



Official 2017 WOCF postcard (500 printed)

## The 23<sup>rd</sup> World Olympic Collectors' Fair ~ Bratislava 2017 ~

by Mark Maestroni

Remember the “Miracle on Ice” at the 1980 Olympics when the US men’s ice hockey team snatched the gold medal from the clutches of the perennial favorites, the Soviet Union? Well, over the weekend of 8-11 September, we saw another miracle – this time in Bratislava where the Slovak Society of Olympic and Sports Collectors, hosted the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Olympic Collectors’ Fair (WOCF). Not only did they manage this feat in three short months, but they did it with style and panache! As president of the organizing committee, Branislav Delej freely admitted he hadn’t had a good night’s sleep since taking on the organizing job after both Baotou, China and Budapest, Hungary withdrew as hosts.

The nexus for all this Olympic collecting mania was the NH Gate One Hotel which not only served as the venue for the fair, but also the show hotel. It’s modern amenities and comfortable hotel rooms were well-priced for fair goers.

Events got underway on Thursday as table holders began to trickle in, most arriving through Vienna’s airport which was a mere 40 miles west of Bratislava.

Gathering in the second floor convention space to pick up their credentials, table holders sipped a delicious dry white wine made from the Devín grape by the Hubinsky winery in the hills above Bratislava. For the oenophiles among you, the Devín grape was

made in 1958 by crossing the floral Gewurztraminer grape with the peppery Roter Veltliner. Devín gets its name from a ruined castle near Bratislava. If you should stumble across a bottle at your local wine store, don’t hesitate taking it home to serve well-chilled with a plate of carpaccio or your favorite goat’s milk cheese.

Goody bags were presented to each of the nearly 135 registered participants from 29 countries around the world. In addition to the show pin, attendees also received a handsome – and handy – navy blue canvas messenger bag with the show logo on the front. I spotted plenty of people putting their bags to good use during the fair.

As someone steeped in the graphic arts, I was most impressed by the extensive array of printed matter featuring the fair’s colorful logo. Naturally the three different fair pins bear the insignia, but there also were roll-up banners, posters, a show program, official postcard, and even a small pane of personalized stamps issued by the Slovak Post Office!



The hurley burley of the show floor on Friday.



Posing in front of the Olympic Flag signed by many of the Fair attendees: Branislav Delej, President of the WOCF Organizing Committee; Ms. Patricia Reymond from the IOC; Roman Babut, President of AICO; and Velimir Adzic, Secretary of the WOCF Organizing Committee.



Roman Babut (sitting on bench with an unknown Slovak red-head) and AICO Vice President Massimiliano Bruno pose with one of Bratislava's famous downtown statues: a Napoleonic soldier named "Hubert."



Three official pins issued by the WOCF. Only the Official pin (at left) was for sale.

Quantities issued and prices (if they were sold) of the many collectible items are as follows:

Official (white) logo pin - 500 made (€10)

Organizer pin - 20

Participant pin - 120

Official Fair postcard - 500 (€3)

Stamp sheet - 80 sheets of 8 "Motif of the State" T2 50g personalized stamps with 4 each of two different labels (€15 per sheet)

The fair occupied the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> floor exhibition hall with tables arranged in long rows. Once in operation, the show floor appeared very busy. According to the organizers, about 200 members of the public availed themselves of the free entrance to the fair, mingling with the WOCF participants in buying, selling, and "window shopping" the vast display of memorabilia and pins. A few philatelic dealers remained very busy catering to the Olympic and sports philatelists. I must confess to having found a couple of interesting items for my gymnastics collection!

Friday afternoon featured the official Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Fair attended by the President of the Slovak Olympic Committee, Mr. Anton Siekel; General Director of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Ms. Bozena Gerhatova; representative of the International Olympic Committee, Ms. Patricia Reymond; Director of the Slovak Olympic and Sport Museum, Ms. Zdenka Letenayova; and AICO President Roman Babut.



The Slovak Post Office was present at the show on Friday (only) where a special show postmark could be used to cancel mail. The postmark was available just that one day: 8 September 2017. The official stamps (below) paid the rate for domestic mail. Two stamps paid the rate for cards to the USA.



Special personalized sheet of 8 definitive stamps plus 8 labels/vignettes for the fair. Only 80 sheets were created.

Following the close of the show on Friday, attendees were invited for a tour of the city which included a visit to a special month-long exhibition of sports and Olympic philately and memorabilia entitled “Find Your Own Hobby” at the Bratislava City Museum. There was also time to explore the downtown plazas with their famous life-sized statues depicting every-day people from different eras. My favorite was Hubert, a Napoleonic soldier who is reputed to have fallen in love with a Bratislava girl and settled down in the area to produce, of all things, sparkling wines, the most popular brand of which is named for him.

A sight-seeing “train” took us on a guided tour of the city including the imposing Bratislava Castle, once the seat of Queen Maria Theresa of Austria. From the grounds, one had a spectacular view of three countries – Austria, Hungary and Slovakia – which come together at Bratislava.

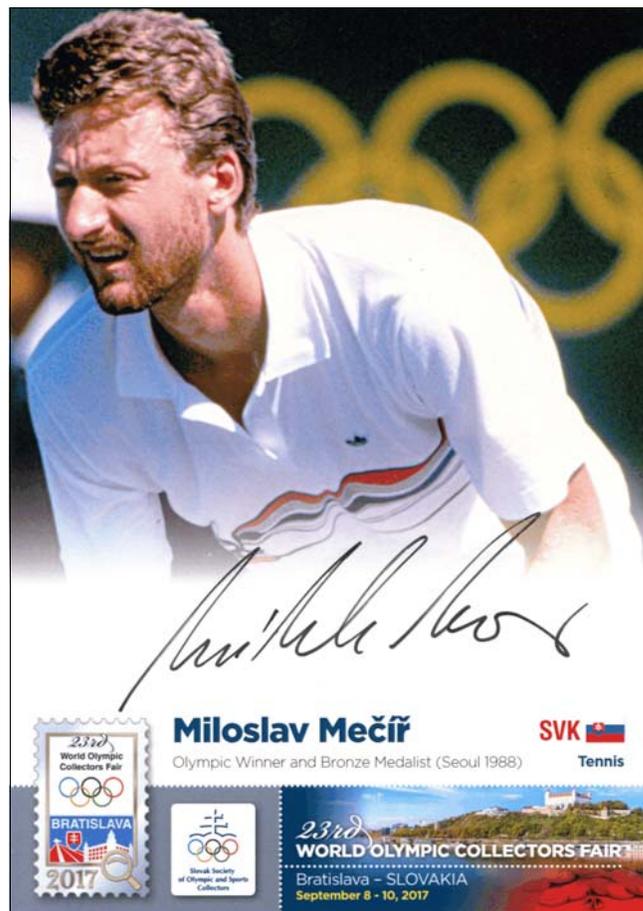
Last year’s Gothenburg World Olympic Collectors’ Fair inaugurated a practice that seems to have now caught on with WOCF organizers: creating special cards designed for visiting Olympians to autograph.

The Bratislava fair held two sessions. The first, on Friday afternoon, featured Milos Mecir, tennis singles gold and doubles bronze medalist in Seoul 1988; Juraj Mincik, bronze medalist in slalom canoeing at 2000 Sydney; Zuzana Rehak-Stefecikova, twice a silver medalist in trap shooting (2008 Beijing and 2012 London); Jozef Gonci, a two-time bronze medalist in rifle shooting at the 1996 Atlanta and 2004 Athens Games; and judoka Jozef Krnac, silver medalist at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

A second autograph session, conducted on Saturday at noon, was attended by silver medalists from the 2016 Olympic Games at Rio in the K4 1000m kayak sprint (Erik Vlcek, Juraj Tarr, Denis Mysak) and their coach Peter Liker. The fifth member of the team, Tibor Linka wasn’t able to attend.

Activities culminated on Saturday as each table holder at the show was awarded a Certificate of Participation by the IOC representative, Patricia Reymond, and the President of the show committee, Branislav Delej.

The evening’s festivities began with a small silent auction in the downstairs lobby area headlined by a 1992 Barcelona Olympic torch, and accompanied by a number of participants medals and some IOC badges courtesy of the Olympic Museum. Competition was spirited, especially between the many Chinese collectors at the fair.



*This card for Miloslav Mecir was one of a set of six created for the autograph signing sessions by Slovak Olympic medalists on Friday and Saturday.*

The customary Gala Dinner followed, with the participation of the President of the Slovak Olympic Committee. It appeared that most of the table holders attended, enjoying the wide array of appetizers, entrees, salads and desserts served buffet style. And of course more of that delicious Slovak wine was offered!

It should be mentioned that AICO’s Executive Board took this opportunity to hold extensive meetings which included an open session on Friday to which representatives of the AICO member clubs were invited. Meetings of the Pin, Memorabilia, and Philately Committees were also conducted.

Judging from the positive comments, the fair was a success with both buyers and sellers. Most seemed particularly pleased with the quality of the hotel accommodations and moderate rates which included a substantial buffet breakfast.

Certainly a big thank-you is due the organizing committee – and in particular President Branislav Delej and Secretary Velimir Adzic – for the first-rate 2017 World Olympic Collectors’ Fair.

See you all next year in Los Angeles!

