

Obituaries



Adolph Gustav Kiefer (USA), *27 June 1918 in Chicago, Ill.; †5 May 2017 in Wadsworth, Lake County, Ill. With the death of this charismatic American, the last of the 1936 Berlin Olympic champions is now gone. Kiefer won 100 m backstroke gold and revolutionised the backstroke. His strength was the "Kiefer turn", also called the "flip turn", which teammate Albert Vande Weghe had first demonstrated at the 1934 AAU Nationals.

Kiefer was the first swimmer in the world who covered the 100-yard backstroke under a minute. In his career he set 17 world records – all in the backstroke. Had the Games taken place in 1940 and 1944, he might well have added to his gold medal tally. His 1944 world records over 200 m and 400 m backstroke suggest he would have been a strong contender. In all he competed in some 2000 races and lost only twice.

Kiefer's parents were immigrants from Germany. His father Otto came from Alsace and had served as an artilleryman in the fortress of Spandau near Berlin. His mother was born in Stuttgart. The elder Kiefer was very keen that his son should learn to swim early in Lake Michigan.

At nine years old, Adolph was allowed to compete against older and bigger children for the first time. Soon after that, unfortunately, the

father died so Adolph was forced to bring in money to support a family of seven. He sold newspapers and worked in his free time on his uncle's farm.

In 1933, he got a job as lifeguard at the Chicago World's Fair, where he met three-time Olympic swimming champion, Helen Madison, and two-time Olympic diving champion, Peter Desjardins. A meeting with swimmer and water polo player Tex Robertson (1909–2007) proved decisive for his career. Robertson had graduated from the University of Michigan. When Robertson later founded a swimming team at the University of Texas, he allowed Kiefer to train under his instruction at the campus at weekends and during holidays.

Kiefer became internationally known when, in autumn 1935, he came to Europe and among other things set three world records in Germany, from 20th October to 9th November. As "Sunny Boy" and also because of his German descent, he attracted much sympathy a year later at the Berlin Games. His meeting in the Olympic Village with Hitler, on which he reported later in several interviews, is, however, almost certainly a myth. Hitler visited the Village only once – on 19th June 1936, about a month before the arrival of the US team – and then never again.

Kiefer attended the University of Texas and, in 1941, at the start of the Second World War, joined the US Navy and first served as a chief petty officer. He quickly moved through the ranks, becoming a first lieutenant by the war's end. He was allowed to implement new safety guidelines and a training programme to teach sailors how to stay alive in the water. During the remainder of his service, he trained 13,000 wartime instructors.

After the war he founded in 1947, his own firm called Adolph Kiefer & Associates, which specialised on the sale of swimming clothing and equipment. Later he expanded his

activities, setting up sports areas and sports equipment, especially for swimming pools as well as flooring for sports halls. His company developed inter alia, the long jump board, which gives a signal if a jump is invalid. He held twelve patents, including non-turbulent racing lanes, which he constructed for a coach at Yale. Another revolutionary product was a racing suit of nylon, instead of the customary wool or cotton. (VK)

Hubert Hammerer (AUT), *10 September 1925 in Egg in Bregenzerwald; †24 March 2017 in Vorarlberg. A trained carpenter with a sharp eye, Hammerer won Austria's only Olympic gold medal in 1960 in Rome, capturing the free rifle three positions at 300 m. In 1964, he carried the Austrian flag at the Opening Ceremony in Tokyo.

Motivated by his father, also a well-known marksman, Hammerer first made a name for himself in 1942 when he placed third in the German youth championships. During the Second World War he served in a mountain group, later volunteered in the elite SS "Brandenburg" Division that fought in Greece and Albania. During a German retreat he was captured and held as a Yugoslav prisoner of war. But after eight months he was released. Equipped with a Soviet weapons certificate he became an auxiliary policeman in Vienna. He then served on the Austrian border, protecting his country's frontier.

Hammerer had to show much patience until he could compete in the Olympics. In 1948, he missed the chance to compete in London because the only weapons he had available were out of date and thus ineligible according to Allied rules. Four years later, in 1952, he lost his left thumb due to an accident at work, preventing him from competing. Then, in 1956, the Austrian NOC had no money to send him to Melbourne.

