

# En garde — Olympic competitor recalls a match

It's not true! I didn't sleep with this Olympic athlete last week just to get a story.

We've been married for 22 years, and with six kids, bed is the only place we get a chance to talk.

Byron Krieger was in New York training for the 1956 Olympics when we first met. (Doesn't that give you a little insight into American training procedures?) But then, Byron could afford to be slightly casual since the 1956 Olympics marked his third international fencing competition, because he had fenced in the 1951 Pan American Games and the 1952 Olympics.

With the focus on the 1980 Olympic Games after the official "Nyet! We won't go!" from the United States, Byron began reminiscing about his own Olympic experiences.

He noted that when the Americans began the reviewing stand, the U.S. never performed the customary dip of the flag in keeping with the American policy of never bowing to a foreign government. The Stars and Stripes marched straight and tall before the foreign dignitaries.

BYRON AND RUSSIA have something in common regarding the Games. The year 1952 was Byron's first Olympic competition, and 1952 was the initial entry of Russia into the Games.

"Russia insisted on building their own Olympic village away from the other countries," Byron recalled. "Communication wasn't permitted between the athletes. One of the fencers had connections and managed to get the fencers an invitation to visit their private dining room in the Russian Compound at a specific time. They were very insistent about arriving promptly."

The American fencers arrived at the Russian village as scheduled. A Russian escort took them to the dining room where they beheld a sight bearing slight resemblance to an Olympic training table. The only missing element was a Gypsy violinist strolling amid the stiffly starched white table clothes topped with candles and gigantic, elaborately decorated cakes.

"They told us the cakes were for the gold medalists," Byron said. "Nothing seemed real, and there wasn't an athlete in sight. We considered it all propaganda."

IN 1956 IT was a different story. Russia had invaded Hungary. While the Russians didn't insist on a separate village, they built a wall of commissars around their athletes.

"Some of the Hungarian athletes had friends among the other countries," said Byron. "They weren't allowed to talk with anyone. Many fencers and other Hungarian athletes defected at the games."

"Politics isn't an innovation with the 1980 Olympics. Byron recalled a visit made to the Salle De Tuscan Fencers Club in Detroit by Helene Mayer right



Jocelyn Krieger

after she had won the 1936 Olympic women's foil championship for Germany.

"Helene Mayer was one of three Jewish athletes who competed for Germany. She was looking through the club's scrapbook," related Byron, "and she became very upset when she read the newspaper clippings which criticized her for fencing for Germany."

Helene Mayer continued fencing in the U.S., winning the National Championships seven out of eight times. She revealed to Byron the real reason she had represented Germany:

"The Nazis put pressure on Helene Mayer. Her family was still living in Germany during the 1936 Olympics. Being Jews, their lives were in jeopardy if Helene didn't fence," Byron said.

WHEN THE 1958 World Fencing Championships were held in Pennsylvania, Byron was asked to direct (remember, Byron and I still laugh when remembering my first introduction to a certain French Olympic twice gold medalist.

I was standing on the sidelines watching Byron direct a match when a tall, quite handsome fencer diverted my attention.

"Pardon, Madame," the gallant white jacketed stranger began. "We have not met. I am Christian D'Oriola from France."

In elegant European fashion, he bowed slightly and kissed my hand. "I'm Jocelyn Krieger," I introduced myself. "My husband is Byron Krieger."

My hand fell from his lips like a wet fish. Without a smile or single word, my new French acquaintance stomped away.

Little did I know at that time Byron was the first and only American to beat D'Oriola. The last time Byron and D'Oriola had met was on the fencing strip during the 1956 Olympic team competition. Olympic champion D'Oriola left the strip — defeated.

OLYMPIC ATHLETES take their sport personally, a trait they share with their countries' officials.

In the 1951 Pan American Games in Buenos Aires, Byron fenced all three weapons, topping every other fencer by fencing 110 bouts. He vividly recalls the decisive bout with Argentine champion Felix Galimi as Argentine dictator Juan Peron watched from the stands.

"En garde!" the director calls. The two fencers raise and extend their foils in a salute. Stepping into an en garde position, they scrutinize each

other through their masks.

"Fence!" commands the director. Clashing blades. Feet pound on the mat. . . advance. . . retreat. . . advance. Then a lunge!

"Against Galimi," shouts the director. "En garde. . . Fence!"

The clang of metal. Blades hit forcefully as Galimi attempts to avoid Krieger's persistent attack. Then like a cat measuring its prey, Galimi remains motionless. Krieger waits. Suddenly, Galimi advances rapidly preparing for a final thrust at Krieger's chest. The sound of the director's voice still echoes in Galimi's ears. Four touches have been called against him. One remains.

Powerfully, Galimi extends his arm only to be stopped by Krieger's blade. The point of Galimi's blade rides aloft as Krieger's foil zeroes into his target. "Against Galimi!" the director calls.

Argentina has lost. The Americans have claimed the gold medal in foil along with the gold medal in sabre and the silver in epee.

Juan Peron rises from his seat. The Americans have thrust at the heart of Juan Peron. Without a word, he walks directly to the door and leaves.

NOW THAT IT'S 1980 and nobody is going anywhere, what does this Olympic fencer think?

"We should back the president. But I'm in favor of establishing a permanent Olympic site where the Olympics began," said Byron.

"It's really a shame. The Olympics

give an athlete memories to last a lifetime. I once met an elderly man wearing a jacket with the Olympic emblem. When I asked him about it, he took out his wallet and showed me a stack of yellowed clippings. He had been a runner in the 1928 Olympics."

It isn't surprising Bill Rodgers sailed across the finish line winning his fourth Boston Marathon only to complain because he wasn't going to the Olympics. Even Bill Rodgers could use a few Olympic memories.

Jocelyn Krieger is a Southfield resident, freelance writer, music teacher and actress in broadcast commercials.

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Time and Place: Thursday, March 5th 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

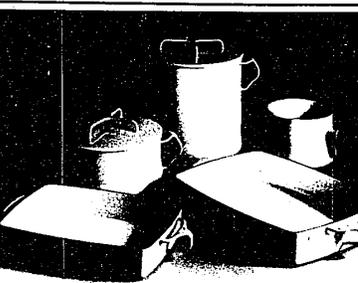
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