

The Olga Dorfner Cup

America's First Woman World Record Holder



The Olga Dorfner Cup is one of ISHOF's most prized treasures. This beautiful ceramic vase is believed to have been made by Chinese American Artisans in San Francisco and was presented to Olga, as the women's National Sprint Champion, on July 4, 1916, in San Francisco.

The vase stands nine inches tall and is eight and half inches across. The Dragon shaped handles are painted in gold, as are the rim and base. On one side is a hand painted portrait of Olga, surrounded by a wreath of gold leaves. Each leaf is individually pinned to the ceramic by two gold pins. On the other side, the award is described in golden calligraphy.

Olga Dorfner was a Philadelphia beauty who brought glamour to the World of Swimming. She was featured in "Vanity Fair" and in the Sunday supplements as the cover girl bathing queen of her day. Olga also has the distinction of being the first American woman to hold a World Record.

Miss Dorfner was the star of the Philadelphia Turngemeinde, a remarkable group of lady swimmers that included Jack and Grace Kelly's mother, Margaret, double Olympic winner and Hall of Famer Betty Becker, and 1917 100 yard freestyle champion, Gertrude Artelt. This group of beauties, coached by Hall of Famer, Fred Cady, a former circus strongman and artist, were the principal rivals of Hall of Famer L de B. Handley's New York Women's Swimming Association. Frequently, who won the big ones depended upon whether the judges were home or neutral. Under the circumstances of this rivalry, Miss Dorfner cherished most her letters of congratulations, coaching tips and encouragement to break new records from de B. Handley.

She won Nationals in the 50 (1916) in 30.2 seconds, the 100 (1916, '17 & '18) and the 220 and 440 in 1917. On July 21, 1919 Olga Dorfner set a World Record for the 200 meters free-style in a 100 yard course at Neptune Park, in Alameda, California. That year, she and Hall of Famer Duke Kahanamoku were picked as swimmers of the year in the year-end newspaper polls. Her 100 yard freestyle time that year, 1:06.2, was also hailed as a World Record.

As with her chief rival at the time, New York's Claire Galligan, Olga Dorfner missed out on a chance at the Olympics due to war (1916) and matrimony (1920).

