

## Obituary

### James Worrall - Olympic Athlete, IOC Member, Canadian Olympic Association President

On 9 October 2011, Canada and the greater Olympic World mourned the passing of James Worrall, age 97, an iconic figure in the heritage of Canadian sport and Olympic matters. Born in Bury, England on 23 June 1914, a young “Jimmy” Worrall immigrated to Canada with his family in 1922 at age 8, settling in Montreal where he eventually attended McGill University and became active in track and field sports organized and sponsored by the nation’s oldest sporting club, the historic Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. Envisioning a career as a teacher, he accepted a position as “Master of Physics” at Upper Canada College (UCC) in Toronto. Teaching at UCC, participating in the city’s track and field culture, and attending courses in law at Osgood Hall, taxed his considerable energies—he was a busy man. His athletic endeavors eventually qualified him for membership on the Canadian team for the 2<sup>nd</sup> British Empire Games held in London in 1934, where he won the silver medal in the high hurdles event. Two years later he qualified to be a member of Canada’s Olympic team for the 1936 Games in Berlin, where he was appointed the team’s flag-bearer for the opening ceremonies. He competed in the 110 meter and the 400 meter hurdles. In each, he failed to qualify for the finals.



James Worrall then embarked on a career as a professional lawyer. At the same time he immersed himself in the affairs of amateur sports administration, serving the cause of Canada’s national and Olympic sporting interests. He rose to become President of the Canadian Olympic Association (COA), now the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC). In 1968 was chosen by IOC President Avery Brundage to become Canadian history’s 6<sup>th</sup> IOC member, succeeding Sidney Dawes of Montreal. He retired from the IOC in 1989, having played major roles in Canada’s hosting of the 1976 Olympic Summer Games in Montreal and the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary. During his twenty year IOC tenure, he became the first Canadian elected to the Executive Board. In 1981 he ran unsuccessfully for the IOC Presidency, losing to the recently deceased Juan Antonio Samaranch.



Notable among Worrall’s achievements in the service of the IOC was his chairmanship of the Commission charged with the responsibility of updating and revamping a long-neglected and critically important document—*The Olympic Charter*, the Constitutional and Bye-Law constitution of the IOC. This task took 9 years to bring to a conclusion; the Commission’s work was ratified by the IOC General Session at its meetings in Tokyo in 1990.<sup>1</sup> Notable, too, was Worrall’s role as a member of Richard Pound’s three person team that successfully negotiated the Broadcast Market Agreement (BMA) with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) in March 1986. The BMA, while granting the USOC 10% of the income from American television rights (currently 12.75%), preserved 90% of the rights income for the IOC and its NOC and ISF family members, and this at a time when American television rights fees dwarfed those of the rest of the world combined. The retention of most of the American TV rights income for the IOC proved a triumph, particularly in the face of an active movement within the United States Congress

to limit the IOC's control of Olympic matters and its commensurate revenues from American sources.<sup>2</sup>

Though the visual and oral memories of James Worrall and his life in the service of amateur sport and the global Olympic movement will fade as each who knew him pass from the scene, a more lasting legacy will endure. In 2000 Worrall published his memoirs in the form of an autobiography entitled, *My Olympic Journey: Sixty Years With Canadian Sport And The Olympic Games*.<sup>3</sup> Pertinent to a Canadian institution that is now over one-hundred years old (COC), Worrall's work stands alone as the single best record of a long and important era in Canadian sporting and Olympic history. Beyond this, Worrall leaves another lasting legacy. Embracing a packrat mentality, quite similar to that of Avery Brundage, Worrall saved copies of every letter to and from him, the minutes of every meeting he attended, and other important documents of historical value. This corpus of material, some 44 archival boxes, was donated by Worrall to the International Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada, where it is available for examination by scholars worldwide. The James Worrall Papers rank as one of the most important Olympic archival collections in the world.

James Worrall is survived by his wife Birgitte, four children, numerous grandchildren, and a grateful nation whose global Olympic standing resides in good stead. James Worrall contributed magnificently to that standing. Honor to his name!

By Robert K. Barney

### Notes

**1** As much as this Session provided a singular triumph for Worrall's long Olympic association, a severe disappointment also occurred at the Session. The City of Toronto's bid to host the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, an effort that Worrall was among the leaders in advancing, was defeated in favor of Atlanta.

**2** For a thorough discussion of the genesis and outcome of the Broadcast Marketing Agreement, see Robert K. BARNEY, Stephen R. WENN, and Scott G. MARTYN, *Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism*, Revised Edition (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2004), pp. 245- 256.

**3** James WORRALL, *My Olympic Journey: Sixty Years With Canadian Sport And The Olympic Games* (Toronto: Canadian Olympic Association, 2000).