

## OLYMPIC TENNIS: SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

by Heiner Gillmeister

Sports history in general, and Olympic history in particular, are not exactly subjects which will make American publishers red hot with excitement. Despite favorable English language reviews of my *Olympisches Tennis* in the U.S. (see Roberta Park in *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 20 (2), Summer 1993, pp. 203-204; and Volker Kluge in *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, Vol. 1 (4), Autumn 1993, p. 28), Rainer Martens, president of the well-known Human Kinetics Publishers of Champaign, Illinois, has only recently reported the following: “[ . . . ] the USTA (United States Tennis Association) is not interested in subsidizing the publication of *Olympic Tennis*.<sup>1</sup> In discussing the book with USTA officials, they expressed doubt that there would be much interest in the book. It is discouraging to know that the governing body of the sport of tennis in the United States does not find the history of Olympic tennis of interest. Unfortunately, that leads me to the conclusion that we would not be successful in publishing this book.”

Fighting against the odds has always been considered a proof of good sportsmanship. We will, therefore, not be discouraged in the least, and add a few facts about Olympic tennis which have come to the light after the appearance of *Olympisches Tennis*, and which would have to be incorporated into the book, should an English language edition materialize after all. As has been described in *Olympisches Tennis* in some detail, the participation of John Pius Boland, twice Olympic champion in Athens in 1896, was by no means as incidental as has always been believed. In Oxford, Boland had been a fellow-student of the Greek Konstantinos Manos, the very same who, as a member of the Athens lawn tennis sub-committee, had been trying, with the assistance of Boland, to recruit competitors for the Athens Games from among the sporting circles of Oxford University. Boland was, firstly, an excellent cricketer, but certainly not a poor tennis-player either. This becomes evident, after all, from the fact that he beat his doubles partner, Friedrich Traun (GER), in the singles. This was no child's play, since Traun, as it now becomes more and more evident, was anything but a lawn tennis neophyte. Traun was one of the promising young tennis players from Hamburg who, as early as 1893 [!], had aroused the curiosity of Baron von Fichard, the famous chronicler of German lawn tennis in the early days and at that time the lawn tennis correspondent of the Berlin journal *Spiel und Sport*. When in that year, the Hamburg Uhlenhorst Club staged a tournament for young players, Traun, “equipped with perhaps too favorable a handicap”, was victorious in both the singles and doubles, and he would have captured the title in the mixed doubles as well had he not been guilty of an error often committed by the novice and which he, the Baron said, had often criticized: he had poached recklessly! Von Fichard expressed the belief, however, that the young man might profit from reading carefully his reports on earlier tournaments! Traun's victory in Athens proved that he had heeded well the Baron's advice. Later in the year of the first Olympics, Traun reached the third round at the Austrian championships in Prague and competed with considerable success in the famous Bad Homburg tournament. In addition, Traun had, well before the Games, stated his intention to enter the lawn tennis event, a very little known fact.<sup>2</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>1</sup>The USTA had been asked whether they would pay for the (rather modest) translator's fee for an English language version entitled *From Athens to Atlanta. A Hundred Years of Olympic Tennis 1896-1996*, to appear in 1996.

<sup>2</sup>This passage is a paraphrase from the English language version of my *Kulturgeschichte des Tennis* München: Wilhelm Fink, 1990. Although this book has also been very favorably received by critics, and a superb Japanese edition of it appeared last year, no American publisher could as yet be found.

In addition to this interesting printed piece of information, another photograph of Traun has come to light showing him, together with Kurt Doerry, another participant in the Athens Games, in his capacity of track & field athlete in a relay heat which took place on 22 September 1895 in Berlin Halensee (Figure 1: Reproduced by courtesy of the van Landeghem Sportarchief, Louvain, Belgium). The photograph was reproduced in the first volume of the famous German sporting journal *Sport im Bild*, Vol. 1 (1895), p. 225, and taken by a certain Dr. F. H. Fincke. By a curious coincidence, a picture showing the photographer as a member of the soccer (football) team of the Anglo-American Club (Berlin), has survived (Figure 2: third from left, back row, standing; Reproduced by courtesy of Richard Pitcairn-Knowles, Sevenoaks, Kent, UK). The picture (from a private collection in England) is a most precious pictorial document of early sports history in Germany, since it shows some of its most prominent pioneers in the 1890's. There is, for one, Andrew Pitcairn-Knowles (goalkeeper, center, front row, sitting with football in his lap), the son of a retired Scottish wool manufacturer from Wiesbaden. Pitcairn-Knowles, after studying with deliberation photo chemistry in Berlin, Freiburg, and Vienna with a view to publishing an illustrated sporting journal, became the editor-in-chief and owner of *Sport im Bild* (Sport in Pictures), the aforementioned journal and an indispensable tool for the Olympic historian in this country. There is, for another, Fred Manning (front row, sitting second from left). He was the brother of Dr. "Guss" Randolph Manning (see *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, Vol. 1 (4), pp. 38-39), and later, in 1904, founded the first German lawn tennis journal *Der Lawn-Tennis-Sport*. Mention should also be made of Dr. Ivo Schricker (back row, standing, second from left), an outstanding soccer (football) player who captained a German side on its tour to England in 1899 (where it was defeated disastrously in three matches), and later became Secretary-General of FIFA (1932-1950); and, last but not least, of Dr. Hugo Hardy (back row, standing, fourth from left, wearing a cap), the only foreigner to take part in the tennis event of the St. Louis Olympics of 1904. The two photographs prove, if anything, that around the turn-of-the-century, participants in Olympic tennis tournaments could be expected to be all-around sportsmen.



**Figure One**



**Figure Two**