

OLYMPICS; U.S. Olympic Chief Quits Over Her Lies On College Degrees

By FRANK LITSKY MAY 25, 2002

Sandra Baldwin, the first woman to become president and chairman of the United States Olympic Committee, resigned yesterday, a day after she acknowledged that she had lied on her résumé about her academic credentials.

Mrs. Baldwin's resignation was the latest embarrassment for the American Olympic movement, and the latest example of a sports figure inflating professional and academic achievements.

According to Mrs. Baldwin's U.S.O.C. biography, she graduated from the University of Colorado in 1962 and received a doctorate in American literature from Arizona State in 1967. On Thursday, she acknowledged that she left Colorado in 1959 after three years at the university, and received a bachelor's degree from Arizona State in 1962. She said she completed doctoral studies at Arizona State, but did not have time to do the dissertation because she had to care for her two children and run the family farm after her parents died. Mrs. Baldwin subsequently taught English at Arizona State for 11 years before starting a real-estate firm in the early 1980's.

She disclosed the discrepancies on her résumé after she learned that a University of Colorado student who had interviewed her for an alumni publication was going to reveal the information.

On Wednesday night, Mrs. Baldwin left a meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and returned to the United States. On Thursday, in a letter to members of the U.S.O.C. executive committee, she said: "I do not think I have hurt the credibility of the U.S.O.C. I have certainly hurt my own, and I ask you to carefully consider the best course of action for the organization."

Yesterday morning, Mrs. Baldwin, 62, held a teleconference with the 23 members of the U.S.O.C.'s executive committee. Later, while the committee was deliberating without her, she resigned, saying in a statement released by the U.S.O.C., "I accept full responsibility for the mistakes I have made."

"I should have changed it a long time ago, but once it was published it got paralyzing," Mrs. Baldwin said. "Now I'm going to have to live with it for the rest of my life."

Bill Stapleton of Austin, Tex., a U.S.O.C. vice president and former Olympic swimmer, took part in the teleconference with Mrs. Baldwin.

"She was on for 15 minutes, and questions were asked," he said. "She was embarrassed. She said it was a big mistake and said she should have corrected it. Nobody asked for an explanation. When she hung up, we discussed it and recommended that it be referred to the ethics committee. By then, I think she had made the decision to resign."

She resigned, effective immediately, during a telephone call with Lloyd Ward, the U.S.O.C.'s chief executive officer. In making the announcement of her resignation, Mr. Ward said: "She did what she considered best for the U.S.O.C. and the Olympic movement."

The U.S.O.C. president is deeply involved in pulling together the disparate governing bodies of the various Olympic sports to set goals and policy for each Olympic Games. Mrs. Baldwin's departure is not expected to change the U.S.O.C.'s direction significantly because preparations are already under way for the 2004 Summer Games in Athens.

Mrs. Baldwin became the U.S.O.C.'s 22nd president at a difficult time for the American Olympic movement. Allegations were swirling that international Olympic officials had been bribed to award the 2002 Winter Games to Salt Lake City; several high-profile sponsors had withdrawn their support for the Games; and the U.S.O.C. was having financial difficulties.

Despite a figure-skating scandal that threatened to become all-consuming, the Salt Lake Games were widely regarded as a commercial and competitive success, and Mrs. Baldwin was praised for her role in salvaging them.

Under U.S.O.C. bylaws, the executive committee will meet as soon as possible to nominate one or more candidates to replace Mrs. Baldwin. A mail ballot will then be sent to the organization's 119-member board. If no candidate receives a majority vote, the executive committee will submit one nominee to the board in November. One committee spokesman said a decision on the next president could be reached within weeks.

One prospective nominee is Paul E. George of Wellesley, Mass., a former president of the United States Figure Skating Association. Mr. George, one of the U.S.O.C.'s five vice presidents, lost a close vote to Mrs. Baldwin in the 2000 election for president. Another potential candidate is Bill Hybl, Mrs. Baldwin's predecessor.

Until a successor is chosen, the bylaws specify that the vice president-secretariat serves as acting president. She is Marty Mankamy of Colorado Springs, a board member since 1990.

Mrs. Baldwin, a real-estate broker in Phoenix and a former president of USA Swimming, had served the U.S.O.C. as treasurer and vice president before she was elected in December 2000 to a four-year term as president.

Since February, Mrs. Baldwin has been one of four American members of the International Olympic Committee. Dr. Jacques Rogge, the I.O.C. president, said Mrs. Baldwin would automatically lose her seat.

The resignation was yet another setback for the Olympic movement in the United States. Thomas K. Welch and David R. Johnson, once the chief organizers for the Salt Lake Winter Olympics, were indicted on federal charges of misusing funds to induce I.O.C. members to award the Games to Salt Lake City. A federal judge threw out the charges, but the government has appealed.

In 1991, Robert Helmick resigned as the U.S.O.C. president after he was accused of using his position for personal gain.

The resignation marked another instance of sports figures inflating their résumés. In December, six days after being named head football coach at Notre Dame, George O'Leary resigned after acknowledging he had lied about his football and academics achievements.

On May 2, a day after he moved from Colorado State to Vanderbilt as the women's basketball coach, Tom Collen resigned after discrepancies were discovered in his résumé. The TimesMachine archive viewer is a subscriber-only feature.

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A version of this article appears in print on May 25, 2002, on Page A00001 of the National edition with the headline: OLYMPICS; U.S. Olympic Chief Quits Over Her Lies On College Degrees.