

## **Robert (Bob) N. Singer: The Person and the International ILader.**

### **A Tribute to Singer's Life**

International sport psychology would have a very different development without Bob Singer. He combined his high scientific qualities that made him one of the most prolific and well-known authors in our field with a unique character, social skills, and leadership qualities.

When he approached for the first time the International World of SP, he had already published *Motor learning and human performance: An application to physical education skills* that would become a main reference book in the years to come. That was at the 2<sup>nd</sup> ISSP World Congress of Sport Psychology held in Washington, in 1968. The modern period of this professional field had just started in 1965, in Rome, Italy, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress and the inception of the International Society of Sport Psychology during that same event. A young 33 years old scholar eager to learn, work whilst being an active contributor, had met a beginning Society formed by enthusiastic people also motivated to develop and affirm a new scientific and professional field. This was also the years of the Cold War, which was a problematic international period that affected the World in most areas. Mutual conflicts and suspicions were characteristics of the interpersonal relationships also in science and sport. The ISSP Managing Council included representatives from different geographic regions, always aiming at a difficult political balance between the Eastern and Western political blocs. Nominations of members came from inside the managing council, rather than from the General Assembly. The organizational pattern was not the democratic one Bob was accustomed to in the United States. He would attend the following congresses in Madrid (1973) and Prague (1977).

Despite being a citizen of the United States – the leading country representing a Western ideology – Bob would reveal an outstanding capacity to establish positive relationships and work with colleagues from an Eastern ideology of the Iron Curtin, all of whom accepted and respected him. His humor, open smile, juvenile sparkle eyes, and passion to be with people, as well as his intelligence, empathy qualities and open minded in regard to cultural diversity made him a high level diplomat and perfect ambassador of sport psychology, ISSP, and even his country. For example, in

cooperation with the Department of State (Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs) and the Russian Embassy, two leading Soviet sports psychologists, Dr. Nicolai Khudadov and Dr. Albert Rodionov, were hosted by Bob Singer at Florida State University from October 16-19, 1974. They visited three other universities during their two-week stay in the United States. The purpose of their trip was to share and exchange ideas and to enhance mutual understanding between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The itinerary and arrangements for the Soviets in Florida were completely taken care of by Bob, which included presentations and interactions with students and faculty from many departments at Florida State University, observation of research laboratories in psychology and movement sciences, interaction with athletic coaches, sightseeing, and socializing with Florida State.

Another example is Bob's leadership was his visit to Nigeria, in 1987, where sport psychology was very incipient despite the deep commitment of Bola Ikulayo, who founded the Nigerian Association of SP in 1985. In that same year Bob had nominated her as candidate to the ISSP Managing Council and she had been elected to the MC that she served for 20 years. Later, in 2013, she would found the African Society of Sport Psychology. Singer, then ISSP President, accepted Bola's invitation to present a keynote to the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Sport Psychology in Nigeria, that was organized by NASP led by Bola. Robert Singer's impact was much higher due to his interactions with students, professionals and athletes of the Commonwealth team. She often mentioned the outstanding importance that Bob had both to Bola's life, and to African sport psychology, as stated in her biographic book *First in Her Class* (Olu-Osayomi, 2013):

*Professor Robert (Bob) Singer has influenced Ikulayo in different aspects of her life, and she holds him dearly in her heart. For Ikulayo, this was part of the big plan of God for her. Professor Singer thereafter became the greatest influence on Ikulayo as well as her mentor. (p.143)*

These personal and diplomatic capacities certainly would decisively influence his first election to the ISSP Managing Council, during the General Assembly of Prague, in 1969. He would develop his outstanding contribution to the development of this

Organization and International SP for the following 20 years until 1997, in Israel, when he finished his last term, as Past-President. The ISSP Congress in Marrakesh (2013) would be the last one Bob attended. He had been elected President in Copenhagen (1985), and reelected in Singapore (1989). However, during the second year of this last term the MC asked Bob to lead the Society as Interim-President due to the unexpected death of President Denis Glencross just one year after he'd been elected. Singer adopted this role until the following annual meeting where it was decided to nominate the most senior Vice-President Atsushi Fujita as Interim President for the rest of the term. Bob Singer's leadership was determinant to overcome this dramatic situation.

Bob had a vision and a plan when he was elected President in 1985. His actions would lead the ISSP to a mature stage with a modern and democratic organizational functioning and statutes. Various working committees were formed led by the Vice-Presidents in order to improve efficiency and productivity. The ISSP was promoted internationally by means of special brochures and scientific events. Relationships were expanded to geographical areas where SP was not as developed as in Europe and North America, which led to the advancement of the field in South America, Asia, Australia and Africa. Continental SP Societies resulted from this movement, including the Asian-South Pacific Association of SP, founded by A. Fujita as a result of Bob's suggestion and stimulus. The two World congresses during his two presidential terms were held in Singapore (1989) and Lisbon, Portugal (1993) that were not traditional SP regions, leading to an important development of SP in those countries and areas of influence. The number and quality of ISSP related publications improved as it was the case of the International Journal of Sport Psychology, the ISSP Position Statements and the ISSP Newsletter, as well as *The Sport Psychology* and the Spanish Journal of Sport Psychology that were endorsed by ISSP. The *Handbook of Research of Sport Psychology* (Macmillan, 1993) edited by Singer, Murphey & Tennant, and *The Handbook of Sport Psychology* (Wiley, 2001), edited by Singer, Hausenblas & Janelle were two major books endorsed by ISSP that had tremendous international impact and influenced subsequent research and publications, worldwide.

The Italian Ferruccio Antonelli had mobilized professionals and scientists internationally that were interested in the psychological side of sport and founded ISSP. The Czechoslovakian Miroslav Vanek had the difficult task of coping with a political crisis inside the Society and spent a lot of energy to make bridges between

representatives from the Eastern and Western blocks. Bob Singer stabilized ISSP, promoted it worldwide, gave it a functional structure, and focused its mission in the scientific and educational development, using publications and conferences as means. The following presidents and MC's have found their tasks facilitated.

Bob enjoyed life, people, and making friends:

*...what great experiences in other cities and countries, and with wonderful people. I have been very fortunate. What a treasury of memories. (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 13, March, 2018)*

*... Beverly and I are doing well, overcoming health issues as they arrive. With age, there are more and more challenges. But at least we are living!! We attend many social events and go out quite a bit. We enjoy the grandkids, 7 and 9, who live in Houston, and wish we could see them often. (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 13, March, 2018).*

Probably one his characteristics that mostly attracted and delighted people was his positive approach to life. During the period of the Irma hurricane in 2017, he wrote in one of his emails:

*I'm taking a break from all the work needed to be done to try to protect our house and pool. Both Florida coasts will be extremely damaged. We live in the center of the State, a little north of Tampa/Orlando. Right now, it is predicted that the eye of the hurricane will go north from Key West/Miami, and through Gainesville, which will be very damaged – very high winds and flooding – Sunday late night or early Monday morning. (...) We are also packing small bags with some clothing, drug prescriptions, valuable items, and whatever, in case we have to try to evacuate quickly. And then how to take care of our dog... (...) Quite an experience. We do have plenty of serious drinking possibilities in case we are too stressed! Being in the army in the 1950s and stationed in Korea at the dividing line between North and South for 16 months, sleeping in a small building in the same sleeping bag, with no electricity, no real toilets, and in the*

*incredible heat in the summer, very cold winters, and hurricane season in the early Fall, I am prepared to survive many challenging situations. (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 09, September, 2017).*

And his humor was always present, even after updating about health problems, as he wrote in one of his emails...:

*Pretty exciting life! What next? At least my dog is great company, the deer appreciate their buffet dinners, and the birds are excited enjoying their bird food. And Beverly and I get along very well. Amazing. Who would have expected that we would last so long, 35 years?... (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 14, June, 2017).*

Amazingly, his smile and eyes kept the brightness of irreverent youth. So did his mind despite the dissonance with his aging body that he kept active as far as he could until the end.

*I have made decisions to improve how I can set priorities about health matters. I'm doing better in general. I can do typical stuff – what the average 80 year old can do. But, as you know, I have always thought of myself as a 20 year old! What a conflict which didn't exist previously. (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 31, August, 2016).*

*Beverly and I are very active in the community going to many performing arts events and socials. I continue to be "mature", which means boring, judged by my past behaviors. However, I'm OK with slowing down. I have no special travel plans, as I think I have all that past travel out of my system. My days and evenings are relaxed, and quite a difference from past years. Now the goal is stay reasonably healthy with these advancing years. (personal mail to Sidonio Serpa, 1, March, 2017).*

Bob was a highly organized person and professional that tried to anticipate situations and reactions. He used to make plans as much as he could. However, he confessed that he had not planned living so long... That is probably one reason for taking so much advantage of all his life situations and communicating such energy to everybody around. Altogether, planned and unpredictable events gave him a sense of accomplishment and he must have come happy to the last minute of his life.

*He has reflected many times on the wonderful opportunities and experiences he had over the years as a member of ISSP. Friends in all parts of the world remain friends. He has felt fortunate in being able to share in the growth of sport psychology in general and the ISSP more particularly during past decades, and hopes that his contributions have been meaningful, useful, and influential.*

(Serpa & Pons, 2015. P.366)

#### References:

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