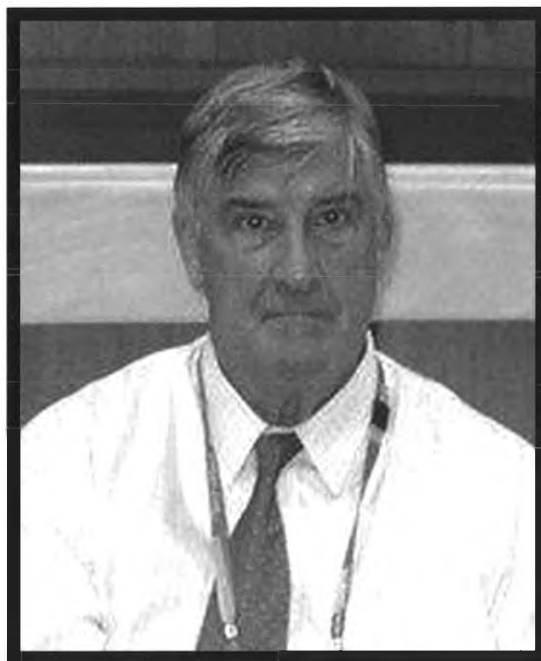


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**OBITUARIES**


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**Anthonius Johannes "Anton" Geesink**

**\* 6 April 1934 – † 27 August 2010**

"This is a great loss for sport", was the reaction from André Bolhuis, the newly elected president of the Netherlands Olympic Committee/Netherlands Sports Federation and he could have added "and also a great loss for the Netherlands and the world."

Anthonius Johannes "Anton" Geesink was born on April 6, 1934 in Utrecht and started his adult life as a construction worker. He started a career in judo and soon became unbeatable by his opponents. He won no less than 16 national Dutch titles, and 21 European titles. He was elected sportsman of the year in the Netherlands four times and was elected "Best World Sportsman (Prix d'Academy Française)" one time.

The highlights of his judo-career really started in 1961, when in Japan, he became the first *non Japanese* world champion. In 1964 and 1965 he repeated this world championship. But the finest hour of his career as a judoka sportsman came on October 23, 1964, when in the final of the Olympic "Open Weights-class", he beat his Japanese opponent Akio Kaminaga, with 15.176 mostly Japanese spectators, silently watching, and many of these crying, when Kaminaga finally lost. However, after his victory, he won the hearts from the audience by, according to judo protocol, he refused a Dutch supporter who wanted to celebrate his victory and send him back. The audience had earlier already witnessed another breath-taking incident, when the two competitors during their struggle had gone off the tatami and Geesink had then lifted up Kaminaga, weighing 108 kg, in his arms and placed

him back on the mat. Afterwards, Geesink explained his victory not as a defeat suffered by Japan, but as the victory of a Japanese sport which had now developed into a worldwide sport (which is necessary to be included in the Olympic Program). From that moment, judo would receive a firm place in the Olympic Program; it came on the Olympic Program in München in 1972.

Anton Geesink became a legend in judo; he became a judo-teacher, developed the Anton Geesink judo-curriculum, became trainer-coach of the Dutch Judo Association, introduced judo at schools and also became a member of the board from the International Judo Federation and Chairman of the IJF Education and Diffusion Commission and became President of honor of the European Judo Union. He also wrote no less than nine books about Judo, and was the initiator of the now commonly used white and blue suits, which the two competitors on the tatami have to wear.

The Japanese people loved him and honored him whenever he came to Japan. In 1997, he received the highest grade in judo: the 10th Dan (one of eighteen were ever awarded), and in January 2000 Geesink even received a Honorary Doctorate from the Kokushikan University in Tokyo.

The Japanese government presented him with the "Order of the Sacred Treasure" and in 2004, the International Judo Federation gave him a well-deserved place in the Judo Hall of Fame.

The City of Utrecht, where he was born and raised



Left: Anton Geesink (right) presents Anthony Th. Bijkerk with the Olympic order *Bijkerk Archive*; right: Anton Geesink with Barack Obama during the Olympic Congress in Copenhagen in 2009 *Martin Franken*

even named a street after him and he lived, had his office and his sport-school, in this street and the City finally honored him with a statue!

At the end of the fifties he had a short career in wrestling and even tried to enter the 1960 Olympics in this sport. However, he did not receive an accreditation from the N.O.C.; mainly because of his career as a professional sport-teacher! Fortunately, this problem was solved before the Games in Tokyo in 1964! But between 1973 and 1978 he also had a short career as a professional wrestler.

After the demise of the then IOC member in the Netherlands, Cornelis Lambert "Kees" Kerdel on November 8, 1986, the Netherlands Olympic Committee forwarded two candidates of its own Board to the I.O.C..

However, I.O.C.-President Juan Antonio Samaranch had other plans; he himself secretly approached Anton Geesink and invited him for a meeting on February 18, 1987, in Lausanne. The meeting lasted three hours and later that year, to the surprise of the whole Dutch sports community, the I.O.C. elected Anton Geesink as its new member in the Netherlands. Samaranch wanted former athletes in the I.O.C. and preferably Olympic champions and Geesink was his first choice.

In that same year, 1987, the Netherlands Olympic Committee celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a reception and dinner in Wassenaar, and that also was Geesink's first appearance as an IOC member in the Netherlands.

Anton Geesink himself fully supported Samaranch's idea to have more sportsmen and -women in leading positions in sport organizations. And thanks to one of his (many) proposals, the then merged NOC\*NSF finally installed an "athletes commission". Anton himself was for a couple of years president of a "NOC\*NSF boardcommission for physical education and fair play"; which commission was later abolished by the NOC\*NSF.

Anton Geesink was a straight thinker and his ideas often collided with those from the NOC\*NSF board.

But he was stubborn and did not yield easily. He wrote many policy-plans, letters, made proposals, made telephone-calls, with few immediate results. However, many times the things he wrote about came into being after some time; which showed how right his ideas had been. For instance, in November 2010, the NOC\*NSF general meeting is probably going to adapt a proposal of Anton regarding the flow through of Board members of associated sportsfederations into the NOC\*NSF Board. Until now, the NOC\*NSF Charter still forbids that Board members of associated federations are at the same time members of the NOC\*NSF Board. From the year 2000, Anton Geesink emphasized that this Charter point delays the flow through from competent people into NOC\*NSF Board and into important international sport organizations. Now a taskforce adopted this change already and accordingly advised the NOC\*NSF member federations in a positive way.

Within the IOC, he was nominated in the "IOC Sport for All Commission" and as the IOC Delegate Member for Games Observation, who was responsible for the appointment of IOC members for doing the honors at the various events of the Olympic Games. He took this position very serious, and usually during the many Games he attended (from 1988 to 2010), he started his daily schedule at a time when other people were still in the arms of Morpheus. He also had a worldwide "network", which he used to further his ideas (especially about the position and wellbeing of athletes).

In 2001, it was Anton Geesink, who, on behalf of the I.O.C., presented me with the "Olympic Order" in silver. During that time, I was also a member of his "NOC\*NSF commission for physical education and fair play".

I met Anton Geesink, his wife Jans and his secretary Martin Franken at the Olympic Games in Sydney, Athens, Turin, Beijing and Vancouver, and several times we had dinner together in the "Olympic Club". I truly enjoyed his

company and many times we spoke of things going on in the Olympic Movement and at home in the NOC\*NSF.

Anton Geesink passed away on August 27, 2010, in a hospital in Utrecht, at the age of 76.

I will remember him as a very dedicated man, who really tried his very best to make sports in the Netherlands better, and who was not afraid of opposition, but always tried to make the best of it for the athletes!

How much he was respected and honored by his peers was visible at his cremation, which was organized in a private circle; but was attended still by Crown prince and IOC member, Willem Alexander of the Netherlands; Mr.

Thomas Bach, Vice-President of the IOC; Patrick Hickey, IOC member and President of the European Olympic Committees; Yong-Sung Park (South Korea), President of the International Judo Federation until 2007; George Kerr, Honorary President of the British Judo Association and like Anton Geesink holder of the 10<sup>th</sup> Dan. Finally Pierre Albertini and Jean Luc Rougé, attended the ceremony on behalf of the French Judo Federation.

Anthony Th. Bijkerk