

# Lifetime Award to a “renaissance” man

By Philip Barker



A bronze bust of Pierre de Coubertin for 2017 ISOH Lifetime Award winner Jean Durry. IOC President Thomas Bach presented the award.

Photo: Markus Osterwalder

The Olympic Studies Centre in the Villa Centenaire was an appropriate place for Jean Durry to receive ISOH’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

It was fitting that IOC President Thomas Bach should make the presentation. Much of Durry’s working life has been devoted to ensuring that the philosophy of another IOC President, Pierre de Coubertin has reached a wider audience. “You really deserve this prize because of the depth of the work you have achieved in Olympic studies” said Bach. “It is from the bottom of my heart that I hand over this award. It is not only an award for your lifetime achievement, but an encouragement for your future achievements. Take this as an encouragement for the future.”

“It is greatly thanks to you that there is a quotation or a reference to Pierre de Coubertin in my speeches” said Bach. “I remember one of the first conversations we had together. You came up with the visionary idea. Whenever you discuss something to do with Olympism, you discover that Coubertin had discussed it already. I am always looking through his works and trying to find quotations.”

Durry had trained as a lawyer but became involved with a wide range of organisations. He first lectured at

the International Olympic Academy in Ancient Olympia at a time when accommodation was still in tents. He produced a long running radio series “Sport and Man” and also cultivated a deep interest in the world of cinema.

He was also a longstanding member of the IOC Commission on Culture and Olympic Education and was also Secretary of the International Fair Play Committee.

Durry recalled the time he had spoken to an earlier IOC President, Avery Brundage. Asked how much he had read of Coubertin’s work, Brundage replied “I read what I could”.

Durry recounted how he began the study of a man he described as a “visionary and a creator of Utopia. I started to discover and get to know Coubertin” he said.

The winner of the 2017 ISOH Lifetime Award had been an enthusiastic cyclist. He was inspired by reading about André Leducq who won road race team gold in 1924 and went on to win the Tour de France twice. Durry rode as an amateur for CS Montparnasse. His first book was *La véritable histoire des Géants de la Route*.

Cycling was, he said, a “sport of courage, tenacity and intelligence”. He spoke of his “simple pride” when in 1968, he was chosen as part of a cycling escort as the Olympic flame was carried en route to the Winter Games in Grenoble.

“If you are lucky enough to be in the stands of the stadium during an Opening or Closing Ceremony, you feel a human fraternity that is something quite rare. And if you have the extreme good fortune of being inside the Olympic Village, you see that there is between the athletes, as well as their coaches, a common language that goes far beyond all differences.” said Durry.

ISOH President David Wallechinsky paid a warm tribute to a man he described as a “renaissance” man. “Jean Durry has promoted interest in sport and the Olympics with his involvement in many organisations” he said and highlighted Durry’s 38-year tenure in charge of the National Sports Museum of France.

“Among his many achievements in the field of Olympic history, Durry collected for the Museum more than 100,000 documents going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century,” said Wallechinsky. In the spirit of the occasion, the ISOH President made his address in French, the first language of the Olympic Movement. ■