

THE OLYMPIC OATH - A BRIEF HISTORY

by Karel Wendl

In the July 1906 edition of the *Revue Olympique*, Coubertin referred to the urgent need to introduce into the few but very important Olympic ceremonies an athletes' oath of fairness and impartiality. The IOC's task would be to ensure that the oath was strictly upheld.

The Olympic Oath was pronounced on behalf of all the athletes for the first time at the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad in 1920 in Antwerp. The oath was spoken by the Belgian fencer Victor Boin, future president of his country's National Olympic Committee. Holding his country's flag in his left hand, with his right hand raised, Boin recited the following words, "We swear that we will take part in the Olympic Games in a spirit of chivalry, for the honor of our country and for the glory of sport."

This oath was modified slightly in 1961,¹ when the term "swear" was replaced by "promise," and "the honor of our countries" by "the honor of our teams," in an obvious desire to eliminate nationalism from the Games.

The Olympic oath is currently pronounced during the Olympic opening ceremony, just after the lighting of the Olympic Flame by the final torch bearer. The flag bearers of all nations form a semi-circle around the ceremonial rostrum, while a member of the host nation mounts the rostrum, holding a corner of the Olympic flag in their left hand and raising their right hand, and then pronouncing the Olympic oath.

The current edition of the *Olympic Charter* establishes the following text for the athletes' oath: **"In the name of all the competitors I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our teams."**

Since 1972, the judges have also sworn an oath, the text of which, per the current *Olympic Charter*, is as follows: **"In the name of all the judges and officials, I promise that we shall officiate in these Olympic Games with complete impartiality, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship."**

Following is a list of the athletes and the officials who have spoken the Olympic Oath at the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Winter Games.

Speakers of the Athlete's Oath at the Opening Ceremonies, Summer

1920	Victor Boin [Water Polo/Fencing]
1924	Georges André [Athletics]
1928	Harry Dénis [Football]
1932	George Calnan [Fencing]
1936	Rudolf Ismayr [Weightlifting]
1948	Donald Finlay [Athletics]
1952	Heikki Savolainen [Gymnastics]
1956	John Landy (Melbourne) [Athletics] Henri Saint Cyr (Stockholm) [Equestrian]
1960	Adolfo Consolini [Athletics]
1964	Takashi Ono [Gymnastics]
1968	Pablo Garrido [Athletics]
1972	Heidi Schüller [Athletics]
1976	Pierre St. Jean [Weightlifting]
1980	Nikolay Andrianov [Gymnastics]
1984	Edwin Moses [Athletics]
1988	Ho Je [Basketball] Mi Nason [Handball]
1992	Luis Doreste Blanco [Yachting]

Speakers of the Athlete's Oath at the Opening Ceremonies, Winter

1924	Camille Mandrillon [Skiing]
1928	Hans Eidenbenz [Skiing]
1932	Jack Shea [Speed skating]
1936	Wilhelm Bögner [Skiing]
1948	Riccardo "Bibi" Torriani [Ice Hockey]
1952	Torbjørn Falkanger [Ski Jumping]
1956	Guilliana Chenal-Minuzzo [Alpine Skiing]
1960	Carol Heiss [Figure Skating]
1964	Paul Aste [Bobsledding]
1968	Leo Lacroix [Alpine Skiing]
1972	Keichi Suzuki [Speed Skating]
1976	Werner Delle-Kerth [Bobsledding]
1980	Eric Heiden [Speed Skating]
1984	Bojan Križaj [Alpine Skiing]
1988	Pierre Harvey [Nordic Skiing]
1992	Surya Bonaly [Figure Skating]
1994	Vegard Ulvang [Nordic Skiing]

Speakers of the Official's Oath at the Opening Ceremonies, Summer

1972	Heinz Pollay [Equestrian official]
1976	Maurice Fauget [Athletics official]
1980	Aleksandr Medved wrestling official]
1984	Sharon Weber [Gymnastics official]
1988	Lee Hak-Lae [Judo official]
1992	Eugeni Asensio [Water polo official]

Speakers of the Official's Oath at the Opening Ceremonies, Winter

1972	Fumio Asaki [Ski Jumping official]
1976	Willi Köstinger [Nordic Skiing official]
1980	Richard "Terry" McDermott [Speed Skating official]
1984	Dragan Perović [Alpine Skiing official]
1988	Suzanne Morrow-Francis [Figure Skating official]
1992	Pierre Bornat [Alpine Skiing official]
1994	Kari Karing [Nordic Skiing official]

¹ *Editor's Note:* The oath was almost certainly modified before 1961, probably several times. The Official Programme from the Opening Ceremony of the 1948 Olympic Games in London, gives the following text for the oath: "We swear that we will take part in the Olympic Games in loyal competition, respecting the regulations which govern them, and desirous of participating in them in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the honour of our country and for the glory of sport."