HERBERT H. WILDMAN

1932 & 1936 OLYMPIC GAMES

WATER POLO

AMATEUR ATHLETIC FOUNDATION
OF LOS ANGELES

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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words. In the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-Specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

HERBERT H. WILDMAN

1932 OLYMPIC GAMES - LOS ANGELES
WATER POLO
Bronze Medalist

1936 OLYMPIC GAMES - BERLIN
WATER POLO

INTERVIEWED:

October, 1987
Marina del Rey, California

by George A. Hodak

HERBERT H. WILDMAN

Interviewer: George A. Hodak

Hodak: I'm in Marina del Rey interviewing Mr. Herb Wildman, member of the 1932 and 1936 American Olympic Water Polo Team. Mr. Wildman, before you discuss your involvement in sports and eventually the Olympics, would you tell me a bit about your family background?

Wildman: Well, in the first place, you better put the Henry in my name because my son is also Herb Wildman. So if you put Henry in there, that makes it Herbert Henry Wildman.

I am one of two children, born of my parents, Leon L. and Viola B. Wildman. That was back a few years ago on September 6, 1912, in Marion, Ohio. They tell me that was back where one of our earlier presidents, Warren Harding, lived. He lived down a couple of blocks from us and walked by our house every day. I don't know as that was a great honor. Some of his exploits are a little dubious. Anyhow, my father and mother met in Crawfordsville, Indiana, when my father was going to Wabash College. He graduated at a very young age of 16 and went on to Johns Hopkins University. He also has a chair named after him at Johns Hopkins, which we think is quite an honor. His father's name was also Herbert H. Wildman and he owned a bank which was called the Wildman State Bank in Woolcotville, Indiana. At Johns Hopkins my father's roommate was a gentleman by the name of Noah Zehr, who is now a doctor. I mention this as it will come out later on.

Dad left Baltimore and the college to marry my mother and they moved to Marion, Ohio, where I came into this world, and then to South Bend, Indiana, where my sister was born. They moved then to Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was secretary and treasurer to the

Studebaker Wagon Company, later to be the car company. My sister's name is Minnie Katherine Wildman, now Jacobs. She was born two years later. For different reasons, we then moved to Toronto, Ontario, where I first really learned to swim in that beautiful Lake Ontario. I really loved it.

Hodak: Was your father much of a swimmer?

Wildman: My dad was probably one of the greatest swimmers with the most unorthodox stroke you ever saw. But he could outswim all of us and also walk on his hands further than the rest of us—a great athlete. He was smaller than any of the rest of our family. I don't know why I got so big, but I did. I guess I took after my mother's family who were all big in stature and big-boned.

We came to California when I was 11 years old. We settled in Hollywood, really up in the Hollywood Hills area. I went to LeConte Junior High School. I had gone to the preliminary schools back in Canada but when I came out here I started junior high school, where I played softball and hardball and got a letter in baseball. I played a lot of squash and handball. I knew the custodian over at the Hollywood Athletic Club. I used to go in after hours, which is another story which I don't think I'll tell. But we had a lot of exercise and we used to go in swimming at different hours when other members weren't in there. We had free use of the pool.

We moved to Venice as the Depression came on, mainly on account of the more reasonable rent in that area. That's probably why I fell in love not only with the beach and the ocean, but the Venice Plunge, which was certainly a great thing in my lifetime. It certainly has been a great boon to me. I used to even be in the locker room collecting towels and doing odd jobs making spare money when I wasn't delivering newspapers. But it was a great chance to get into the Plunge without having to pay for it.

Hodak: So you attended Venice High School?

Wildman: Yes. Venice High School, at that time, had both junior and senior high school classes. I started going out for all sports; swimming and water polo were the main ones that I was interested in. Outside of riding waves in the ocean, I really enjoyed the school events. In 1929 I got a letter in swimming and water polo and we won the city championships. Then in 1930, being a senior, they elected me captain of the water polo team and we won the state championship.

Hodak: What position did you play in water polo at this time?

Wildman: Well, in high school I did most everything. I was kind of a utility man—I could play most anywhere. I wasn't quite fast enough to be the sprint man, but I was pretty big so I made a pretty good guard. I had long arms so I was a good goalkeeper. And I had big toes so I was pretty good at hooking in the guys shorts; I could always keep these other fellows spun around where I wanted them. So I played most everywhere. I wasn't too bad at forward. I could handle the ball well.

While in school I enjoyed the camaraderie of the swimmers, especially one that I sailed with every afternoon. We had a small boat that we had built and we kept it under the Venice Pier. I don't think anybody on the pier knew that we kept it under there; if they did they probably thought we had permission to keep it under there. Anyhow, we sailed every afternoon and we had the first boat in our own marina, because the whole ocean was ours—there weren't any other boats out there, just us, sailing on the Pacific by ourselves. Sometimes we had to swim back, pushing the boat back, bailing it out and so on. But that was part of youth, growing up. This fellow's name was George Geiger, who is now the head of the Long Beach School District. He was really one of the fellows who was the instigator of me becoming interested in water polo at the Venice Plunge. He said, "Why don't you go out and start practicing with those guys, they're looking for a goalkeeper." And I thought, "In order to play that caliber . . . because those fellows had all been former Olympians, like Wally O'Connor, Reggie Harrison and the

Daubenspecks.

Hodak: And these guys were members of the L.A. Athletic Club?

Wildman: No, at that time it was the Venice Swimming Club. We hadn't joined the L.A. Athletic Club. At that time we were members of a club called the Venice Swimming Club which was sponsored by the Venice Swimming Association, and we practiced at the Venice Plunge. But as I recall now, I figured the caliber of these fellows who had played in the Olympic Games would be way out of my class. As it turned out, I soon got educated.

Hodak: What do you mean by educated?

Wildman: Well, I started right out by figuring that I might overwhelm them with my superior playing, but after being almost drowned and being mauled by one of the Daubenspecks—O'Connor and all of them would swim over me like I wasn't even in the pool—I decided I'd better get out of that category and get into the goal where I belonged. So that's when I started becoming the goalkeeper. That's where they needed a man to play anyhow. After much time experimenting, with a lot of ambition, youth, determination and hard work—I used to do a lot of swimming—after miles of kicking, swimming laps, jumping out of the water getting strength in my legs, I got pretty proficient at playing the goalkeeper position. I became proficient enough so that I made the team and before long I was the steady goalkeeper. I was the number one on the number one team. My goal and ambition was to play with that kind of caliber. I have always said that if you want to get good at anything, never go with somebody that is . . . well, if you're going to bowl with somebody, you want to bowl with the best. Anything you do, you shouldn't go with somebody that's not as good as you are, or you're going to get down to their level. If you're going to get better, you should go with somebody that's better than you are and you'll move up. Anyhow, that's what happened. I sound like I am bragging a little but I certainly had done well enough to make the team. I got comfortable in that job

and I spent many years at it. In fact, we trained and stayed together for 11 years.

Hodak: And this group of swimmers or water polo members, in addition to the Daubenspecks and the O'Connors, who would some of the other swimmers be?

Wildman: Well, there was Charlie Finn and at that time there was Bill and Wally O'Connor. Of course, there was Reggie Harrison. Some of those fellows were cut because they were classified as professionals. We had other fellows that swam, people from the beach. That was about the time when the Venice Plunge got into financial difficulties.

Hodak: In the early '30s?

Wildman: In the early 1930s, later on in '30 and '31 and that area. We had people with cars—if you can call them that--rattletraps, cars, whatever, anything that would run to get to San Francisco or UCLA or USC or the Olympic Club or the various clubs where we would play at least once a week. But we had to have gasoline money. When you practice all the time—at least five to six days a week—with that many fellows, we needed that gasoline money. The LAAC needed a team, so we moved our whole team up to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. There's where two of the members of our team, Reggie Harrison and Rich Daubenspeck, were replaced by [Dr. Charles H.] "Dutch" McCallister and Calvert Strong, who were members of the Los Angeles Athletic Club water polo team. The rest of the club were members of our original team. That's when we became the Los Angeles Athletic Club water polo team.

Hodak: So how aware were you of the Olympics at this time? Was this part of a long-range goal? Was it something your teammates talked about?

Wildman: You know, that's a question that I have thought of many times and it is peculiar you should ask. From the time that I was in high school I was always aware of the Olympic Games and always followed

them fairly close. And when you are playing with men of that caliber and you listen to . . . for instance, Wally O'Connor, went into the 1924, the '28, the '32 and the '36 Olympics, (I'm a little ahead of my story), but he was a four-time Olympian so naturally we knew of his going to the Olympics. All the time that we were practicing, Phil Daubenspeck, Charlie Finn, all of us, in the back of our minds, had really one goal in mind. We were a group of fellows who thought an awful lot of one another. Of all the years—we played for 11 years—I don't ever remember having one cross word spoken between us. Maybe somebody got hit in the mouth or something and there was a few words said against our competitors, but as far as we went, we were just a happy bunch of fellows with one aim in mind. We all had that five rings in mind, the Olympic emblem, that we all wanted to see.

We listened to our leader, Wally O'Connor. He told us about things that happened in Amsterdam. He'd tell us how well he was treated and about the different people and how they rolled out the red carpet, the different ways that people lived in foreign countries. Of course, the 1932 Olympics were going to be in Los Angeles so we didn't get to travel very far from Venice. But we were looking ahead, even then, to the 1936 Olympics. We knew that if we could make this one, we sure were going to make the 1936 Olympics. And we talked about this. It was a team plan from three years before the 1932 Olympics when I first started playing with the team. I could hear the gentle rumble was one for all and all for one, like the Three Musketeers. We were one big group and we all wanted to take that one big step and make that Olympic goal.

I think it may not seem a lot to some people, but I feel that to have the privilege of representing the United States, in any sport, is one of the greatest honors that can ever be bestowed upon a person. Then, if you're fortunate enough to even win a medal . . . it's just something that you can remember the rest of your life. It is such a thrill and a goal to look forward to. I keep stressing that. I do a lot of work with young people, and I keep telling them to practice a

clean life, stay away from the crack and this dope bit and all of this stuff. Keep off all of these things. Just keep your body clean and work hard. Anybody has a chance. If a little kid from Venice can do it, you can do it.

Hodak: I'm curious, how did you see yourself as a team at this time? Were you tested by local competition much at all?

Wildman: We practiced together as well as played for 11 years. We practiced at least five days a week, weather permitting and pools being available. We tried to fit at least one game in every week and sometimes it may be every two weeks. But we tried to play one of the local schools or one of the local clubs, for instance, UCLA, USC, or Fullerton. Or if we were lucky, we'd somehow get a chance to go up to the Olympic Club in San Francisco or play Stanford or some of the various colleges.

Hodak: Did these schools present much of a challenge to you?

Wildman: You see, all schools have particular stars on the water polo team. But they don't have a group of stars, therefore, they don't have the team . . . . If they could have pooled all the stars, we'd have had more trouble. But the schools never bothered us. For instance, the Olympic Club would give us more trouble than anybody else because they would pick the better players from each school. Then they would get a pretty fair team. And they had a coach at Fullerton, who I'm sure a lot of people who follow swimming or water polo remember, Jimmy Smith, rest his soul, a wonderful man. He had a team that was something else. I often think of him; he was a wonderful man, and a great coach. He always gave us trouble. He was like the proverbial thorn in your side. We always had more problems with his team than we had with most everybody else.

Hodak: Did you face any international competition prior to the Olympics?

Wildman: This was the problem that we had. Every day, we never knew

really how good we were. We were never beaten, but when you're playing team after team after team—the same groups, the same coaches, the same individuals who are coached by the same individuals, using the same plays and so on—it's not the same as if you have . . . . For instance, overseas, where the water polo is their national pastime, like baseball is here, they have what they call international points. They go from country to country like I go to Culver City. They call those international points because they are liable to go to Yugoslavia or Hungary or Austria or England or France or Sweden. Each one of those are like when we go 100 miles each way. They would have international points; we'd go 100 miles and we're still in the same state. So we didn't have any way to judge just how good we were until one day we got a call from the LAAC director who said, "I've got a team that wants to play you fellows." Well, we were wondering what was happening and he said, "It's an international team from England, the Dreadnought Dragoons."

Well, that was a frightening name in itself. They were an English group and when we met the commander—if that's what their head man is called—he said, "We've never been beaten. We'll take it easy on you fellows so you won't look bad to your club." And we said, "We'd appreciate that." So we got into the pool with them. Well, the outcome was much different than he expected. We felt a lot better after the game was over. At the end of the half the score was something like 20-0, our favor. Then at the end of the game it was about 35-0. They never did score. So we figured by playing one international game that we had a pretty fair team, but we still didn't know because they weren't as good as many of the local teams. Anyhow, this is just one incident. We figured then that we must have a fairly good team if they'd played all over the world and they hadn't been beaten.

Hodak: How did the British coach respond to this beating?

Wildman: Well, the English are very polite. As he got out of the water he

said, "You fellows gave us quite a drubbing. In fact, you fellows play quite a different, rougher type of game than we do. One of your fellows tore off my blooming costume!" As I recall, we had to give him a towel and he had to get out of the pool to replace his swimming suit. One of our fellows had actually torn his suit off. (laughter) So he was right, we did play a rougher game than he did.

In those days we played a little rougher game than they do now. The fouls weren't called as often as they are now. We were allowed to play a little longer and the fouls weren't called as fast. There weren't as many substitutions, in fact, unless you were hurt or injured, there were no substitutions. You played the full time. I always think that in those days it was a little different game than it is now. Anyhow, it is still a great game to watch. I think it has really become so much better known since it has been on TV. And everybody got excited during the '84 Olympic Games. Now when you hear the name water polo almost everybody knows what it is; whereas before, they'd ask you how do you get the horses; in the water. (laughter)

Anyway, from then on, we figured we must have a pretty good team. We went into Brookside Park and we met our competition for the Olympic tryouts. We had a lot of confidence.

Hodak: Before we talk further about the tryouts and the actual Olympics, I am curious about some of the nuances of goalkeeping or goal tending. Talk a bit about that.

Wildman: Well, a goalkeeper's got a big net that you have to protect and when you get in that net, it begins to look 80 feet wide instead of just the regular distance. The ball begins to look like somebody is shooting it out of a gun. And your arms get heavier and you just can't seem to get out of the water in time. But when you are young, and with all the ambition I had the adrenalin was flowing, and you had these great water polo players that I played against

and just had to get better or you didn't hold down your job. So I got so that I either was lucky or I would use tricks or anything in the world to outmaneuver them. You learn to use kind of a frog kick to kick yourself and hold yourself out of the water. And on lob shots, they stall you and you have to be able to stay up as long as they can keep bluffing you. Then when they throw that ball, it's going to come at you at 90 miles per hour. The funny thing is I have been hit in the face very few times. Even when they are just a few feet away they know they can't knock your head off so they very seldom hit you in the face. They try to go around your head and if you are fast enough you can usually deflect it. I have been so fortunate. And you have a chance to use your eyes. It's like a boxer who feigns with his eyes. You can kind of fool him and make him think you're going to look one way and jump the other. Either you do that or you cross over and look one way and jump that way or you look one way and jump the other way. Before long you have them so confused they don't know what they are doing.

So it's one of the cases where you're darned if you do or darned if you don't. And if you're lucky or if you're just good . . . you either look really great or you turn out to be a bum. In all those years, I happened to do it pretty well. I turned out to be a grade-A goalkeeper and I was fortunate enough to outmaneuver and outjump them. For all those years I stopped enough of them so that we were never beaten, so I guess maybe I was a pretty fair goalkeeper. I always thought I was, anyhow.

Hodak: The tryouts that you referred to earlier at Brookside Park in Pasadena, this was a round-robin tournament of several teams other than the Los Angeles Athletic Club team?

Wildman: Oh yes. I have forgotten how many teams but there were quite a few. They were from back East, of course, and then some local teams. It has been a long time now, I can't even remember who the final team was that we beat.

Hodak: It was the Illinois Athletic Club.

Wildman: Yes, I thought it was Chicago—the Illinois Athletic Club.

Hodak: How did the coaches and players from the teams back East approach the West Coast players?

Wildman: You know, it's a peculiar thing, but the East Coast fellows back there thought that we were still back in the cowboy and Indian stages. They didn't figure we had any swimmers or polo players or anything out here, so they didn't think that we had a chance of giving them any kind of competition. So they figured it was between New York and Chicago. They even sent telegrams to Wally O'Connor, who had been on the 1928 team, and they were razzing him. They said, "What are a bunch of Indians doing playing water polo." It was the coach of the Chicago Athletic Club swim team. Bill Bachrach, who sent this telegram. And when we defeated them, Wally O'Connor, our captain, sent a telegram back to Bachrach and all he said in the telegram was, "Ha ha ha." I thought that was pretty clever.

But it was a good competition. As I said in the first of the interview, my father's roommate at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Noah Zehr, is the fellow who introduced or invented the electric means of taking out tonsils. And it so happened that after we had won our right to represent the United States as the water polo team, the announcer said, "We'll now have a demonstration of backstroke by a Daniel Zehr." Well, there aren't too many Zehrs. It's kind of like Wildman, it is kind of a peculiar name, Zehr.

Hodak: He was announced as being from Fort Wayne, Indiana?

Wildman: From Fort Wayne, Indiana. And that's, of course, where Dr. Noah Zehr lives. And my dad thought, "My goodness, it couldn't be—two roommates from Baltimore." So Danny Zehr gave a demonstration of the backstroke; he'd already made the Olympic team. When he got

out of the water, he walked past us in the grandstand and my father hollered down his nickname— "Billdad." You'd have thought somebody had hit him with a baseball bat. He stopped dead in his tracks and looked up and came up in the stands and said, "How would you know—with all the people in the world, there's only a few people who know my nickname." So my dad told him the story and all during the 1932 Olympics Danny lived with us; then after the Olympics we drove him back home to Fort Wayne and had quite a reunion with his folks.

Hodak: Tell me about the Opening Ceremonies.

Wildman: It was a great, great experience. There's nothing like it. You can't imagine the exultation or the thrill. It's hard to explain. It's kind of like an earthquake—until you've been through one you just can't imagine the feeling. It's unbelievable. There's something that is so wonderful about opening day at the Olympics. You can't believe how many people are connected with the Olympic Games. And you all line up outside of the stadium and each country marches in. You follow the American flag in and they play the anthem, and all of these thousands of athletes march in and you're standing in that field, and it is the greatest collection of athletes in the world. I happened to be standing right in front of [Mildred] "Babe" Didriksen, who was probably one of the greatest athletes that ever lived. And to hear her talk! I'll always remember her all my life for the things she said. She wasn't bragging because she does what she says she's going to do. I was so thrilled to be standing with her and with the Riley brothers [Johnny and Mickey] and with our team. I was standing with so many of the fellows. When they play "The Star-Spangled Banner" and they open the Games and light the torch, tears run down your cheek and the chills go up and down your spine. I'll tell you, if you don't have goose bumps, there's something wrong with your constitution.

Hodak: How did you find the accommodations in the Olympic Village?

Wildman: This was the first time that any Olympic Committee had ever furnished housing for all the athletes—a uniform village. You can read about [Elias Jackson] "Lucky" Baldwin and the Baldwin Hills where the cabins were built. I happened to be fortunate enough that my roommate was Duke Kahanamoku, the Hawaiian who is now almost sainted as the father of surfing. There are so many surf festivals in Honolulu. When I was over there not too long ago. they were going to have reporters come out for me to give an interview because he's so well liked and just like a king over there. From knowing him, I can see why. He was probably one of the nicest fellows I have ever had the opportunity of knowing. He was such a great man to be around. He was a wonderful swimmer. He swam from 1912 and here it was 1932. That was a long time. A lot of water passed under his body.

The housing in the Village was a great thing. The houses were new. The athletes were very happy. The food was great. They had a hospital right there. I don't think there was very much activity in the hospital because all of us were in pretty good health. They had a big reception room with cowboys patrolling the outside on horseback. Every once in a while they would stage a phony thing of somebody trying to jump over the fence and the cowboys would run over and arrest them. Of course, they'd take them around the corner and turn them loose. But the crowds would all cheer. In those days, there wasn't such a thing as terrorism. Nobody was looking over their shoulders. It was a different type of security.

There were just thousands of visitors. There was so many people just milling around. It was such a pleasure to go out and give autographs. The people were smiling and happy. Nobody had any money but it didn't cost anything to give these dear people your autograph. Everybody was so interested in talking. The food was so great in the Olympic Village. However, I was just a few miles from home. For me to have participated in that Olympics was one of the greatest thrills of my life.

Hodak: And what about your actual water polo competition? There were only five teams competing that year. Tell me a bit about how that went.

Wildman: The problem that they had with water polo was that there wasn't enough money in those years—that was the Depression. The countries were all in trouble. In fact, one of the countries, Brazil, brought up shiploads of coffee and sold it on the way to bring their team up. Other countries did everything just to get a team up here. Anytime you have a minor sport you have to cut down somewhere. So there weren't as many of the lesser sports that were represented like they are now. The people who were there were the cream of the crop, so it wasn't the easiest thing in the world. They had a weak team from Japan, but they outdid themselves in the swimming events, where they took almost all the medals. However, in water polo you don't have to be the fastest swimmer in the world, you have to be the cagiest, as well as a good swimmer. For instance, people like Johnny Weissmuller or Buster Crabbe, who were great swimmers, would come in and train with us—and they couldn't make the team. They weren't trying, of course. But you have to be a great ball handler.

Remembering more about the Japanese team, they were a fine group of lads. The problem that they had was that they lacked experience. They tried hard and wanted so much to do things. It's hard to believe, but, we all remarked about the fact that anyplace you went in the stadium—whether it was in the Olympic stadium or the swim stadium or the Village—there were fifteen Japanese tourists who had cameras. Whether it was Johnny Riley or Mickey Riley or any of the better divers, or maybe Georgia Coleman, swimmers, runners, horse racers, no matter what it was, they must have taken 9,000 shots of every event that went off. This is what happened to all of our electronics as well. It doesn't matter what it is, they copy it and go home and do it better. I'm sure one of these days we're going to have a good Japanese water polo team. But that one just didn't fare well. They tried hard but it was almost pathetic. But they sent a team anyhow, which we appreciated. It's fine that

they sent somebody over and it showed that they were a nation who was willing to compete.

We won a bronze medal which I was very proud of. If you can't be the best in the world, the third best isn't bad. But at the end of the half we just quit scoring. I think it was 10-0. Wally came back to us and said, "Only five teams came this time, and if we discourage Japan that only leaves four, and they are liable to stop having water polo in the Games at all. So let's take it easy." So we just passed the ball back and forth. Some of the other teams just went ahead and made heavy scores and when it ended up we tied Germany; but by counting the extra scores they made on some of the other games, they outfigured us for the silver medal. It was worked out and evidently it was fair. But had we gone ahead and scored another ten I think we'd have had the silver.

We never were beaten in the United States except by Hungary in the 1932 Olympics. And we tied Germany and they outfigured us. But we were the only U.S. team to win a medal up until the 1984 Olympics where the U.S. team got a silver medal. And they got outfigured for the gold, but, anyhow, that's another story.

I got to meet [Oliver] Halassy of Hungary and I met their goalie. I don't remember the goalie's name but I can picture him just as plain as the day I was talking to him. In fact, I traded my United States sweat outfit with him. And he showed me a book that they put out and it was fantastic. They had a full, hardback book of all the water polo players, telling how many international games they had, where they lived, showing pictures of the cars they own and so on. Their water polo players are royalty over there.

Hodak: They were certainly the most established team in Europe.

Wildman: Of course. Germany also had a good team. They did things that weren't quite up to snuff, I didn't think, but they had a good team. There's no doubt about it. They wouldn't have tied us if they

didn't.

Hodak: So you lost to Hungary, 7-1 and tied Germany, 4-4. What were some of the tactics used by the Germans that you really didn't approve of?

Wildman: For one thing, the goalkeeper isn't supposed to come out so far, and he was out in the middle of the pool sometimes. There were certain things that went on that I'm not going to bring out.

Hodak: Between the German and the Hungarian games you established a record of sorts?

Wildman: Well, that was one of the things that I have always been proud of. I happened to stop seven free throws in a row—four in one game and three in the next—which is unheard of. But Halassy came up and told me that that was the first time that he'd ever been stopped on free throws, especially three of them. It's unbelievable to be able to stop a free throw. That's almost like giving them a point. But, of course, on the eighth one they broke the string. It's a tough shot when they stand up in front of you. But I outsmarted him for three of them and that tickled me. I sure enjoyed that and it was kind of a record that I don't think too many people will keep track of. But Jimmy Smith always bragged about it on my behalf.

Hodak: Were you able to attend other events during the Games?

Wildman: Oh, yes. In fact, I've got so much memorabilia. I have collected all the brochures and books. I still have all of the programs from the '32 Olympics—the ten-cent program. I've got the times of each of the prelims for the track events.

Hodak: And what of the Closing Ceremonies?

Wildman: Some people say the closing event is sad. It's a beautiful thing. You've had the experience and all good things have to come to an

end. For example, the Closing Ceremonies of the 1984 Games—which probably will never be duplicated, and if it is, I hope I am there—was probably the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. When you see a Closing Ceremony, you know that the Games have to stop sometime. You've met all these wonderful people, not only the contestants but the coaches too. Some of those people, I'll just never forget. I'll forget their names but I'll never forget their faces or the courtesies that they have shown me. I'll just never forget the things that they have done for me. I even remember some of the people who asked me for an autograph. It's an honor and a privilege. Some people kind of ignore it or don't want to. You'd be surprised, most of them would like to if they have the time. Almost all of them would sign autographs.

As I said, the Closing Ceremony was a gorgeous thing. It's like the end of day—the sun's going down and it's time for a rest. But you know there's another Olympics coming up. Just start training harder. You're going to make the next one if you're good enough and you keep in good health. And you've got to keep your amateur status. Look at some of these boys like O'Connor, who made four Olympics. I made two of them and I think I would have made the 1940 Olympics if they had held one. Even if I didn't make it with our team, I think I might have been picked as an alternate. I was a pretty fair goalkeeper. But the war came along and knocked that one out.

Hodak: So your team stayed together?

Wildman: Oh yes. We practiced for three years after the 1936 Games. Then we found out that they weren't going to have them in 1940. That's when we broke up as a team. I didn't quit, I just went on to different things rather than swimming. I gained 40 pounds.

Hodak: Well, we won't dwell on that.

Wildman: Thank you. (laughter)

Hodak: Now, would you carry us up to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Discuss any changes in your life, any interest or publicity that came your way as a result of competing in the Olympics.

Wildman: After having competed in Los Angeles in the 1932 Olympics, there was quite a bit of publicity in the local papers. They really played it up because they didn't have too much activity going locally anyhow. They really played up the local athletes so we got quite a nice bunch of reviews and publicity. This, of course, was on top of the reviews we had all through the Games. We won our bronze medal and that was a first. I lived here all my life so naturally this brought attention to the various things that were happening in our area. And people who hadn't known me before were all my friends now, on a first-name basis. At the time, I was working locally on some of the fishing boats. I got to be a skipper at a young age and was working out of the local fishing pier running pleasure boats. In the interim I became a husband and soon thereafter we were blessed with a fine daughter and a fine son—Sharon and Herbie, Jr. This was certainly a blessing and we have enjoyed them all through our lives. But we lost our daughter to cancer just a couple of years ago, which is another story.

But the publicity that the Games gave us will be something that one will never forget. A person will always have this. As you well know, a person is who he knows and it certainly helps an awful lot in anything he does. I think it helped on some of the activities that I was interested in. Our ambitions were to get to the 1936 Olympics. We weren't able to travel any distance, except from Venice to the Coliseum, which is a short distance of probably 18 miles. That isn't much of a trip. We were looking for a much longer distance by knowing that the next Olympics were going to be in Berlin, Germany. This is quite a carrot to hold in front of a young team who had a lot of ambition. We really trained hard and had a lot of ambition to get to those Games. We were training not only as hard as, but much harder than we trained for the 1932 Olympics. Our coach in the 1932 Games, Frank Rivas, was still

helping us out quite a bit.

Hodak: Did this continued training reflect itself in the 1936 tryouts in Chicago? Were you able to easily handle other teams at the tryouts?

Wildman: It wasn't any easier. I believe they were doing the same as we were. In 1932 they didn't know that we were a pretty good team, so when they came out they thought that they would have it all to themselves. But when they came out here and found out that we were tough, why, they trained harder like we were training. So when we got back there we found that they had toughened up a little too. But perseverance will win out in the end. We took on all comers that we had to. It was a round-robin affair. They finally roped off a swimming area in Lake Michigan. We happened to get back there when the weather was 90 degrees day and night. Lake Michigan happened to be around 58 degrees day and night. After an hour of being in that cold water they asked me why I was blue and I told them I always was that color when I got out of the pool after an hour of swimming. I was so elated at winning the tryouts that I didn't even notice the cold water.

It was a wonderful feeling to have had the opportunity and the experience to compete with such great teams as the Illinois Athletic Club and the New York Athletic Club and various other clubs that showed up to compete with us. I certainly enjoyed it.

The trip back there was uneventful. Of course, we went by train from Chicago to New York. They notified us that we would have to get off at Pittsburgh and catch another train. Well, this train that we were going to catch was a long one. It must have had 15 or 20 cars on it. Everybody was running like bats out of the proverbial place. I couldn't imagine why the thing was so long it would hold all. the people on our little train. But they were all getting on the first five cars. Well, when I got on I found out soon enough why they were all running. The first five cars were air-conditioned. The only air-conditioning we had was by leaving the windows open.

In those days, the trains were run by coal and the soot would come out of that stack and through the window. I had on my white suit, which soon became a grey suit, which soon became almost a black suit. It certainly did ruin a good suit of mine. But the next time, I'll be among the front runners. I guarantee you.

We got to New York and our accommodations were very fine. We even got to listen to whoever it is who has the Royal Hawaiians. We were invited to that. We didn't have *very* much money, but we went to all the free entertainment. They really treated us royally in New York before we got on the boat. We went over on the *Manhattan* and came back on the *United States.* I have menus from each trip. I was a little guy from Venice who had never seen so much food in his life. It was a treat like I had never seen.

Hodak: Were you keeping in shape on board the ship with the use of the canvas pool that others have mentioned?

Wildman: Well, I think I mentioned it before, I am quite a surfer. I not only surf board but I loved to body surf. We got into quite a storm and the boat would roll and each time the ship would roll the water would all shift from one side to the other. I just got it timed so I could ride that swell in the canvas bag from one side to the other. I surfed my way from New York to Cobh, Ireland. It was sure fun. You could just body surf across that pool for quite a while. I got a kick out of riding that wave across that swimming pool. There was enough water in there that you could ride the wave or kick, but you couldn't swim because it wasn't that big. You couldn't do any lap swimming but you could do your kicks. We passed the ball around and did our morning mile around the deck. It was a beautiful boat. They treated us beautifully. The accommodations were exceptional. The boat traveled around 18 knots, if I remember right. It took them about five days to get over.

Hodak: Where did you land in Europe?

Wildman: We came into to Cobh, Ireland, first. We got to slip in to Cobh and see a little bit of Ireland; very little, just the harbor itself. Then we went to France, to La Havre. Cobh was not that fascinating but La Havre was quite a spot. It was the first time I had ever seen meat out in the open with the flies and all. I had never seen cities that weren't as modern as ours. They had meat markets out in the open and the open sewage. I wasn't too impressed.

Then we went to Germany. We landed at the mouth of the Elbe River and we took a boat up the river and I have never seen anything like it. They have these street cafes, only they were lawns. The German people were all singing the German songs. It was probably one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen. All the way to Berlin these people were serenading the whole team from all the way along this gorgeous river. I'll remember that as long as I live.

We arrived in Berlin and they had huge buses to transport us to the Olympic Village with accommodations that were just beautiful. The Village was about ten miles outside of Berlin in a rural setting. It was set in a most gorgeous forested area that had ponds with fish. The buildings were all brand-new. The mess hall was a huge curved building. As we found out later, they had different chefs for every country. Each country had their own menus. I couldn't believe the steaks and the turkey. You could get anything you wanted from corned beef to T-bone to filet mignon. It was just wonderful.

My roommate was Kenny Beck. We were stationed in Gubenhaus. Each little unit consisted of ten units and they all had a translator. We had our own swimming pool with diving platforms. They had a complete track and field setup. The whole Village was complete down to a general assembly hall where tourists could come and meet the athletes. Buses and transportation was available to you by just showing either your Olympic emblem on your jacket or your Olympic identification card. You could go anywhere in the city at no

charge.

Hodak: When you traveled in the city, were the German people very attentive, receptive or interested in you as an Olympic athlete?

Wildman: I have never been in a cleaner city. There were no papers and no graffiti. There wasn't a vacant lot that had a weed in it. Everywhere we went we had our American shields on our jackets and a crowd would gather following us around to see what we were looking at. They didn't know what we said in English but when we'd laugh they'd all laugh. The parks and statues were just beautiful. Everywhere you go there is a statue. I think they make a statue every time they turn around. They must celebrate everything.

The people were so appreciative. They just greeted us with open arms and the red carpet everywhere we went. I have never been so well treated in my life. I just couldn't believe how nice these people were. No matter where you went you were always getting lost. The two magic words were Bahnhof Zoo. If you could get back to Bahnhof Zoo, you were sure to find buses or they'd be there pretty quick to get back to the Village. You could grab a car, a bus or a taxi. Any way you could get back to Bahnhof Zoo, that was the main starting point to get back to the Olympic Village. Or there were always a lot of civilians who would be willing to drive you out, especially if you were from the United States. And as I said before, they could tell with that flag that you had on your coats, your United States Olympic banner on your pocket. Most of them wanted to practice English. It was always a harrowing experience with them trying to talk English and drive at the same time. They were always so willing. In fact, one time Kenny Beck and I were outside the Olympic Village and a German man offered us a ride. Well, we were driving along and I was looking at the speedometer and, not knowing it was in metric measurements, I was soon a little worried. Then it turned out the guy was anxious to try his English out on us. He was paying more attention to us than he was to the road.

and then all of the sudden he hit the center divider. So Kenny and I said, "Here, yeah here, this is where we want to get out." [laughter] He was really friendly, but too concerned with trying out his English. We thanked him, got out and caught a bus.

It was just a great experience. So we would go back the ten miles anyway we could get back. When we would arrive at the main visiting hall they had a huge entrance hall to the Village where we would all assemble before going in. We'd have to show our passes to get in. Then we would walk to the various places.

Hodak: Prior to the actual Olympic competition, did you have any practice sessions in Berlin or in the outlying areas?

Wildman: That was a must! You can't get by without practicing. We were so used to practicing five days a week, but they didn't have any facilities in the pool that was in the Olympic stadium, as I recall. They had a beautiful full-sized pool in this big building that was on the far end of the track. They also had a regular track for the track and field fellows. But the pool was beautiful and heated so we could go in and swim laps but we couldn't practice. Besides, there wasn't any other team around that we could practice against in that area. But we would go to various small villages or towns or even cities that were close by. As you know, in Germany, like baseball is to America, water polo is almost their national game. In fact, some people say it is their national game.

I recall one experience when we went to a place called Plotzensee. First, we were supposed to be there about two o'clock and the driver of the bus got lost. Of course, we didn't know where he was going but by the time we got there we were at least an hour and a half late and we thought there wouldn't be anybody there. But when we got there, I have never seen so many people even at a baseball or football game. They were even sitting on signs. They were in the water and on every available spot. I couldn't believe there was that much interest. They had a team, I guess, that

represented the town of Plotzensee. They were a fine looking young group. In the place that we played they just roped off an area in one of the canals on the outskirts of the city. It's a little tough practicing when you're trying to dodge the sewage that went floating by. But, I'll tell you, they had a team that was as good as any of the local college teams. I couldn't believe how good they were. We had one whale of a time but we finally outscored them. They were certainly good but we finally bested them. What a reception we had afterwards! The people came in and wanted our autographs. When we got there I thought, with all the people in the water—there was little kids about three or four years old splashing, hollering and hooting—I thought, "Boy, that water looks good and warm." So I dove in and I don't know why it wasn't frozen over. Wow, it was cold! But after you get in with your adrenalin running and you get swimming around a little bit you can stand it. But after about an hour I had a few goosebumps on me. It was quite an experience and was certainly well worth it.

Hodak: On a different level, what about other impressions or memories you have of Berlin at this time? Anything that you noticed that suggested something about the political climate of Germany of the time? Were there any things you noticed in your sight-seeing around Berlin?

Wildman: Well, it was impossible to miss the political end of it. For instance, it was impossible to have been in Berlin and not notice that they were geared up for . . . if they weren't thinking of some conflagration they were certainly thinking of something. Because every person in the place was in the army or going to join. There was only a few civilians running around and the rest of them were either brownshirts or blackshirts or oliveshirts, I believe. Anyhow, there was three different classes of them and, boy, they herded all those poor, little civilians around.

On every place where there was any kind of open area, you'd see these fellows training with a full pack and crawling on their bellies

with a rifle. We'd see these gliders everywhere and we'd ask about them. From what we understood, they'd just have to yank the front nosepiece off and hook a motor on it and turn it into a fighter plane. The buses we rode in . . . and as I looked into the '36 manual that you were showing me I recognized one of the buses, or a similar bus, that we rode in. They had these brackets all the way around the top. The top rolled back on the brackets. I kept asking the driver what those brackets were for. I could never understand. Finally, after about a week, he got tired of me questioning him and he said, "Well, that's where the machine guns go." I found out later that they just put a bunch of machine guns on there and stand these fellows on the seat and drive into a village or something and these fellows had a regular tank. You could make a tank out of all these army buses that we were being transported back and forth to the Village in. Inside of Berlin there wasn't any place that didn't have a Nazi flag. Even businesses had the Nazi insignia up. We saw broken glasses in some of the Jewish establishments. They had already started the harassment.

I had one experience with a young college student who I got to talking to while I was walking down Unter den Linden. He invited me in to sit down and have a cup of tea or a soda with him and he was asking me questions about the United States. So I immediately wanted to invite him out to the Village and he said, "No, I can't come out there." And I said, "Oh, you don't have the time?" He said, "No, I can't come out." So I said, "Why is that?" And he said, "Because I can't go over a half a mile from the university." He was attending the University of Berlin and the Jewish people couldn't leave. They couldn't get over *a* half a mile surrounding the University of Berlin. Everywhere you looked there were evidences. I could go on and on. There was this sort of evidence everywhere.

Hodak: Before or during the Olympics did you come in any contact with high German officials, political officials, or Hitler himself?

Wildman: One day the word got out that Hitler was having an informal meeting

for the athletes, an afternoon luncheon, where he was going to recognize some of the athletes. So, having nothing better to do, I got on the bus and, sure enough, there was Hitler himself. This was during the track and field events that we went to. This was the only time I got closer than a couple of hundred yards to him. We all stood in line—there was probably 50 of us—and went by and he gave us a book, which is probably one of the nicest pieces of memorabilia that I have of the 1936 Olympics. It is a book of photographs of the Olympic Village, and all the surrounding gates and the different parts of Berlin. He gave each one of us this leatherbound book with beautiful photographs and then shook each one of our hands. And he gave the *heil* bit and away we went. Had I known what I know now, it would have been a different story. But at that time it was an honor to shake his hand.

At the time, in the Village itself, it was known that Reich Marshal [Hermann] Goering was going to come to the Village to visit. That meant about as much to me as nothing. But I knew later that he was certainly one of the biggest men in Germany later on. But he didn't show up. So one of the few colds I have ever had in my life—and this was a doosey—and one of the few practices I ever missed, I stayed at home this one morning. About 11 o'clock I felt a little better and started to go over to the pool to take a few practice swims. I was feeling pretty good. All I had on was a brief swimming trunk, which is nothing more than a G-string and my towel. These roads were nice wide roads and in came a touring car, a big touring car, with a whole bunch of blackshirted officials and a pompous, big, heavyset man—obviously an army official. They came skidding up to a stop right alongside of me and there were three other cars right behind him with SS troops, they were called the blackshirts. He got out and I went to shake his hand and all these fellows were about to point their rifles at me. I don't know where I could have hidden a weapon, I didn't have that many places to hide a weapon. Anyhow, I shook his hand and he said, "I am Goering," and we had a talk for about 20 minutes. I really enjoyed meeting this gentleman; and I use the word gentleman loosely now. But he

wanted to know what I thought of Germany, how I was being treated, how I liked the facilities that we were living in, how we liked the trip over, how the food was, etc. He was so courteous that I couldn't believe, even after this thing was over, the stories we heard about him. He was so gracious a man.

So that was my experience with meeting the big operatives. Outside of that, I didn't have much to do but be herded around like the rest of the locals with these army people. They were all pleasant but they let you know that there was no monkey business. You went where the arrows pointed. But they treated you real fine and it was probably one of my finest experiences that I have ever had.

Hodak: Let's talk about the Opening Ceremony. I know that was certainly a very-well orchestrated ceremony that the Germans put on. What sort of impressions do you recall of the Opening Ceremony?

Wildman: Well, this, of course, was my second experience and I don't think that it was much different than it was when I was in the 1932 Olympics. When they put on these events, with all the pomp and circumstance, it's really so impressive that you'll remember it as long as you live. But you can't really remember what happens other than your own personal thoughts. I remember the people around me. I remember thinking about how each athlete was probably thinking about his event coming up, thinking about his homeland, thinking about how this was going to influence his life, and how the people in the stands were reacting to all this. When they lit the torch, and then as they'd play the national anthem . . . if one didn't have a tear come to his eyes, he must have been either completely out of his mind or he was just unconscious, because it was so touching. When you stop and think about the enormous amount of work that goes into getting this show on the road . . . . I think of each person who is there and each one having his own thoughts, as I was. I was just so impressed.

Hodak: And they played a tape of a recorded message that Baron de

Coubertin had made in Lausanne, Switzerland?

Wildman: Now, as I recall, they played this tape and at that time, I was so impressed looking around and seeing the expressions on the other athlete's faces. I really was so touched. I don't believe that I even heard a word that was said on the tape. Maybe in my subconscious mind I may have absorbed part of it, but as far as I know, I was just too absorbed with the whole enormity of the situation around me. An Olympic Opening Ceremony is such a great thing, with thousands and thousands of people, not only in the stands but so many people from so many nations, each one of them the best in their field. Some will lose and some will win, but each one of them, in their heart, are all going to put out their best effort. And that's what counts. I know we did. So it's a wonderful experience.

Hodak: What do you recall of the United States team marching into the stadium? There was some question about the matter of a salute?

Wildman: This is interesting. First of all, there was the question of who was going to carry the flag. I honestly have forgotten. As I recall it was the captain of our team, Wally O'Connor, who was a four-time Olympian. He was one of the flag bearers for the United States.

Hodak: And then the gymnast, Alfred Jochim was the official U.S. representative or appointed representative to lead the team in.

Wildman: Yes, he was the man that led us in. Of course, my heart and soul was watching Wally O'Connor. I thought so much of Wally, who was, to me, one of the greatest men I have ever known. He was so kind and although he wasn't that much older than I was, I always felt he was kind of like a father to me. He was a down-to-earth type of person. So we always kind of looked to him for what to do.

So, everybody in our group got together and were discussing the fact that in the United States we don't recognize anybody else's flag. I shouldn't say we don't recognize it, I mean we honor our

own flag. But as far as somebody else's flag, they have a right to their own flag but we do not salute anybody else's flag. They were asking that everybody should give the Nazi salute, but it was against our protocol. So what should we do? Well, we all decided that we wouldn't and evidently the whole team did because there wasn't a soul . . . . We all walked by and as we went by we certainly were aware and cognizant, and we were perfect ladies and gentlemen, but we didn't give the Nazi salute. I can't see why there was a controversy about it. I'm sure that they should understand, however I think there was a little bit of aggravation on some of the people that didn't understand our ways.

But outside of that one little incident, the whole thing was so beautiful—the people, the costumes. Our garb was certainly great; I liked it better than I did the uniforms that we had in 1932. I liked the felt hat, the belts and trousers, and the shirts and everything that they gave us. Our shoes and sweat clothes were great. We had a full outfit. I thought we looked great.

Hodak: Any other general comparisons come to mind between the '32 and the '36 Olympics?

Wildman: Well, there was so much difference. Here in Los Angeles, we'd eat half our meals at home. Transportation . . . we'd go back and forth here; over there we were dependent on others for transportation. So it's little stuff like that that differ so much.

Hodak: Let's talk about the water polo competition. Certainly something to point out is that your team faced a little stiffer competition than in the 1932 Olympics.

Wildman: It's an amazing thing. You're in a different situation. I have to bring up like the Lakers or the Rams or any of the teams around here. When they're in their home field, they have the advantage no matter what you say. When you've got a cheering crowd and the people behind you it makes one whale of a difference. No matter

how hard you try, in the back of your mind, the cheering . . . . And when you've got that many teams competing, it's a bug-bear. No matter how hard we played we were running into competition that was world-renowned. What else can I say? They were just better than we were. We had never been beaten in the United States except by Hungary. That's the only time we were ever beaten in 11 years over here. And we had played hundreds and hundreds of games. But over there, boy, it's a different situation. It's like I was talking about playing these practice games in these little towns and villages. They'd have these teams that were small teams and, I'm telling you, those teams were tough. We beat them but we weren't playing any bunch of turkeys. We were playing some well-taught, really good water polo players. And as good as we were, we were really hard-pressed to beat them. We could beat them but then when you get to the top of the whole nation . . . . And we ran into some tough luck. We got beat, that's all. You just can't make excuses. Any one day any team is going to beat another team. You can start making alibis or anything else, but you're just going to have to say that the other team is better than you are.

Hodak: For the record, I should point out that the U.S. was one of 16 teams in the water polo competition and was eliminated in the first bracket, losing to Belgium and Holland by one goal each and then defeating Uruguay. Certainly you don't have to have any alibis for your goal keeping. It wasn't a matter of a lot of goals being scored against the U.S. team.

Wildman: You know, it's like anything else. For some reason, we got outsmarted. When you play the same team time after time, they get to know just what curve ball you can't hit or whether you're a sucker for a low ball. I got so that I'd know these polo players. But when you're playing against guys that you've never seen before, it's tough. And you only get one shot. This is it. And then maybe your fellows are not feeling exactly up to snuff. Some of the shots weren't exactly on target and that kind of hurts when your team isn't quite up to snuff. Maybe on some other day we'd

have gone through and done a lot better, but we got eliminated. But the whole experience was certainly one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Hodak: Were you surprised that Hungary successfully defended its championship?

Wildman: Well, of course, even though the Hungarians repeated their victory from '32, the Germans really pressed them much harder this time, and, in my opinion, should have beat them. In fact, I couldn't believe it when Hungary was the victor. I was so sure that the Germans would win that I'd have bet money on it.

Hodak: Yes, it was a very small difference separating Germany and Hungary.

Wildman: I'm sure it must have been because, as I say, I couldn't see that. I thought sure that Germany would win. Anyhow, the Hungarians have always been tough competitors and it's a long story too, about that Hungarian outfit. They have a little different feeling over there about professionalism, which I'm not going to go into.

Hodak: So at the conclusion of the Games it was announced that the next Olympiad would be held in Tokyo. Did you have thoughts of possibly trying out or competing for the next Olympics?

Wildman: Oh, of course. We were shooting for it. I always wanted to go to Japan. We had our eyes set on Japan and I'm sure as I sit here . . . . We practiced two more years after the '36 Games. After the drubbing we got in 1936, we decided that we'd really better get serious. We weren't concerned as much about the teams in the United States, but we realized these teams outside of the United States weren't any playboys. These guys meant business. In 1932, we handled most of these teams with ease but when we saw the other teams that were competing we realized that we really had to get down and figure out a lot more plays and a lot different situations.

So we started really getting into some serious game plans. We had some new plays that I thought were phenomenal; some underwater stuff that they still don't do yet. I don't mean illegal underwater stuff. I mean people swimming underwater and coming up in front of the goal and long passes and things that they don't use now. We really had some wonderful plays figured out and they worked like clockwork. Of course they only work once, but that's all you need to win a game. We would hold them until the right time. It's kind of like the old statue-of-liberty play in these football games. You don't use them but once, maybe twice.

So, as I say, we practiced for two more years with our eyes on Tokyo, but the Games were called off. And time was marching on. At that time I weighed about 165 pounds and I could not understand how people could gain weight. I could drink malts, eat ten sandwiches for lunch and would not gain a half a pound. Boy, when we quit swimming that five miles a day I started blowing up like a balloon. I went past 200 pounds like it was standing still. But, that's another story.

Hodak: So, do you have any other thoughts about the Berlin Olympiad? Were you able to see many other events?

Wildman: Oh, yes. Naturally, we went everywhere that we could. We could go anywhere by just showing our Olympic jacket or our Olympic identification papers. You could grab a cab, get on a bus, a train or anywhere else, and everything was on the house. We had quite a few people from Venice who went with us. Quite a few of them aren't with us anymore so I guess I can tell this story. But, when we would go to the track and field events, there was plenty of room in our section so I wasn't taking anyone else's seat. But we'd all go in and then we'd collect each other's IDs and one guy would take them out and pass them out among our fellows that came over on the boat with us. *So* they would all come in and we'd all sit together in the stands. So they'd get to see the Games. We had seats that weren't more than 100 feet from Hitler's box. We were right next to

it. But they were wonderful seats, They certainly did give us grand seats.

Hodak: So you were able to see Jesse Owens?

Wildman: Yes. We got to see every event. In fact, I've still got almost all of the programs from the 1936 Olympics track and field events. They were ten cents at that time, as I recall. But I've got a lot of the programs. I've got all of them from the 1932 Olympics, too. I've even got the one for [Evelyne] Hall when she won her heat. I've still got to give that one to her. I always forget to take it when we go anywhere where she's going to be.

Hodak: Following the Olympics, were there any scheduled exhibitions or competition for the water polo team?

Wildman: We gave several exhibitions.

Hodak: And this would have been in some of the larger cities near Berlin?

Wildman: Actually, they were trips rather than exhibitions. We never did play any polo games. They were actually more like courtesy trips that they gave to the team. We went with divers mostly. Dick Degener went with us and maybe Marshall Wayne went on one of them, and also Frank Kurtz. Oh, there were quite a few fellows. We went to Frankfurt. We went down there on a trip that was such a wonderful experience. They had a reception down in a wine cellar. They had a huge cask that must have been 18-20 feet across that even had Alexander the Great's name carved on the outside. Kings and all kinds of celebrities were carved in this huge keg. It was a reception. The *burgermeister* really gave us a tremendous reception. It was wonderful. Just everywhere we went, they took us all over. We went to Leipzig and the various towns in that area.

Hodak: Was there a big reception for the U.S. Olympic team upon arrival in New York?

Wildman: Yes. When we got back into New York it was quite a big reception. We came back on the *United States,* that was the name of the ship we came back on. In New York, they had a ticker tape parade. Naturally, you can't give a paper parade for a zillion athletes. But there was a big reception and many, many people at the dock.

We hit a tremendous storm coming back. Me being an old "Venetian" and on the water all the time, sailing and skippering boats, it didn't bother me. But there were many, many people who didn't show up at the breakfast table, or the lunch or dinner table. So quite a few people wanted to get home. There wasn't too much playing around. We just kind of wanted to get home as quick as we could.

Hodak: Was there any sort of reception awaiting you here in Southern California?

Wildman: We got quite a reception in Los Angeles and we got a big reception here in our home town. There were people cheering and hollering and hooting. It was a surprise. You just don't expect that.

But one of the biggest receptions that we as a team received was when we got into Frankfurt. I don't know where the advertising came from but I couldn't believe it. We got into the station in Frankfurt, which is huge. My word, it's as big as any station I have ever seen in the world. It was so huge I couldn't believe it. The crowds were just immense. Everybody was hollering these German greetings. Then, all of the sudden I hear: "Herbie Wildman!" from the back of the crowd. I thought I was losing my mind or something. Then I heard it again and I knew my ears hadn't gone bad. So I looked up and saw a fellow named Bob Williams, a guy I'd been swimming with for years on the beach. He has an act, which he's had all his life, in fact, he still has it. He was on with *Sugar Babies* back in New York. He has a dog now that doesn't do anything, but in those days, he had the smartest little dog act that you've ever seen. That dog was so fantastic, you wouldn't believe it. He'd do this dog act all over the world in front

of kings and queens everywhere. Here he was in Frankfurt, and he'd seen this advertisement in the paper and had met the train. And out of these thousands of people, here I was getting off the train; and somebody in the middle of Germany is hollering: "Herbie Wildman!" That was probably one of the biggest thrills that I had in the whole trip. Can you imagine? Out of the millions of people in Germany, here's somebody hollering my name in the middle of Frankfurt. That's kind of a peculiar story.

Hodak: Yeah, that is. Following the Olympics, did you return to California? I assume you were in the military in World War II.

Wildman: I was married and by the time the war started I had two children. I had a skipper's and an engineer's license. First I was going to go in the Navy. With my boating background I thought I might get an officer's rating. But then they needed men for tugboat service, which would be stateside and I could still keep my service station and garage. So I thought I'd go up there. And I got a job, well, that was classified. That was one of the services that they wouldn't touch you. In other words, that was the merchant marines. A merchant marine was classified just like the service was, so all through the war I was operating 98-foot tugboats. I got to be chief engineer of six tugboats up at Port Hueneme. So that's what I did all through the war. I went up as a skipper but when I found out how cold it was on the bridge of those things I decided to move down in the engine room and take care of the engines, which was easier and warmer. So that's where I spent most of my time, taking care of the big, huge diesels. I finally took care of the whole fleet of tugs.

Hodak: And you were able to maintain your business in Los Angeles?

Wildman: Yes, I worked two days on and four days off. So I worked 18-hour shifts. I was able to keep my business open by doing the off-time at the tugboat business. But after the war was over, I met my schoolgirl companion that I always admired in high school. My first

marriage ended in a divorce. And I met this lady, Naomi D. Richmond, and she was kind enough to take over the reins. I've been married now since 1945 and it has been a wonderful experience. She and I had our business at Glencoe and Washington Boulevard in Marina del Rey. In about 1972 we decided to chuck it all in. It was a garage service station and auto parts business. In fact, it was right across the street from the 1984 Olympic headquarters at Lincoln and Washington.

So we've had a wonderful life. We now live in a condominium just about a half *a* mile from there, so it was not a far way we had to go to work. Naomi did all the bookwork and tried to keep me in line pretty well.

Hodak: I think she did a good job. She's still doing a good job.

Wildman: Well, hopefully. We've enjoyed our life and hopefully we've got many more years to go. We're looking forward to it. We're enjoying our retirement.

Hodak: What other, things have you enjoyed through the years. Did you continue to swim or fish? What other interests have you had?

Wildman: We swam. We have a pool out in front. I enjoy swimming in the ocean quite a bit. I've done a lot of diving for abalone and lobster. I also have delivered a lot of boats up and down the coast and done a lot of sailboat racing. In fact, we bought a boat, a 42-foot sailboat, which we've raced. I more or less won every major race on the Pacific Coast. In fact, in 1961 we won the Ensenada race, which is the largest international race in the world in class-A arbitrary. We've had a couple of seconds and a couple of thirds in the Ensenada race, and a couple of 350ths as well. (laughter)

Hodak: Are there any sailing partners you would like to mention?

Wildman: My partners have always been fellows that I've known all my life.

One of them was the head of Todd Shipyard or was one of the heads. He was the head dockmaster there. He now resides up in Brookings, Oregon. Then there is Ken Highley, who is one of the chief engineers over at North American. If I named all the fellows that have cruised with me for so many years we wouldn't have enough room on this tape. But they are all great friends of mine. My brother-in-law has cruised with me.

But the slip rents have gone up so high that we finally got rid of our sailboat so I fish with other people on their boats. Me being a diesel engineer, they have to take me even if they don't like me because I can keep their boats running. (laughter) So I fish off the islands here. We don't fish locally on account of this sewage and the drainage problem here on the local coast. This water is becoming contaminated and it's just a shame that the local waters are in this condition. We should be doing something about it.

Hodak: And you also worked helping in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Wildman: I worked with Andrew Strenk, who was a swimmer in the 1968 Olympics. He was kind enough to allow me to work with him all through the 1984 Games. I enjoyed every minute of it. I put in 1500 hours that I accounted for and probably another 500 that are not accounted for. I was also on the Spirit Team, which is the speakers' bureau, and I gave between 100 and 150 speeches. We never kept track of them but I spoke all over the Southland at different schools, rotary clubs and various organizations. I'm still doing it, too. It just keeps going on and on. But I enjoy doing it and I hope the people keep asking me.

Hodak: And you've been active in promoting the Calgary Winter Olympics?

Wildman: They were kind enough to ask me to lead some of their parades to kick off the Calgary Games here in Los Angeles and they gave me a nice 100-dollar Stetson hat and some of their pins. As you know, I'm a pin collector. I started that through my work with the

Olympic Committee here. They were kind enough to get me a good job. First they were going to give me *a* desk job, which I turned down. But, I said that I wanted to have something where I could see some of the Olympics. So finally, I thought I had blown it, and they said, "No, we're going to make you a photo marshal." You may ask, "What is a photo marshal?" A photo marshal is a fellow who herds the photographers around. Well, I was fortunate, I got to be at the start and finish of all the swimming and diving events, and the synchronized swimming. So I got to see all of the races, the diving and the synchronized swimming. It was really wonderful to be in that position, *as* well as to meet all the pin traders. There was always people out there with their blankets down trading pins. Being a member of the Spirit Team, we had our own pins and they were pretty rare, so I'd get a couple of extra pins for one Spirit Team pin.

I recall giving a talk at Caltech to a large number of students. I was giving my stories and no one was laughing. And I was getting more and more nervous and starting to sweat. Not a chuckle. I knew I was in trouble when I gave my best story and no one laughed. Then afterwards the professor said he thought that was great. Well, I thought he was being sarcastic. I said, "Great, what do you mean? They didn't laugh at any of my stories." Then he said, "Didn't I tell you? They are all foreign exchange students. They don't know English." (laughter)

Hodak: Now, as a way to conclude our session, I wonder if you have any summary thoughts about the Olympic Movement. How do you see the Olympic Movement changing over the years?

Wildman: Well, of course, I try to do as much for the Olympics as I possibly can. If I could only put back one iota of the tremendous amount that I got out of the Olympics I would be happy. If I worked the rest of my life I could never repay what I got out of it. As I look back to the start of *my* Olympic association, we were just really enthusiastic. We loved the game. It was nothing but sheer

enjoyment. We looked forward to every practice. There was nothing but camaraderie. Every time we would play a game we got to know everybody on every team that we played. We knew all the teams from the North. We even knew the fellows from back East. I still know the fellows' names from back East.

I see the water polo team today. They go all over Europe and play. I was lucky; I had one international game to my credit. These guys, like the Germans or the Hungarians, they're playing one team right after another from outside of their borders. And I see these skiers every time they are on television—of course, we didn't have television. For some reason, they seemed to get their skis up to make sure that their sponsor has their name showing right toward the cameras. It's an altogether different ballgame. Now, I think this is great. I think it is fantastic. I mean, this is the way it should be. And I think they enjoy it just as much as I did. It's something that they will remember all their lives. And they probably are going to remember it just like I do.

I've been around on this planet for a long, long while, since 1912. And I can. look back and enjoy these memories, or try to remember them. I still enjoy talking about them. Athletes today will be the same way in 50 years. And they'll never forget these experiences. So when you talk about the Olympics, it's wonderful for the youth of the nation. Those are my ideas about the Olympics. They should never be phased out, and I'm sure they never will be. The only thing I am concerned about, if they can just keep politics out of it. This is what scares me. Now, this is my own idea. Maybe I shouldn't say these things, but that's my own personal opinion. Politics, to me, has no right to be in . . . I think of these fellows who have trained for four years and then don't get the opportunity to travel and get to express themselves on their field of battle, or to get out there and do the thing that they do best. And here's some fellow up there who can take that right away from them. I just don't think it's right.

Hodak: Your opinions are what I am here to gather. I appreciate you sharing your memories and thoughts about the Olympics and everything else you've covered.

Wildman: Well, I sure appreciate you. You're doing such a great job and it's certainly an honor to know a man who puts this much time and effort into it. You've certainly been a perfect gentleman. It has truly been a great experience. It's wonderful to know you, sir. I just want to say, "George Hodak, thank you," and I want to shake your hand.

Hodak: Thank you, Mr. Wildman. I am glad to have gotten to know you.