



VICTORIAN OLYMPIC COUNCIL

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Tribute to Julius (Judy) L Patching AO OBE **January 4, 1917 – February 13, 2009**

Harry Gordon, honorary official historian of the AOC, writes:

Julius “Judy” Patching, who died on Friday at the age of 92, was not only the Grand Old Man of the Olympic movement. He was one of the most loved characters in all Australian sport, admired and respected by generations of athletes for the genial, down-to-earth wisdom of his leadership.

His active involvement with the Olympics began when he officiated as chief starter at the Melbourne Games in 1956 --- without a single false start. It ended just as perfectly in April last year, when he strode with pride as a torch-bearer to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, carrying the Beijing Olympic Games flame.

Between those events he had served close to the helm of the Australian Olympic Federation (now Committee), as secretary-general, for 11 years; had helped manage four Australian teams and led two of them, as chef de mission, to the troubled Games of Mexico City and Munich; had presided, with characteristically easy authority, as deputy mayor of Sydney’s Olympic Village in 2000; and had helped guide the fledgling Oceania zone into significant membership of the international Olympic movement.

Julius Lockington Patching was born in Geelong on January 4 1917. His was one of the early families in the Point Lonsdale area, and he remembered, as a child, watching the paddle steamers Weeroona and Hygia bringing holidaymakers to Queenscliff. His father Harry owned the local bus company; his grandfather ran the news agency.

He joined the Navy in 1934, aged 17, and served on a variety of ships, including the light cruiser HMAS Perth, which was later sunk in Sunda Strait ... “I was transferred before it happened --- a lot of my mates went down with the ship.” He was a sailor for 13 years, finishing in charge of the Navy’s physical education department.

During that phase of his life, two important things happened. He began competing as a teenager with the Geelong Guild athletic club, mainly in sprint and hurdle events, and ultimately became club captain; it was the start of a lifelong involvement with leadership in sport. And in 1940 he married Betty James, beginning an even more enduring commitment: a devoted partnership that lasted 63 years.



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As chief starter at the Melbourne Games, Patching fired the gun in the heats and finals that projected the sprinter Betty Cuthbert into legend (via three gold medals). He always rated Cuthbert --- he called her "Skipper" --- as his favourite athlete, although he maintained lifetime affection and admiration for Dawn Fraser, Shane Gould, John Landy, Ron Clarke and Herb Elliott.

Patching remained in close touch throughout his life with Cuthbert (who won a fourth gold medal in 1964, later became a victim of multiple sclerosis, and now lives in Mandurah, WA). She crossed Australia to attend his 90th birthday in Queenscliff, Victoria, an occasion celebrated by scores of family and friends, including athletes and administrators.

Judy Patching's great strength as a team leader was the amiable, but firm, rapport he enjoyed with athletes, whom he sensibly considered to be the most important element in the Games. As assistant general manager of the team in Tokyo in 1964, he took Dawn Fraser's side when she insisted on marching, contrary to orders, in the opening ceremony.

He was later able to talk Fraser into competing in the final of the 100 metres final, wearing an official Speedo swimsuit --- after she had earlier refused point-blank to do so; he was probably the only official she respected enough to allow herself to be persuaded to back down.

At the same Games, he defused what could have been an ugly incident after 12 transistor radios went missing in the athletes' Village. He told a busload of Australian athletes: "Unless the missing stuff is back within five minutes, the police will be here. I'm going to walk around the block. When I get back I expect them all to be returned." They were.

It was during Patching's first experience in full charge of an Olympic team --- in the ridiculously high altitude of Mexico City, at a Games threatened by riots and boycotts --- that the Australian sprinter Peter Norman was caught up in the notorious Black Power episode. He finished second, between the black American sprinters Tommie Smith and Juan Carlos.

On the victory dais Smith and Carlos each raised gloved fists and looked downwards during the playing of the US national anthem, in a gesture of racial protest which led to their expulsion from the Olympics. Norman, standing between them, wore a civil rights button and later expressed sympathy for their point of view.

When Patching was advised that authorities in Australia wanted Norman punished, he summoned him to his office in the Village. "Okay," he told him. "Consider yourself reprimanded. Now how many tickets do you want to the hockey?" That was his style.



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Patching was in charge of the Australian team in 1972 in Munich, scene of the most terrible deed in Olympic history: the massacre of 11 Israeli team members by Palestinian terrorists. There was talk of cancellation of the Games, but next day the IOC president Avery Brundage announced: "The Games much go on".

Patching didn't always agree with Brundage, but this time he had praise: "(Those words) brought everyone together," he said. "Brundage helped people realise that the bond in the Olympic movement was so much stronger for this intrusion."

Patching's day job then was as superintendent of recreation for the City of Melbourne. He left it after Munich to take up the full-time appointment as secretary-general of the AOF. There he combined with the president, Sydney Grange, to form one of the most effective administrative partnerships in Australian sporting history.

Both enlightened veterans of another, aggressively amateur age --- when the chook raffle played a part in financing the travel of athletes to Olympic Games --- they nursed the Olympic movement into an era of sponsorship, professionalism and the Australian Institute of Sport.

When Patching accepted his final hands-on Olympic task, as deputy mayor of Sydney's Olympic Village, his instruction was ... well, just be Judy Patching. When there were gripes, he was sought out. He always possessed a special capacity for listening, then solving problems --- often behind the scenes.

Patching was honoured with an AO in 1985 and an OBE in 1970 for his services to the Olympic movement. In 1983 the IOC awarded him its Olympic Order in silver.

Since his retirement from the AOF in 1985, Patching lived in Point Lonsdale, on a house built in 1960 on land given to him by his father. His beloved wife Betty died in February 2003. He is survived by his sons Bruce and Colin, six grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren.

Harry Gordon



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Julius (Judy) L Patching AO OBE

Judy began his involvement in sport in 1932 as a track and field athlete with the Victorian Athletic Association. From the outset he worked tirelessly to promote sport within Australia and overseas.

Some of Judy's key roles included:

- Chief starter and member of the Technical Committee at both the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne and the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth
- Athletics Section Manager at the Rome 1960 Olympic Games
- Assistant General Manager at the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games
- Australian Olympic Team Chef de Mission of both the Mexico City 1968 and Munich 1972 Olympic Games.

In recognition of his tireless contribution to sport, Judy was honoured with Life Membership of:

- Victorian Athletic Association
- Victorian Olympic Council
- Australian Olympic Committee
- Archery Society of Victoria
- Fencing Australia
- Athletics Australia.

Over the years Judy contributed to the Victorian Olympic Council in several senior roles:

- 1971 to 1973 Honorary Secretary
- 1974 Executive Member
- 1975 to 1985 Chairman
- 1986 to 1993 President.

He also was:

- Delegate, International Amateur Athletic Federation, 1960 to 1970
- Secretary General, Australian Olympic Committee, 1973 to 1985
- Superintendent of Recreation, City of Melbourne, 1966 to 1983
- President and Secretary General, Victorian Olympic Council
- Founding Secretary General, Association of Oceania National Olympic Committees
- Deputy Mayor, Olympic Village, Sydney 2000 Olympic Games
- Australian Olympic Team Chef de Mission, Centenary re-enactment of the Olympics in Athens, 1996.



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Other honours bestowed on Judy include:

- Silver Order, International Olympic Committee
- Award of Merit, Association of National Olympic Committees
- Australian Sports Medal
- Membership, The Sport Australia Hall of Fame
- First Oceania National Olympic Committee's Merit Award
- Award of Merit, Victorian Athletic Union.

His outstanding contribution to sport has also been recognised internationally with the presentation of an OBE in 1970. He was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1985.

He was appointed Honorary Life Patron of the Olympians Club of Victoria in 2003.

In 2007 the Victorian Olympic Council introduced the Julius L. Patching Sports Official of the Year Award to recognise the work of volunteers, coaches and officials in sport.