

# Wolf Lyberg passed away

By Ove Karlsson

A founding member of ISOH, member of its Executive Committee (1996–2004), later Honorary Member, Wolf Lyberg was, during the last month of his life, ISOH's oldest member.

Born July 24, 1917, Lyberg had a rich and eventful life. As a journalist, writing with an easy flow, he worked mainly at *Idrottsbladet* (IB; once famous also outside Sweden) 1938–66 (1955–62 free lance, 1962–66 also as managing director). Multilingual, he was Scandinavian correspondent for the French sports daily *L'Equipe* (1946–81) and contributed to several other publications in various countries.

As a sports official, he was at the Swedish Sports Confederation 1966–82 (1966–75 Information Director/1967–75 Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Svensk Idrott*, 1975–82 Head of the International Department) and the Swedish Olympic Committee, from 1969 assisted by Gunilla Lindberg, who has been an IOC Member since 1996.

Outside the Olympic sphere, Wolf was – among other assignments – Honorary Secretary of the Swedish Handball Association (1944–50) and Treasurer of the International Handball Federation (from its foundation in 1946 until 1950), Chairman of the Swedish Sports Journalists' Association (1966–71), Chief of Press Services at several major sports events in Sweden, including world championships in handball (1967) and ice hockey (1969 and 1970).

A true globetrotter, Lyberg travelled around the world 94 times and visited some 100 countries (including Japan on more than 40 occasions!).

In 1997, Lyberg published his autobiography, fittingly entitled *Jorden runt på 80 år – ett resande liv i idrottens tecken*, loosely translated "Around the World in 80 Years: A travelling life devoted to sports" (Strömbergs Bokförlag, Sweden; 240 pages, in Swedish, illustrated, ISBN 91-7151-091-5).

In football, Lyberg was one of the initiators of the European Cup of Club Champions (now Champions League). He organized tours, mainly to the Far East, for Swedish club sides and, as an advisor to Real Madrid C.F. for many years, he worked closely with Santiago Bernabéu, the club's legendary president. In the mid-1950s, Lyberg got a lucrative offer to become head of International Relations for Real, but turned it down for family reasons. However, in 1960, he accompanied a real side on an

around-the-world tour, and in 2008 he was awarded the Badge of Merit by the famous Spanish club.

Lyberg attended his first Olympic Games in 1936, in Berlin as student/spectator, and was present at a total of 28 Games up to and including 2004; the exceptions being Nagano, Sydney and Salt Lake City. He was the liaison between the media and the Swedish team in Tokyo in 1964 and the organizers' Chief of Press Services at the venues for Nordic skiing and luge at the 1968 Winter Games. As Assistant Secretary-General (1969–84) and Secretary-General (1984–88) of the Swedish NOC, he was Chef de Mission or Assistant Chef de Mission of the Swedish teams in the 1970s and 1980s.

After having retired from the Swedish NOC in 1988, when the Olympic Order in silver was awarded to him, Lyberg worked on a voluntary basis for the IOC until H.E. Juan Antonio Samaranch left as President. By compiling facts and figures from the Games (incl. lists of all competitors since 1896, more than 110,000, where available with their birthdates) and the entire Olympic Movement (incl. IOC Presidents, Sessions and Meetings of the Executive Board), he contributed greatly to the documentation of Olympic history. His work resulted in a number of publications, and in 2001 he was awarded the Pierre de Coubertin Medal.

With Ian Buchanan, the first ISOH President, Lyberg compiled mini-biographies of every IOC Member since the committee was founded in 1894. The intention to have a book published was never realized, but the material became the basis for a series which continues to this day in ISOH's *Journal of Olympic History*.

For the Royal Swedish (Bernadotte) family, Lyberg also played the role of "Matchmaker" to the Swedish Royal Family. He was instrumental in bringing together the Crown Prince, now King Carl Gustav XVI, and Miss Silvia Sommerlath, a VIP Hostess at the Munich and Innsbruck (1976) Games. The King and Miss Sommerlath married in 1976, in between the Innsbruck and Montreal Games, and both have kept a very special affection for the Olympics. Wolf was a frequent guest at dinners at the Royal Palace.

In Sweden, people usually retire at 65, to live a quiet life. This never bothered Lyberg. After an extraordinary working career of 45 years, Lyberg just went on, keeping his enthusiasm for sports in general and Olympic history / statistics in particular – almost to the very end. He would sound like an eager young boy when on the phone to report some interesting details he had found during many hours of "digging" in libraries and archives. For those of us who were somewhat younger, this was very encouraging.

Wolf Lyberg played an important role in Swedish and, not least, international sports. Always friendly and helpful, he will be sadly missed. Dear Wolf, may you rest in peace in your Olympic heaven. ■



Aged 95, Wolf Lyberg, the renowned Swedish sports journalist, official and historian, died August 13, 2012, at a Stockholm hospital.