

Nashville Boxing Coach Receives Prestigious USOC Award

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – On Friday, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) presented Dr. Christy Halbert with the Olympic Torch award, recognizing her significant impact on the U.S. Olympic Movement. Halbert, a boxing coach and advocate for women's Olympic boxing, was honored during the 2011 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Assembly in Colorado Springs, Colo.

About the Award

The Olympic Torch Award, established in 1965, is presented to an individual who has made a positive impact on the Olympic Movement in the United States and has contributed to promoting the Olympic ideals throughout the country. Notable Olympic Torch award recipients include 1977 - Gerald Ford, U.S. President, 1996 - Bonnie Blair, Olympic speedskating champion ('88, '92, '94), 2000 - Bud Greenspan, Olympic film-maker.

The 2011 annual Assembly took place September 22-24 in Colorado Springs, Colo., at the Antlers Hilton hotel, with more than 450 participants. Through this year's theme of "Inspired Excellence," the Assembly brought together the various constituents of the Olympic Family, as well as individuals and organizations associated with the Olympic Movement in the United States, to encourage communication, collaboration and to create new initiatives supporting the Olympic Movement. The master of ceremonies was 2002 Gold medal figure skater Sarah Hughes, and the keynote was delivered by longtime Olympic television host Bob Costas.

About Christy Halbert

Halbert entered the sport as a professional fighter when women were not allowed to box as amateurs in the United States. She now coaches boxers and coordinates gym instruction at Boxing Resource Center, a non-profit organization she founded in 2003. The gym is dedicated to training youth and young adults in Olympic-style boxing.

Halbert has personally led four boxers to 16 national championships in the three most prestigious domestic competitions: US Nationals, National Golden Gloves, and National PAL. Her students have also found success internationally, claiming gold on the Continental level, as well as dozens of silver and bronze medals at domestic and international championships.

After earning the highest certification level from USA Boxing, the sport's national governing body, Halbert became eligible to coach Team USA in international competitions. She was the first US woman coach to serve as a head coach for Team USA in a World Boxing Championship. In 2001 she led Team USA in the first-ever Women's World Championships, and has since helped Team USA earn medals in seven Continental Championships, the tournament prelude to the PanAmerican Games, which will officially open their doors to women boxers this October.

A testament to her international coaching success, Halbert is the only US coach--and the only woman--to be invited by the International Boxing Federation to serve in their development programs, "Road to Dream." In 2010 Halbert served as an assistant instructor in Bridgetown, Barbados, and earlier this year was promoted to head instructor/coach for the first-ever World Championships for junior and youth women boxers in Antalya, Turkey.

Coach Halbert, known for her innovative approach in the very traditional field of boxing, has designed new boxing tournaments formats, including a round-robin model now being used by USA Boxing. She is also the author of *The Ultimate Boxer: Understanding the Sport and Skills of Boxing*. In her extensive work domestically and abroad, she has served as a coach and as a member of commissions and committees; she has authored legislation, served as an advisor to boxing organizations; and often acts as an ambassador for the sport, all in an effort to bring parity to women's boxing. Halbert is recognized for her multi-disciplinary contributions to the sport, including writing position papers, producing videos, conducting research, creating marketing materials and educating about the value women's boxing brings to the Olympic program. She is widely considered the foremost authority on women's boxing.

Halbert says, "It used to bother me that people would only talk about my boxing accomplishments in terms of women's boxing. I've always felt that my contributions have been good for the sport overall. I finally came to realize that a lot of people don't really know what to make of the work I do. For them, it's easier to label me as a 'women's coach.' I am proud of the fact that I have expertise in women's boxing, and that I'm known for my work in amplifying the voices of women athletes."

Coach Halbert is Chair of the USA Boxing Women's Task Force, an advisory body she has served on since 2004. She was appointed to the International Federation's Women's Commission in 2007, and continues in that role. After serving on the Continental Women's Commission, Halbert was appointed its Chair earlier this year.

Born in Morrilton, Ark., Halbert has lived for many years in Nashville, Tenn. She received her bachelor's degree in Mass Communication and Sociology from Western Kentucky University in 1992, where she was a scholarship athlete and Conference Academic All-American. She earned her Master's Degree (1994), and Ph.D. (1999) in Sociology from the University of Kentucky. While a graduate student she became the first person to publish on the topic of women professional boxers, work that emerged from her master's thesis. She has coached a number of sports on the college and recreation level, and has coached boxing for over 17 years.

Making History

Halbert explains, "The goal was to help boxers' voices be heard. They wanted a chance to compete in amateur boxing's most prestigious stage. I discovered that most people had no idea that women's boxing wasn't in the Olympics, so education was the first step. Then there was a lot of misinformation, so it was critical to correct information, and share facts."

In 2008, boxing was the only sport without women athletes, the next year an IOC Executive Committee vote lifted the ban. The summer Games of 2012 will feature women in all sports. In boxing 36 women will compete across three weight categories, and 150 men in 10 categories.

Halbert says, "It's a start. The world will be impressed by women boxers. They are competing in one of the most difficult sports, in a sport that most cultures still consider an exclusively masculine domain. They are fierce athletes, and have incredible resolve just to get to the point where they are able to climb through the ropes to compete."

The United States Olympic Committee's 2011 Olympic Torch Award acknowledges Halbert's pioneering contribution, leading to the inclusion of women's boxing into the Olympic Games.

Excerpts from Dr. Halbert's Acceptance Speech (9/23/11)

I am honored and inspired by this award. This award is a sign that the USOC values all athletes, and sees the promise of an inclusive Games.

2012 will be the first-ever Olympic Games in which women will participate in all sports. The addition of women boxers is long overdue, and the significance of what they embody inspires all of us to accept challenges, regardless of the barriers in front of us.

A big part of being a boxer is just answering the first bell, accepting the challenge, sometimes full of surprises, and having the focus to adapt to any opponent.

All athletes deserve an opportunity to participate in their chosen sport, to reach their fullest potential in the sport of their choosing, to be respected in the sport they make their avocation.

Recently I coached junior and youth boxers for our International Federation's development program. During a month on the Eastern coast of Turkey, I was surrounded by young athletes hungry for competition, and for the opportunity to learn and excel in their sport -- boxing. I coached women boxers from Vietnam, Rwanda, Madagascar, Guatemala, Syria, Afghanistan, and many other countries, who now have the opportunity to participate in boxing. The Olympic nod gives legitimacy to their athletic pursuit, and I often find myself reflecting on the effect their experience as boxers has on their lives beyond the ring.

I believe that at its best, Olympic sport is transformative -- it empowers, challenges and inspires on the micro and macro levels. At their best, women Olympic boxers embody the struggle that we all face regularly, to be our best, despite the barriers in front of us; to find ways to improve ourselves, to challenge others in a fair fight, and emerge from the contest a better person.

###

Below: Halbert says a few words in acceptance of her 2011 U.S. Olympic Torch award. Sarah Hughes, 2002 Gold medalist in figure skating, presented the award.

