

Sándor Tarics – A champion in the Pool and Laboratory

By Vilmos Horváth

Sándor Tarics, a member of the Hungarian gold medal water polo team at the 1936 Olympics, has recently celebrated his 98th birthday. Currently, he is the oldest surviving Olympic champion. In addition to his outstanding career as a sportsman, he also achieved world renown for his scientific work.

Sándor Tarics was born on 23 September 1913 in Budapest. His father was an employee of the Hungarian State Railways, his mother a seamstress. As a result of hardship during World War I the child was sent to live with his grandparents in the country. However, he finished his elementary studies in Budapest. His excellence in mathematics was soon realised by his teachers, and he became a student at the Árpád Grammar-School in 1923, graduating in 1931. He was admitted to the Engineering Faculty at the József Nádor University of Technology of Budapest in the same year. He received his diploma in 1936.

Success in the Pool

By 1929, aged sixteen, he was already taking part in competitive sport in the pool. In competitions at secondary school level, he achieved excellent results. In 1932 his school water polo team won the national championships. Here he was discovered by Béla Komjádi, legendary trainer of the first "golden generation" of Hungarian water polo players. He joined the MAC team and then the national collegiate team which won the world championship at their level four times between 1933 and 1939. In 1933, he had the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities in the senior national team but because János Németh, the greatest talent of that time played in his position, Tarics made only six appearances. Even so, he became a member of the team sent to the Olympic Games in Berlin. He played in only one match at the Games, but scored four times in a 12–0 win against Malta. It later became clear that his goals were important to the success of the side. He was also chosen for the national team after the Games. He continued to play for his club team until 1945, but by this time he was already concentrating on life away from the pool.



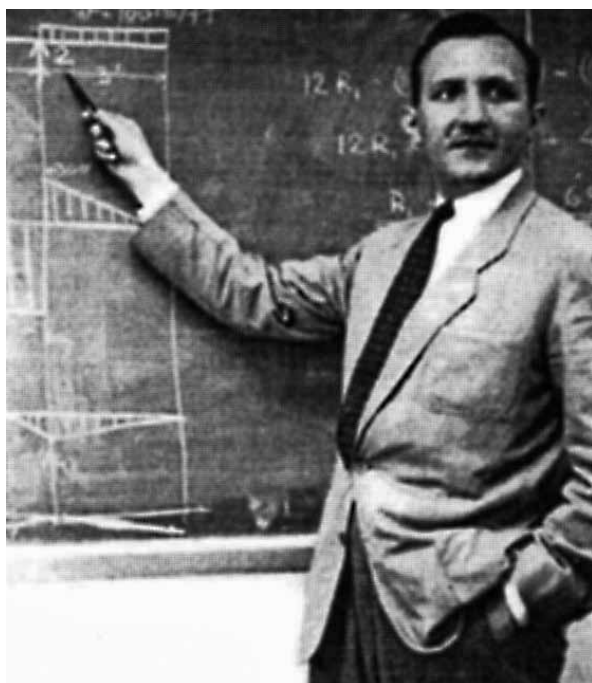
A new life in the research Laboratory

He had his diploma but as he returned from the Olympic Games, he was unemployed for a while. Then, with the help of one of his professors, Károlyi Oltay, he took up a position with the City Survey Division in Budapest. Then, in 1941 he was awarded a scholarship to spend several months in the United States. Encouraged by his professor, he began work on his PhD thesis. He enlisted in the army in 1942. He served as an artificer officer with the rank of Ensign (Second lieutenant) behind the lines. In the meantime he was able to complete his degree. He was lucky to avoid both the German withdrawal and capture by the advancing Soviets. In the spring of 1945, he was appointed as a chief engineer at the City Survey Division. From 1947, he became a private teacher, and in 1948, he was invited to become a professor at University of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Tarics had little hesitation in accepting, as much as anything because the political situation in Hungary had deteriorated. He received a travel permit and left the country with his family.



Winners Ceremony in Berlin in 1936: Hungary was Olympic champion in water polo. Below: Sándor Tarics, who in Berlin only took part in one match; went to the USA after the Second World War and became professor in the University of Fort Wayne.

His reflected on his decision to make a new life in the USA: "In fact, I did not want go away from here (Hungary), but I made a decision to leave in 1948. Then people had already started disappearing from here, there was uncertainty, and nobody knew what would be end of the process, so I had to leave. It was a difficult decision but I think it was worth it. It was worth it even though I had to start again from zero as an immigrant with a visa above the quota. I settled in Fort Wayne and taught in an engineering school there for two years. Then I went



to San Francisco to find adventures, taking no small risk. I had the same lump in my throat that I felt before the matches, as I took no small risk. But I succeeded, this was one of my best decisions in my life."

The proof of his words is his success in the scientific world. Tarics was engaged in designing of offices, schools, office blocks and military establishments. He purchased an office in San Francisco after ten years, and he managed a design team of 60. He worked with the Earthquake Research Laboratory of Berkeley University from 1973. He developed an earthquake-proof laminated rubber pad in 1978. This was built in the foundation of a tower building in South California. Shortly after that, an earthquake with a magnitude of 4 on the Richter scale shook the building, but that was all. The building and its surroundings did not suffer any damage! "Later this became a wonder of the World. Thousands came from Japan to inspect how we made protections (sic), and later it was patented, even though after long-lasting procedures. This method has been used in constructions in a value of three thousand billion dollars since then." And the effectiveness of his designs was proved during the great earthquakes in Japan in 2011, as the skyscrapers and high buildings bore the test. The disaster was caused mainly by the tsunami.

Recognition from everywhere

His scientific work has been recognised across the world. The results of Sándor Tarics has been recognised with an award in America. In 1984, he received the Goethals

Oldest living Olympians

Gender	Name	Country	Sports	Year	Birthday	Age
SUMMER GAMES						
Gold Medalists						
M	Sándor Tarics	HUN	Water Polo	1936	23SEP1913	98
F	Evelyn Furtsch	USA	Athletics	1932	17APR1914	97
Medal Winners						
M	Sándor Tarics	HUN	Water Polo	1936	23SEP1913	98
F	Evelyn Furtsch	USA	Athletics	1932	17APR1914	97
Competitors						
M	Walter Walsh	USA	Shooting	1948	04MAY1907	104
F	Dorothy Dermody	IRL	Fencing	1948	26APR21909	102
WINTER GAMES						
Gold Medalists						
M	Nils Karlsson	SWE	Nordic Skiing	1948	25JUN1917	94
F	Lydia Wideman	FIN	Nordic Skiing	1952	17MAY1920	91
Medal Winners						
M	Émile Allais	FRA	Alpin Skiing	1936	25FEB1912	100
F	Lydia Wideman	FIN	Nordic Skiing	1952	17MAY1920	91
Competitors						
M	Émile Allais	FRA	Alpin Skiing	1936	25FEB1912	100
F	Liselotte Landbeck	BEL	Figure Skating	1936	13JAN1916	96



Two Olympic Champions: Sándor Tarics with Pál Schmitt, who was twice Olympic champion in fencing in 1968 and 1972 and today is the President of Hungary.

Medal for research into earthquakes over several decades. In 1987, he received the Toulmin medal – named after the Colonel – for his work in military design. In 1986 he was granted a golden diploma by the University of Technology in Budapest as a recognition of his work over

the course of half a century. He was the United Nations earthquake advisor for a while, and was elected to the directorate of the American Engineering Association. He was honoured in both the USA and also in his mother-country.

At the age of 75, in 1988, Sándor Tarics retired but did not completely sever his connection with his working life. He now lives in suburban San Francisco and continues to seek mathematical solutions. He was married three times and had three children. One of his daughters died in a car accident, but he has three grandchildren from his son and two grandchildren from the other daughter. In his leisure time, he makes excursions, loves nature and still swims. He played tennis regularly until the age of 90. He has had a successful career in sport and science but if you ask him what has given him the most satisfaction, he replies: "The fact that I have never hurt or injured anybody. Perhaps that."

Thomas Bach first winner of the Willibald Gebhardt Prize



It is fitting that a new nominated prize, dedicated to the first German IOC Member Dr. Willibald Gebhardt, was awarded in 2011, when he would have celebrated his 150th birthday. As the first recipient of this prize was chosen IOC Vice-President Dr. Thomas Bach, also President of the German Olympic- and Sport Association (DOSB).

And also another comparison can be noticed: Willibald Gebhardt founded in 1897 the German Fencing Association, which changed itself the same year into the German and Austrian Fencing Association. Thomas

Bach became Olympic champion in fencing at the Montreal Olympics in 1976.

The prize, awarded by the Willibald Gebhardt Foundation in Essen, for which the sculptor Paul Brandenburg from Berlin designed a plaque, will be presented in the future every two years. The festive presentation, which was accompanied by historical fencing matches, took place on October 19, 2011 in Berlin. Thomas Bach placed the prize money, in the order of € 10,000 at the disposal of the German Sport Foundation.

Photo: Jürgen Engler