



# The Sport Media Pearl Awards Judges

## 1. Gianni Merlo, AIPS President (Italy)

Gianni Merlo was born in Vigevano, Italy in 1947. He began his journalistic career in 1967 with the magazine *Atletica Leggera* then became a contributor for newspapers including *Il Giorno*, *La Gazzetta del Popolo* and the *Corriere dello Sport-Stadio*.

In 1972, he held the position of television commentator assistant, first for Italian Swiss television and then for RAI, the national Italian network. In 1974, he was employed by Italy's leading sports daily newspaper *Gazzetta dello Sport* as head of the athletics, winter sport and Olympic department.

He has been a correspondent at 21 Olympic Games including 11 winter games: Innsbruck '76, Lake Placid '80, Sarajevo '84, Calgary '88, Albertville '92, Lillehammer '94, Nagano '98, Salt Lake City 2002, Torino 2006, Vancouver 2010, and Sochi 2014, and 10 summer games: Munich '72, Moscow '80, Los Angeles '84, Seoul '88, Barcelona '92, Atlanta '96, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and London 2012. He was present at more than 30 World Championships and European Championships in athletics and skiing.

In 1983, he edited two sport encyclopaedias for Rizzoli, the editorial group of *La Gazzetta dello Sport: Conoscere l'atletica* and *Conoscere lo sci*. Since 1990, he has been director of the magazine *Atletica Leggera* and has launched and edited two volumes entitled *Atletica* and *Sci*, which are part of the series *I grandi sport illustrati*.

Key achievements and milestones include:

- Member of USSI, the Italian sport journalists' association
- Chairman of the Athletics Commission since 1986 and President of UEPS from 1984 to 1988
- Chairman of IAAF press commission since 2004
- Member of the IOC Press Commission
- AIPS (International Sport Press Association) President since May 2005 with 153 associated national associations worldwide
- In 2008, co-wrote the book *Dream Runner* with Oscar Pistorius
- Re-elected AIPS President in 2009 during the Congress in Milan and for the third time, in 2013, during the Congress in Sochi



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**“Sport Media Pearl Awards play a very important role for the journalists’ profession that has recently faced difficult times. This event is an opportunity to show that journalism is still alive and still fighting for its principles. Sport story tellings embody also tales of life. In the awarded pieces, as well as in all submitted works, we can re-discover the pleasure of the sport as an instrument of global culture.”**

### **2. Jamil Mohamed Abd Al-Qader - President of Arab Sports Press Association (Jordan)**

Mohammad Jamil Abd Al-Qader Melhem is a pioneer in the sport media sector, whether in Jordan or throughout the Middle East.

During the last four decades, he has taken positions that have developed his career and created new generations of talented journalists in the region.

Melhem has been the Founder and Chairman of papers such as *Al Difa*, *Al Ra’l*, *Addustour*, *Al Sha’b*, *Al Arab Al Youm* and *Goal Daily*.

Melhem was also the Founder and Director of sports programs on Jordan TV from 1967 to 1990, Secretary General of the Jordan Football Association from 1974 to 1988, President of Amman Sports Club from 1984 to 1988, and a member of the Executive Board of the Olympic Committee for two decades.

Melhem has been the Vice Chairman of The Committee of Information in Arab Football Federation since 1980, as well as maintaining the role of President of Arab Sports Press Association since 2005.

On top of a busy career, Melhem has participated in many sport global forums, such as the Los Angeles Olympics 1972, the Moscow Olympics in 1980, the Seoul Olympics in 1988, and World Cups in 1974, 78, 82, 86 and 90.

**“Sport is life. It’s one of most the important aspects of human civilisation with the capability of gathering individuals and groups on easy, understandable, noble goals. Sport media is the strongest link between those fans and stadiums all over the world.”**

### **3. Vincent Amalvy - Global Head of Sports - AFP (France)**

Amalvy took over as Head of Sport at Agence France-Presse (AFP) four years ago. He is the



first former head of the photo department to take the reins of a major general service at AFP.

Amalvy started out in journalism after studying law. He joined AFP as a photojournalist in its Bordeaux bureau in 1985, before moving to Paris in 1990. He was promoted to Editor in Chief in 2000. He was handed responsibility for the France-Europe-Africa region in 2003, before becoming Editor in Chief of AFP's global photo operation in 2004.

In 2006, he moved to Washington as Chief Regional Photo Editor for North and South America and also had responsibility for organising AFP's coverage of global sporting events including the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup™. Amalvy is part of the Press Commission of the International Olympic Committee.

**“Journalism is first and foremost about passion. Hopefully the Pearl Award will reflect this passion and the way of sharing a moment of sport.”**

#### **4. Jaap de Groot - Chief Editor of the sport section - De Telegraaf (The Netherlands)**

de Groot was born in 1955 and holds dual Dutch and US nationality. He has been a reporter for *De Telegraaf* since February 1976 and the Chief Editor of the sport section since 2006. de Groot has reported from ten World Cups, nine European Championship and six Olympic Games - three summer and three winter.

Outside of The Netherlands, de Groot has had his work published in *Die Welt*, *France Football*, *Newsweek Magazine*, *Soccer America*, *World Soccer*, among other titles.

Other media work includes regular appearances as commentator on Dutch national radio and television, as well as several international media outlets in the UK and the US.

de Groot was involved in an international documentary in 1991 with Silvio Berlusconi that has been televised in more than 70 countries.

The testimonial matches for Johan Cruyff at Amsterdam ArenA, Dennis Bergkamp at the Emirates Stadium and Edwin van der Sar at the Amsterdam ArenA, were all organised by de Groot. He is also a former member of the FIFA Players Committee under Michel Platini and a former member of the UEFA Media Task Force.

**“Sport is life, in the fairest way. Everyone can judge if you fail or succeed - there's no escape. It's up to the media to judge this in the fairest way.”**



## 5. Donna De Varona, President of DAMAR Inc. (US)

Donna de Varona, President of DAMAR Inc., a sports marketing, production and consulting company, is a double Olympic gold medalist and former world record holder in swimming.

By the time de Varona retired from her sport aged 17, she had established more than 18 world records and fastest times, competed in two Olympics - the first as a 13-year-old world record holder - and was voted the most outstanding female athlete in the world in 1964-5.

Internationally, de Varona is recognised for her work as an Emmy award-winning news and sport journalist, having covered 17 Olympic Games. She has been appointed by three IOC Presidents to the Women in Sport Commission and served as Chairman of the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup.

She continues to work with many NGOs, including Prince Faisal's Generations for Peace Foundation and Prince Albert's Peace and Sport NGO, and has recently been on the Executive Board of the LA2015 Special Olympics Global Games Organizing Committee. This year, she served as the lead advisor in creating the International Women Athletes Business Network.

In the US, de Varona has served on the United States Olympic Committee Board and Foundation, the United States Soccer Foundation, the International Special Olympics Executive Board, and is an advisor to the US Department of State Empowering Women Through Sport initiative.

de Varona's relentless work on behalf of athletes as a Presidential appointee and US Senate Consultant through her focus on title IX and the Ted Stevens Olympic and Paralympic Sports Act has profoundly changed both the educational and athletic landscape for women around the world. Additionally, as the Founding President of the Women's Sports Foundation, the impact of her work continues to this day. Currently, she is the lead advisor to the EY Women's Athletes Business Network, a global initiative to help women athletes transition from competitive sport to other professions.

She is a member of the Seneca Falls Women's Hall of Fame, the USOC Hall of Fame and the International Swimming Hall of Fame. She has earned five honorary doctorates and is a graduate of UCLA.

**“The truest form of freedom is freedom of expression. The written and spoken word**



**can uplift, illuminate, celebrate, as well as expose people and practices that threaten the health and welfare of international sport. The Pearl Awards will ensure that those who seek truth and excellence will be recognised for their contributions.”**

## **6. Mark Gleeson - SuperSport television soccer commentator and freelance journalist (South Africa)**

Mark Gleeson is the Editorial Director of The Content Company and has 30 years' experience of covering sport in his native South Africa and across the African continent

He is also a world-renowned authority on African football and has been honoured for his services to football on the continent by the Confederation of African Football.

He is also a television commentator for SuperSport, winning the 2007 SAB Commentator of the Year and 2007 SAB Sports Journalist of the Year for his work with the satellite TV channel.

He is a correspondent for Reuters, World Soccer, BBC and several other outlets in Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Portugal, Switzerland and the US.

He was commentator for the South Africa versus France match in the 1998 FIFA World Cup in Marseille on SABC-TV, which holds the record as the most watched television event in South African TV history.

He has covered every World Cup since Mexico 1986, with the exception of Italy 1990, and every African Nations Cup tournament since Senegal in 1992.

He is the Founding Editor of the South African soccer magazine *KICK OFF* and worked on staff at *The Star* and *Mail & Guardian* as soccer correspondent and Sport Editor. He has run his own freelance business since 1996.

He serves on the jury of FIFA's World Player of the Year award.

He has been a member of media committees for both CAF and FIFA and is a former Chairman of the Sportswriters' Society in South Africa.

Gleeson, 51, is married with two teenage children and lives in Cape Town.



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**“Sportwriting is arguably among the most joyous of jobs. To be witness to daring, endeavour, resilience, sacrifice, rigour, talent, and to both triumph and defeat, is indeed a privilege. Those who can match the craft of the arena with the skill of their pens are also of a unique kind. It is a special ability for a sport writer to be able to detail the drama, explain the situation, paint a picture of the action and bring home to the reader all the nuances of what they have witnessed. Sometimes it can as exhilarating reading a brilliantly crafted report as it is watching the action.”**

### **7. Rainer Holzschuh - President of European Sport Media (Germany)**

Holzschuh was born in Germany in 1944 and after school went on to study law. Having taken a part-time role writing about sport with a small paper in Regensburg in Bavaria, he began his path up the sport media ladder.

By 1970, Holzschuh joined German daily newspaper *Augsburger Allgemeine* before moving on to *Kicker-Sportmagazin*, Germany’s most celebrated football paper.

Holzschuh has since gone on to work as the Head of Press Department & Public Relations for the German Football Association and became Chief Editor of *Kicker*, before being appointed as the paper’s publisher.

Holzschuh also works in other areas of media, making appearances on German TV and radio, as well as being involved in Germany’s Player of the Year and Coach of the Year awards.

**“The Pearl Award for outstanding coverage of sports has a worldwide significance, which is for the benefit of all parties - for sport, due to increased perception, for the consumer, due to imparting of interesting events, and last but not least for the prize-winning journalist, due to the highest possible appreciation of his role as a mediator between both poles.”**

### **8. Gary Kemper - IOC Consultant (US)**

Gary Kemper has had a 40-year career in international photojournalism, covering news and sport for United Press International, Reuters and the European Pressphoto Agency.

He was a photographer based in Brussels and London for UPI, covering stories throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa. He was the first editor hired by Reuters when the



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company began its news pictures operation in 1984 and was based in Hong Kong as Editor for Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

He returned to London as Editor for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Kemper served as the Photo Chief for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. From 2003 to 2011 he ran the North American operation for the European Pressphoto Agency.

Kemper is currently based in San Diego and works as a consultant for the IOC and for other major sporting events. He has been involved in 13 Olympic Games.

**“We are 16 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the still photograph remains one of the most powerful communication mediums through which to cover sport. The best sport photos encapsulate the best of sport - the peak action moment, the athlete’s prowess, the thrill of victory, and the anguish of defeat. Like the athlete, the photographer must anticipate the critical fraction of a second. Throughout my career, it has been an honor to witness both professions at their very best.”**

### **9. Shinsuke Kobayashi, Chief Editor of the Sports News Section, Kyodo News (Japan)**

Kobayashi has spent his entire career at *Kyodo News*, starting out in 1987 as a reporter for their sport news section.

Having travelled the world with the organisation, enjoying spells in London and New York as a sport correspondent, Kobayashi is now the Chief Editor of sport at *Kyodo News*.

**“Sport journalism is a microcosm of all reporting. It includes covering news, drama, entertainment, culture, economics, politics, international relations - and the actual sport. That is what makes our job so interesting!”**

### **10. Yao Ming, Special Olympics Board Member and Global Ambassador and Founder of Yao Foundation (China)**

The former Chinese professional basketball player and NBA legend was born in 1980 in Shanghai, and is currently studying at the Shanghai Jiaotong University.

Yao played for the Shanghai Sharks from 1997 to 2002 and was the first overall pick in the 2002 NBA Draft, where he went on to play for the Houston Rockets from 2002 to 2011.



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Yao is not only one of the most influential figures in China, but is one of the most well-known Chinese athletes in the world. The eight-time NBA All-Star was listed as one of the “100 most influential people in the world” by TIME Magazine. He also received the Medal of Honor and Outstanding Contribution Award from the General Administration of Sports in China.

Yao Ming founded the “Yao Foundation” in 2008, which aims to help unprivileged children in China. In 2007, Yao conducted a charity game together with NBA guard Steve Nash and since then the Yao Foundation has held two charity basketball games in 2010 and 2013. With the philosophy of educating children through sport, the “Yao Foundation Hope Primary School Basketball Season” was launched in 2012 and helps unprivileged children get involved in sport to be healthy, optimistic and confident. To date, 79 Hope Primary Schools and nearly 60,000 children have participated.

### **11. Neil Wilson - Athletics and Olympic Correspondent of The Daily Mail for 25 years (UK)**

Neil Wilson covered athletics at the UK's *Daily Mail* from 1979 to 1986 and was the paper's Olympic and athletics correspondent from 1991 until retirement.

Between 1986 and 1991, Wilson was the athletics and Olympic correspondent for *The Independent*.

Wilson was the editor of the British Olympic Association's Official Report of the 1976 Olympic Games and Sportswriter of the Year 1985 at the British Press Awards.

The 2012 Olympic Games in London was the 11th summer Olympic Games he had covered, and he has reported on nine winter Olympic Games.

Has written or co-written nine books on Olympic sport.

**“Many larger nations have domestic sport media awards, but the Pearl Awards for the first time offers proper recognition and global honour to a profession whose words and pictures enhance the business of sport.”**