

# 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 20<sup>th</sup> October to 9<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.



But in 1958 he made an international breakthrough. Competing at the European Championships in crossbow shooting he won silver. Then in the World Shooting Championships he came in fifth in free rifle despite an error by a judge (another athlete had shot at his target).

The way to the Olympic gold medal was opened to him in 1960 by the young Swiss gunsmith, André Danner, who before the Rome Games had offered for 2000 francs the revolutionary "Danner Support". But at the time Hammerer, living as a journeyman carpenter was financially overburdened and could not afford the "Danner Support". However, the Tirol "Supreme Master of the Austrian Shooters" bought the weapon and lent it to him. After his Olympic victory he received the gun as a gift. (VK)

**Steven "Steve" Holcomb (USA)**, \*14 April 1980 in Park City, Utah; †6 May 2017 in Lake Placid; NY. Holcomb competed in three Winter Games, winning the four-man gold at the 2010 Olympics, piloting a sled he called the "Night Train" to victory, and bronze medals in both events at Sochi in 2014. He became a pilot after serving as a brakeman early in his career, and switched after failing to make the 2002 US Olympic team.

Early in his career, Holcomb served in the Utah Army National Guard (1999–2006). He won the Overall World Cup title six times, and garnered 60 medals on the world-cup circuit. He won five World Championships, winning the two-man in 2012, four-man in 2009 and 2012, and the mixed team in 2012–13.

During the middle of his career, Holcomb developed eye problems with a disorder called keratoconus, and his virtual blindness led to depression. He underwent experimental eye surgery to correct the condition, which was successful. He detailed his struggles in a book published in 2012, *But Now I See: My*

*Journey From Blindness to Olympic Gold* which also told how in 2007 he attempted suicide at the depths of his depression. In April 2017, Holcomb was still competing and was training at the US Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, looking towards the next world cup season and the 2018 Olympics. Sadly, although only 37 years old, he was found dead in his room at the training center. No cause of death was announced. (BM)

**Margit Schumann-Esmarch (GDR).**

\*14 Sep 1952 in Waltershausen/Thuringia; †12 April 2017 in Oberhof. Margit Schumann, who played faustball and badminton, followed Olympic luge champions Antra-Maria Müller and Wolfgang Scheidel into learning the secrets of specialised toboggan on the all-natural track at Friedrichroda. In 1971, she became European junior champion and for the first time GDR champion. Then she was selected in 1972 for the GDR Olympic team, where in Sapporo she justified her selection with a bronze medal.

Four years later, in 1976 in Innsbruck, she took Olympic gold. At her third Olympic Winter Games in 1980 at Lake Placid she landed in sixth place, after she had broken her collarbone in a fall three weeks earlier at the European Championships in Olang.

The Thuringian was a four-time world champion (1973–1975 and 1977) and three-time European champion (1973–1975). From 1973 to 1976 she was GDR champion consecutively.

After her career she worked for the army sports club Oberhof as youth trainer. After German reunification she was part of the services. In 2005 she married the former press chief of the International Luge Federation (FIL) Harro Esmarch. (VK)

**Yury Lobanov (URS)**, \*29 September 1952 in Dushanbe, TJK; †1 May 2017 in Moscow. In 1972, Lobanov became the first athlete from Tajikistan to get an Olympic gold medal,

winning in the C2-1000 m with Lithuanian Vlasdas Česiūnas. At the 1980 Olympics, he was bronze medal winner in the C2-1000 m.

Born in Dushanbe to Russian parents, Lobanov and his older brother Mikhail, who would later become a two-time world champion, took up canoeing in their teens with a local club. He was on the national team from 1971–1980. Competing mostly in Canadian doubles, Lobanov was a 10-time world champion – C2-500 in 1974–1975; C2-1000 in 1974, 1977, 1979; and C2-10K 1973–1975, 1977, 1979. He also won three lesser medals at the Worlds.

He retired after the 1980 Olympics and later worked as a canoeing coach. In the 1980s and 1990s he was head coach of the Tajikistan team. At the end of 1990s he moved to CSKA Moscow. (TK)

**Yelena Naimushina (URS)**, \*19 November 1964 in Askiz, Khakasiya, RUS; †14 March 2017 in Krasnoyarsk. Naimushina was on the Soviet gymnastics team from 1979–1980, which won gold at the 1980 Olympics and a silver at the 1979 World Championships. Individually, her best international placement was 13<sup>th</sup> at the 1979 Worlds. She also won gold in balance beam and silver in floor exercise at the 1980 world cup.

She ended her career in 1982 after a serious back injury. Educated as a physical education teacher, Naimushina married Latvian cyclist Andris Zelčs-Ločmelis, the 1980 world junior track champion. They lived to Latvia where they raised three children. The couple divorced in 2001 and a year later Naimushina moved back to Russia. (TK/WR)

**Frank Schepke (GER)**, \*5 April 1935 in Königsberg, East Prussia; †4 April 2017 in Kiel. Together with his brother Kraft, Frank Schepke won gold with the German eight at the 1960 Olympics. That same line-up had already won the 1959 European and



a few weeks earlier the West German championship.

This crew was known as the "Ratzeburg", even though their members came not only from the Ratzeburg clubs. Their prowess was attributed partially to their new oar design. In 1960, the crew again won the German championship, and both brothers also were champions with the coxed fours and the coxless fours that year. In 1961 the brothers again claimed the national title with the coxed fours. (WR)

**István Szondy (HUN)**, \*11 August 1926 in Berettyóújfalu; †13 May 2017 in Budapest. Szondy was a three-time Olympian: 1948 and 1952 in the modern pentathlon and 1956 in showjumping. His greatest success came in 1952 as a member of the Hungarian gold medal winning team. He also won individual bronze. In 1954 and 1955 he won the World Championship with the team; a year before, in 1953, was runner-up in the individual rankings.

After the Hungarian revolution the qualified fencing master emigrated to West Germany, where initially he worked as a waiter. In 1957 he moved to Frankfurt (Main), where he co-founded the university fencing club.

From 1962 to 1971 he was a trainer with Frankfurter TV. He later looked after the US modern pentathletes and from 1971 to 1987 worked as a trainer in Hessen before returning to Hungary in 1999. (VK)

**Steffi Walter, née Martin (GDR)**, \*17 September 1962 in Schlemma; †21 June 2017 in Leipzig. The daughter of a baker from the Erzgebirge, she was 13 years old when she made acquaintance with luge.

After winning the Junior European Championship in 1981 she became world champion twice (1983 and 1985) and twice Olympic champion (1984 and 1988). She had three children, studied law after her sporting career. She died at the age of 54 from cancer. (VK)

**Józef Grudzień (POL)**, \*1 April 1939 in Piasek Wielki, Buska Zdroju; †17 June 2017 in Pultusk. His career fell in the "Golden Age" of Polish boxing. National coach Feliks Stamm sent in 1964 ten boxers to the Olympics in Tokyo, of whom seven won medals. Grudzień achieved one of the three golds, defeating in the lightweight final Velikton Barannikov (URS) on points (5-0).

Grudzień was runner-up at the 1965 European Championships and won the European Championship in 1967. He returned to the Olympics in 1968 where he lost against Ronnie Harris (USA) in the final. He was a three time Polish champion (1965, 1967 and 1968).

Later he worked until 1972 as junior trainer. An army officer, he was for many years a member of the the NOC and Vice-President of the Polish boxing association. (WR/VK)

**Sergey Mylnikov (URS)**, \*6 October 1958 in Chelyabinsk/RUS; †20 June 2017 in Moscow. He began his ice hockey career with Traktor Chelyabinsk in 1976 and played there until 1989, except for a short spell with SKA Leningrad in 1980-82. With Traktor Chelyabinsk Mylnikov won his only medal at the Soviet Championships, a bronze, in 1977.

Internationally Mylnikov was the top Soviet goaltender for nearly four seasons, from 1986-90. He won Olympic gold in 1988, was world champion three times (1986, 1989, 1990) and European champion four times (1985-87, 1989). He also won silvers at the 1987 World Championship, 1990 European Championship, 1987 Canada Cup.

In 1989 Mylnikov was drafted by the Québec Nordiques as the 127<sup>th</sup> overall choice, and although he played only one season, 1989-90, he was the first Soviet goaltender to play in the NHL. From 1991-93 Mylnikov played with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl and finished his playing career in Sweden, playing with Sätters IF from 1993-95. (TK)

**Imre Földi (HUN)**, \*8 May 1938 in Kecskemét; †23 April 2017 in Tatabánya. The Hungarian was one of the best weightlifters of all time. His first international medal came at the 1959 European Championships, when he claimed bronze in the bantamweight category. For well over a decade, Földi would be a fixture on international podiums.

He won the 1962 European Championship, held in Budapest front of his home crowd. He added four more European overall titles (1963 featherweight, 1968, 1970, 1971), while also winning five golds in the individual disciplines.

In 1965, after three silver medals at the World Championships, Földi finally became the world's best. After earning silver medals in 1964 and 1968 (in which he had only lost the gold on body weight), his greatest triumph occurred in 1972 when he won the Olympic gold medal (which doubled as the World Championship). To boot, Földi won the press and the clean & jerk, registering an overall world record – one of his 20 records between 1961 and 1972. After this victory, Földi continued to compete, but with less success. In 1976, he did become the first weightlifter to compete in five Olympics, finishing in fifth place. A year later, an injury ended a career in which he collected 13 Hungarian titles. (OM)

**Vladimir Petrov (URS)**, \*30 June 1947 in Krasnogorsk, RUS; †28 February 2017 in Moscow. Petrov was one of the best forwards on the Soviet hockey team in the 1970s. He began playing in 1965 with ice hockey with Krylya Sovyetov Moscow and two years later joined CSKA, playing there through 1981. With CSKA he won 11 Soviet titles (1968, 1970-1973, 1977-1981) and 11 European cups (1969-1974, 1976, 1978-1981). He led the Soviet Championship teams in points scored in 1970, 1973, 1975, and 1978-79 and he was the leading goal scorer at the Soviet



Championships in 1970 (51), 1973 (27) and 1979 (26). In 1971, 1975 and 1978 he was selected as part of the best line of the Soviet Championships with teammates Boris Mikhaylov and Valery Kharlamov.

Internationally, he played 281 games with URS team and scored 189 goals. He won two Olympic golds in 1972 and 1976 and one silver in 1980. He was a nine-time world champion (1969–1971, 1973–1975, 1978, 1979, 1981), seven-time European champion (1969, 1970, 1973–75, 1979, 1981) and scored the most points at the 1973, 1977 and 1979 World Championships. He also took part in the 1972 and 1974 Summit Series, and helped win the 1979 Challenge Cup between the Soviet Union and the NHL All-Stars.

After finishing his competitive career, Petrov worked as an official. From 1986–1988 he was head coach of VS Moscow Oblast football club. From 1992–94 he served as President of the Russian Ice Hockey Federation. He has also worked as a general manager of SKA St. Petersburg, CSKA and Spartak Moscow. (TK/WR)

**Dieter Kottysch (FRG)**, \*30 June 1943 Gleiwitz, Upper Silesia; †9 April 2017 in Hamburg. Kottysch came in 1956 as an immigrant from Poland to Harburg near Hamburg, and for a long time spoke better Polish than German. He came into contact with boxing as a 16-year old, yet two years later the trained architectural draughtsman was (West) German youth champion. In the adult class he won the welterweight title five times in a row, from 1964 to 1968.

But internationally he had yet to find success. At the qualifying contests for the 1964 united German Olympic team he lost to the GDR boxer Bruno Guse. At the European Championships of 1967 he lost to the 1960 Olympic light welterweight champion, the Czech Bohumil Němeček. In his next title contests – in 1971 – he went out in the quarterfinal.

Meanwhile, following the Olympics of 1968, at which he was put out in the second round, he moved to light middleweight. Until the 1972 Games in his own country he had 247 fights, of which he lost only twelve. In Munich he then had the good fortune of the virtuous. When the draw in the first three rounds had given him relatively easy opponents, he beat the British fighter Alan Minter by 3–2 in the semi-final and took gold with the same margin of victor against the strong Pole Wiesław Rudkowski (1946–2016). The pair began a life-long friendship.

Kottysch abandoned thoughts of a professional career in boxing after Cologne boxer Jupp Elze had suffered fatal injury to the brain in a 1968 European Championship fight. Instead, he got a job as a sports teacher, but the attempt to convert his sporting success into money failed. He became an alcoholic; his marriage collapsed. From 2006, he suffered from dementia. (VK)

**Paul Falk (FRG)**, \*21 December 1921 in Dortmund; †20 May 2017 in Queidersbach. It was an unequal couple who became ice-skating Olympic champions in 1952. Ria Falk, née Baran and by profession shorthand typist, was the temperamental aesthete. He, a trainer precision engineer, was the calm “gymnast”, who learned dancing from her. This opposition was the secret of their harmonious appearance.

After they had become a couple in 1937, their career went off in two directions. In the winter they were skaters, in summer roller-skaters. They were German champions 11 times – from 1947 annually just as much on the ice as on roller-skates.

Before they could celebrate international successes, Baran/Falk needed lots of patience. The 1944 Winter Games were cancelled because of the Second World War, and in 1948 the Germans were excluded. Their “premiere” was the

European Championship of 1950 in roller-skating, which they won. In 1951 they acquired the title on the ice as well. In the same year they became world champions in both sports. Then they got married.

After that, participation in the 1952 Winter Games was by no means certain, as they father of the US siblings Kennedy had begun a campaign before Oslo with the aim of casting doubt on the amateur status of the Germans. One day before the event the ISU however decided in favour of the Falks.

After Oslo the couple changed to revues. For three years they were under contract to Holiday on Ice. They then joined an Ice Ballet which had been established by the 1936 champions Ernst and Maxi Baier and skated with this troupe until 1956.

After the sudden death of his wife, Falk married for a second time in 1987. At 95, he had been the oldest surviving German Olympic champion. (VK)

**Derek Ibbotson (GBR)**, \*17 June 1932 in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire; †23 February 2017 in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. “Ibbo” did two years in the RAF. In 1955 he won the Inter-Counties three miles title and was second to Chris Chataway over the same distance at the AAA Championship. The following year, he beat Chataway to win the title and then became the first man to win the coveted Emsley Carr Mile in under four minutes, before going to the Melbourne Olympics where he finished third in the 5000 m behind Vladimir Kuts (URS) and the Briton Gordon Pirie. (HE/WR)

BM = Bill Mallon, HE = Hilary Evans, OM = OlyMADMen, PT = Paul Tchir, TK = Taavi Kalju, VK = Volker Kluge, WR = Wolf Reinhardt

**The ISOH offers the families of the deceased its sincere condolences.**

