# OBITUARIES

## Nel van Vliet

\* 17 January 1926 † 4 January 2006



When I wrote about the life of Nel van VLIET in an article entitled: *The Story of the Lost Olympic Medal*, in the *Journal of Olympic History*, Volume 12, Number 1, January 2005, I little knew she would have so little time to enjoy the replacement Olympic gold medal she had received. She passed away from cancer on January 4, 2006, in her home in Naarden. The dreaded illness took hold of her for two months, and finally claimed her life.

She had only taken up Swimming at the late age of 16 but within less than a year and a half (in

1943) she had already enjoyed success, winning the coveted national championships in the 200 metres breaststroke. In 1946 she broke the world record in the 100 metres breaststroke and in 1947 repeated this with a new world record in the 200 metres (2:49,2). That same year, she took part in the First European Championships after the Second World War, which were held in Monaco winning gold in the 200 metres breaststroke.

In London in 1948, she took part in the Games of the XIVth Olympiad and breezed through the heat and semi-final, breaking the Olympic record twice. In spite of the fact that some swimmers in the final already swam the new butterfly stroke (then still accepted as the same as the regular breaststroke), she won that final and the Olympic gold medal in 2:57,2. As noted in the previously mentioned article, she could not enjoy her medal for long, for within a fortnight of her return from London the medal was stolen from her home.

Because of the immense success of Fanny BLANKERS-KOEN, who won four Olympic gold medals in London in 1948, Nel van VLIET'S success as the only other gold medal winner from The Netherlands was overshadowed and neglected.

After the 1948 Olympics, she made a trip to the United States and got married to Mr. KOUDIJS. The marriage lasted five years; he then left her for another woman, leaving her with three children to take care off. She got a job as an instructor and taught children in Hilversum to swim for twenty-five years.

In 1999, she swam in the Masters and won four gold medals in her age group (70-74 years).

She was a truly great swimmer, who should be remembered with honour!

*Anthony Th. Bijkerk*