Inside the 2026 World Olympic Collectors' Fair

by Mark Maestrone

The 2026 World Olympic Collectors' Fair was most certainly a group effort, organized jointly by SPI and the Olympin Collectors Club. Jim Goddard, VP of Olympin, and I served as co-presidents of the event, which took us the better part of two years to organize. In the end, it all came together with everyone gathering at the Antlers Hotel in Colorado Springs for this extravaganza of Olympic collecting.

From Friday through Sunday, 22-24 May, the Heritage Ballroom was a sea of Olympic memorabilia, pins, stamps and pretty much anything "Olympic" one might think of. There were 55 tables displaying collectibles from every Olympic Games beginning with the first Games of the Modern Era in Athens, Greece, in 1896 through the just completed Olympic Winter Games held in Milan and Cortina, Italy, in February. Over on one table were three Olympic torches just waiting to be snapped up by some astute collector, while across the room there were autographs from Olympians and other sports personalities from around the globe. And if you wanted to leap into the unofficial Olympic sport of pin trading you had only to close your eyes and point in any direction to spot a likely pin trading opportunity.

This was the 29th WOCF and the fourth to be held in the United States after Chicago (2011), Lake Placid (2015) and Los Angeles (2018).

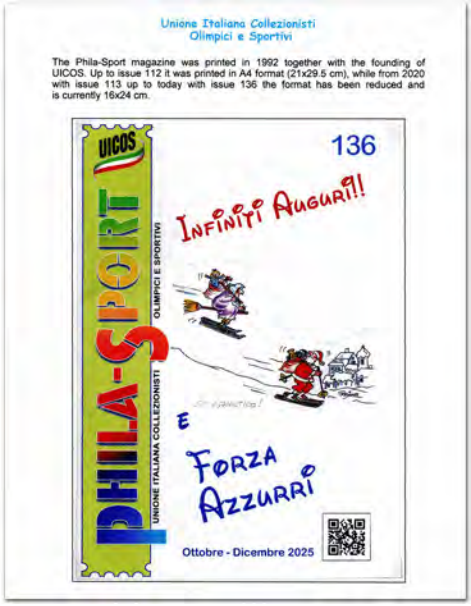
The inaugural fair was held way back in 1994 in Lausanne, Switzerland, home of the International Olympic Committee. It's no coincidence, then, that the IOC has long been a staunch supporter of the Fair which helps to preserve the culture and heritage of the Olympic Movement. The primary sponsor of the fair is AICO, the International Association of Olympic Collectors, an organization recognized by the IOC.

(Left) The Opening Ceremony included remarks by Doug Price, President and CEO of Visit Colorado Springs – Olympic City USA. WOCF 2026 Co-President, Jim Goddard, is at left. (Right) Conrad Klinkner with his 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games exhibit – the highlight of the philatelic display. *[Opening Ceremony photo: Pam Litz]*

Scenes from the exhibition. (Left) The exhibit frames were in a prominent position inside the exhibition space allowing attendees and visitors easy access. (Right) The stage at back doubled as "autograph central" for Olympians. 1984 Women's Olympic gymnast Michelle Dusserre was signing autographs when this photo was taken.

In the early days of the WOCF, philately predominated. Over the intervening years, the fair has broadened to embrace all the other collecting disciplines – pins, memorabilia and numismatics. While philatelic output from countries participating in the Olympic Games (as well as non-participants) has been declining, there were some stellar philatelic displays for everyone to enjoy. SPI's own Conrad Klinkner brought his seven-frame Display Class exhibit, Games of the Xth Olympiad – Los Angeles 1932. A Large Gold winner at national-level exhibitions, the exhibit also contains silver and bronze Olympic medals awarded to competitors at the Los Angeles Games. Countless other unusual and colorful pieces of memorabilia are scattered among the philatelic rarities. Judging by the attention it received from both attendees and visitors, the exhibit was clearly a popular feature of the fair.

Two special postmarks created for the Fair commemorated Opening Day on 22 May and Museum Day on 23 May. Shown here are the special souvenir postcard and cacheted cover.



The 8-page UICOS presentation opened with an overview of the Italian society's organization and some of its activities. The cover of their colorful quarterly publication, "Phila-Sport" from October 2025 was included.

AFCOS, the French member of AICO, celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2024 just in time for the Paris Olympic Games. They accompanied a brief history of the founding of their society with photos and philatelic documents.

SPI's 16-page society frame, which was originally developed for the NY2016 international, takes a more "educational" approach by explaining the different ways one can build an Olympic collection. This is followed by a listing of the 20 most popular philatelic elements that collectors seek (e.g. mint stamps, coils, specimens, meters,machine slogans, etc.).

Olympic City USA decal, one of the many goodies in the Fair's goodie bags provided to each table holder.

The remaining five philatelic frames (a big "thank you" to the Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library in Denver for loaning the Fair some of their 16-page frames) included a two-frame display of 1932 Lake Placid Olympic Winter Games first day covers from SPI member Andrew Urushima's collection, and a one-frame overview of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games that I brought along.

An opportunity was afforded each of the 18 member clubs of AICO around the world to send eight pages highlighting their club's own activities and to publicize themselves to the world. Three clubs took advantage of the opportunity. AFCOS, the French collecting group, used their allotment to review their 30-year history of preserving Olympic heritage in France.

The Italian society founded in 1992, which goes by the acronym UICOS (Italian Olympic and Sports Collecting Union), contributed pages showing an interesting mix of philatelic and other collectibles representing the interests of their members. For those new to Olympic collecting, SPI contributed a full-frame "primer" on how to form an Olympic collection.

Representatives of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) were also on hand to apply the two special postmarks that were created for the Fair. The first of these depicted the logo of the WOCF 2026 (but without the Olympic rings, which the IOC would not allow to be used). This Opening Day postmark was dated 22 May 2026.

(Clockwise from top left) One of the grassy quadrangles between training buildings. Monument to "The Olympic Truce. Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic Ideal. Presented to the United States Olympic Committee by the Truce Foundation ...". USA Boxing training center with four rings.

Our tour guide at the USOP Training Center, Paralympian Mike Tagliapietra, flanked by AICO members Rufin Schullian and Christophe Ait-Braham. Mike is holding a thank-you gift from AICO presented by Christophe.

The second special postmark commemorated Museum Day on 23 May in honor of the USOPM. An image of the Olympic Museum was prominent surmounting the museum's logo. While only the Opening Day postmark was available on the first day of the show, both postmarks could be obtained on Day 2. The USPS was not present on Sunday, the final day of the show.

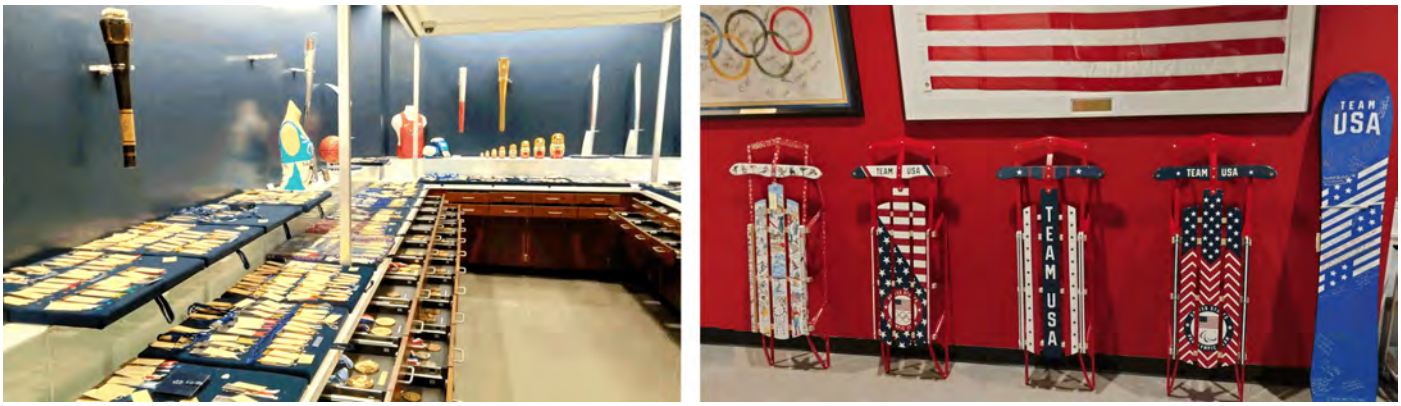
At the end of this article readers will find more information on how to order the special cacheted covers (generously donated by SPI board member, John La Porta), official show postcards, and show pins (the only collectible which includes the Olympic Rings). Collectors may submit their own covers and cards for cancellation from the USPS during the customary 30-day grace period.

Colorado Springs was chosen as host city in no small part because of its close association with the Olympics. The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC), the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of the USA, is headquartered here, as are the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Training Center (USOPTC) and the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum (USOPM). It's no wonder that Colorado Springs is also known as "Olympic City USA"!

Each of these organizations played an important role in the planning of events for WOCF 2026.

Those that arrived early were treated to a tour of the US Olympic & Paralympic Training Center. This is where so much of the behind-the-scenes "blood, sweat and tears" are shed as athletes prepare for elite competition. I had visited the facility way back in 2001; much had changed since then.

Our tour guide was Paralympic shooter, Mike Tagliapietra (Rio 2016 Paralympian), who is a resident athlete at the training center. We were able to tour many of the training facilities. The mammoth weight-training gym had the latest in machines including those specially designed for use by Para athletes. Next we peaked into a special room which allowed athletes to train in environments with



Inside the Crawford Family Olympic Archives at the USOPC. At left, torches, Olympic winners medals, participants medals and Olympic badges galore – literally a treasury of Olympic history! The archives included a great deal of 3-dimensional artifacts as well. A selection of US Olympic luges, plus a snowboard, are at right.

More from the Archives. (Clockwise from top left) I've always liked the design of the Salt Lake City 2002 Olympic Winter Games winners medals. Seen here are the Silver and Gold men's ice hockey medals, and a Bronze medal from men's 1000 m speed skating. (Right) A display of mascots and Olympic badges. (Bottom left) At center is Amanda McGrory, the Curator of the collection and our tour guide. With her are two of our international collectors, Christian Kunz from Germany (left) and Rufin Schullian from Italy.

different elevations and humidity/temperature levels – especially helpful when away competitions took teams to extreme climates and high elevations. Mike showed us the Shooting center where we watched both Olympic and Paralympic athletes practicing. A couple of Mike's Para-team mates explained how they were accommodated in different events. At the wrestling center, one of the wrestlers, whom Mike corralled, answered our questions about Olympic wrestling and the differences between Freestyle (his specialty) and Greco-Roman. Following the tour – and much to his surprise and delight – Mike was presented with a gift from AICO President Christophe Ait-Braham. Our final stop: the USOP Training Center Gift Shop, of course! I couldn't resist picking up some 2028 LA swag.

On Friday evening, the USOPC archives were opened for a private viewing by attendees. Five small groups of about 15 collectors received a personalized tour by the curator of the Crawford Family U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Archives, Amanda McGrory. The 7-time Paralympic medalist in track & field guided us through what has to be one of the most spectacular collections of Olympic torches, winners medals, IOC badges, and other Olympic memorabilia ever assembled by a private collector. Gordon "Gordy" Crawford, now retired from the global investment industry, donated his collection to the USOPC back in 2018. The star of the show? Probably the truly fabulous 1932 Lake Placid Olympic Winter Games gold medal. Crawford's six-figure auction bid was enough to grab this from the IOC. "They had a budget and I didn't," he later admitted.

While the tours of the archives were shuttling back and forth on a 15-minute schedule (the USOPC was a short 5-minute walk away), the Silent Auction

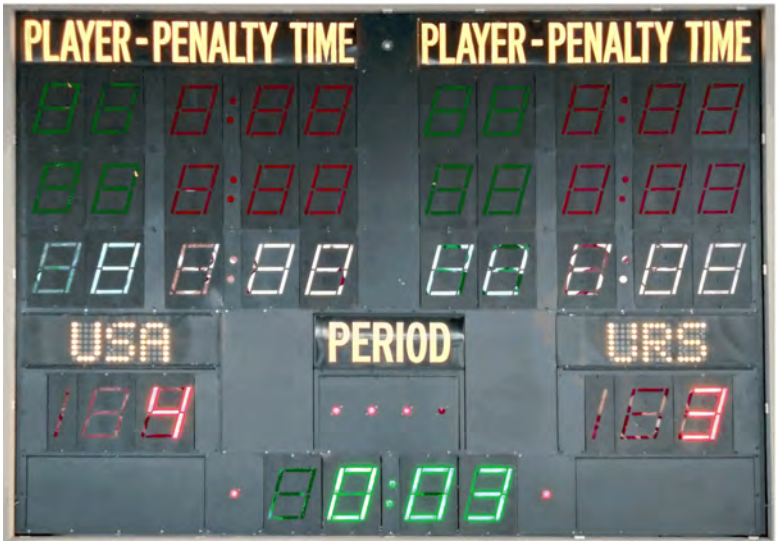
The two hottest lots at Friday's Silent Auction were basketballs autographed by the entire men's and women's gold medalist teams at Paris 2024: Team USA. The men's ball (left) sold for $1200, while the women's sold for $350.

and light dinner were in full swing back at the hotel. Collectors were very generous with their donations to the auction, as were the IOC (who provided some IOC Session badges), and various NSFs (National Sports Federations) such as USA Basketball and USA Wrestling. The biggest ticket items on offer: basketballs signed by the gold medalists at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games – Team USA for both men and women. The men's ball went for a whopping $1200, while the women's ball was hammered down for a more modest, but no less significant, $350. In all, the Silent Auction took in over $4,000 which certainly beat all previous US-held WOCFs.

Another beautiful Rocky Mountains day dawned on Saturday with plenty of activity on the floor. Over the course of the Fair, we had five Olympians visit: Jack Elder (1976 Sapporo – Men's Luge); Michael Theimer (1976 Montreal – Men's Shooting); Kara Winger (2008 Beijing, 2012 London, 2016 Rio, 2020 Tokyo – Women's Javelin); Jeanne Golay (1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta – Road Cycling), and Michelle Dusserre- Farrell (1984 Los Angeles – Silver Medal, Women's Artistic Gymnastics Team Event). Some of the Olympians took advantage of the free tables that were offered to them. Kara Winger brought a virtual swap-shop of uniforms and other items to sell which attracted plenty of attention from collectors! When I offered her a 1996 US Centennial Olympic Games postal card to autograph, Kara grinned and pointed out that javelin throwers in the Decathlon (which was the event depicted on the card), were notorious as being rather poor javelin throwers.

The Fair's special events culminated with our tour of the USOPM and Gala Dinner on Saturday evening. Attendees had 90 minutes to roam freely around the museum prior to the start of the dinner served on tables napped in red, white and blue in the ground floor atrium.

Those Olympians visiting the Fair were happy to autograph items. (Clockwise from top) Michael Theimer (shooting), Michelle Dusserre (gymnastics), Kara Winger (javelin).



The U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Museum had something for everyone. (Clockwise from top left) Team USA uniforms from different Olympic and Paralympic Games were on display throughout the museum. For surfing fans there was the wildly colorful red, white, and blue board belonging to Carissa Moore, winner of the first gold medal in the women's shortboard surfing contest at the Tokyo 2020 Games. Last, but not least, a 1980 Lake Placid Olympic Games scoreboard mounted on the museum wall pretty much says it all. Frozen at the 3-second mark, hockey fans could relive that iconic moment at the Olympics when, with just 3 seconds to go in the third quarter of the USA-USSR match, Al Michaels delivered his iconic "Do you believe in miracles?! YES!" call!

The museum experience begins as you ride the elevator to the top floor where you are greeted with a magnificent view of Pikes Peak through the cab's rear window. As you begin to wend your way around and down the ramped walkways, the history of the Olympic Movement in the US is revealed with both static and video displays. Look one way and spot the colorful surfboard that Carissa Moore used to win the first gold medal in woman's shortboard surfing at the Tokyo 2020 Games. Pivot in another direction and marvel at the Rubik's Cube signed by 2024 Paris men's gymnastics superstar, Stephen Nedoroscik – the Pommel Horse Guy – who relaxed on the sidelines of the competition solving his cube in under 20 seconds. Feeling particularly energetic?

The museum included a number of interactive exhibits in which visitors could try their hand at different sports. Here, Rufin Schullian gives archery a go.

The USOPM atrium provided plenty of space for our Gala Dinner. The video screen against the back wall displayed a dynamic montage of Olympic action!

Fly down a skeleton run, sprint down a 100-yard lane, or let fly some arrows in an archery simulator. And the movie at the end of the tour is not to be missed!

As I exited the exhibits, I encountered the museum's CEO, Marisa Wigglesworth. Marisa and I had been working for some time on the Fair details. Congratulating her on such an impressive presentation, I remarked that what particularly struck me was how even-handed the displays were in covering both the Olympics and Paralympics. She smiled broadly, nodded her head, and said, "yes, that was precisely what we were after!"

The Gala Dinner, a buffet-style meal with three different serving stations named for Olympic cities, was well received. The closing remarks by Jim Goddard, Marisa Wigglesworth and myself, culminated in tributes to Olympin Club founder, Don Bigsby, by both Olympin and AICO. The Olympin Club created The Don Bigsby Collectors Award which is to be "presented to a member of the Olympin Collectors' Club whose passion for the Olympic Games and whose extraordinary efforts have resulted in a significant advancement of the hobby of collecting and preserving Olympic artifacts and history." The first recipient is Don Bigsby. AICO gives an annual Olympic Collector Award. The 2026 Award was given to Don Bigsby as well.

While Don couldn't attend the Fair this year due to health issues, both awards will be presented to Don by Jon Becker, Olympin's treasurer and a member of the WOCF 2026 Organizing Committee.

As attendees said their farewells on Sunday afternoon and the last tables were packed away, there was a sense that WOCF 2026 had accomplished exactly what it set out to do. Collectors from around the world had come together not only to buy, sell, trade, and exhibit, but also to share stories, renew friendships, and celebrate the rich heritage of the Olympic Movement.

Speaking on behalf of the Fair's Organizing Committee, I would like to thank everyone who attended from the US and around the world. The Organizing Committee and volunteers worked tirelessly to make this show possible. I'd especially like to thank my co-president, Jim Goddard. The Fair would never have come together without him!

Accolades also go to our wonderful supporters: Emmanuelle Campanelli of the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage; Amanda McGrory, and the USOPC; Marisa Wigglesworth, and the USOPM; and Ray Schulte of Schulte Sports. To our two sponsors – RR Auction and Ingrid O'Neil Auctions – a big thank you as well.

I'd also like to thank the Executive Board of AICO – Christophe Ait-Braham, Branislav Delej, Massimiliano Bruno (who was unable to attend) and Rufin Schullian. The Organizing Committee deeply appreciated your faith in us despite these very challenging times.

See you all next year at the 30th World Olympic Collectors' Fair!

The museum's CEO, Marisa Wigglesworth, at left, with my co-president, Jim Goddard, and his wife, Diane.