



**FEDERAZIONE  
ITALIANA  
TWIRLING**

Disciplina associata al **C.O.N.I.** – Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano  
Membro della **W.B.T.F.** - World Baton Twirling Federation  
Membro della **C.E.T.B.** - Confederation Europeenne de Twirling Baton

C.F. : 05589560019  
P. IVA: 12930280156  
Sede Nazionale: Oleggio (No)

Sede Operativa :  
Segreteria Generale  
Via Novara, 1 – C.P. 64  
28047 Oleggio (No)  
Telefono 0321-998688  
Fax 0321-998688  
E-mail : [segreteria\\_generale@twirlingitalia.it](mailto:segreteria_generale@twirlingitalia.it)

**PRESIDENTE FEDERALE**  
Peppino Giamminola

Oleggio, 20th July 2011

Dear Sandi,

Herewith please find historic memory of the early beginning of the WBTF, a copy of the first Board of Directors and a DVD about the first Twirling World Meeting held in Venice on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1979. That was a very important historic moment from which the preparation of the first World Championship in Seattle in 1980 started.

I'm sure you'll appreciate all this with my best regards.

Yours,

Peppino  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

## The origins of the World Baton Twirling Federation and of the Baton Twirling

*Homo Mundus Minor* said the Roman philosopher Severino Boezio: *Man is a world in miniature* and this small but huge world, in our opinion, doesn't only refers to ideas and achievements of his present time, but also everything that tells about his past, as well as the experiences of men lived before him and passed on to future generations. Man's life consists not only in actions and ideas which are useful to the present and the future, but that are interwoven with memories. The memories of events personally experienced will be the topic of the WBTF origins.

Beginning this history by saying the word "majorette" is not a prejudice since the origins of twirling are linked to this name. How many majorettes performed in the last century all over Europe and the USA accompanying music bands to give more luster and folklore to their performances! Among the first constituent members of the WBTF here are some names: Scottish Majorettes Association, Italian Federation of Majorettes, British Majorettes Association; anyway the word "twirling" was already used: Japan Twirling Committee, US Twirling Association and Twirling Institute of Holland.

The first international meeting of the representatives coming from seven nations was held in London on August 10, 1977. It was promoted by Mr. Ken Sasser, ITTI (International Twirling Teachers' Institute) President and by Mr. George Walbridge. England, Scotland, the USA, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Japan were present. During that first meeting the Italians Mr. Giamminola and Mr. Nobile made a proposal to change the concept on the figure of majorettes (that was supposed to be a beautiful young girl to entertain the audience) to be considered as an athlete, a gymnast who did physical exercises with the interpretative skills of the artistic and rhythmic gymnastics along with the use of a tool called twirling baton.

With evident satisfaction this concept was accepted and approved by all present. The meeting established a few basic points: preparing an appropriate statute, involving twirling technicians to prepare a technical regulation, increasing the number of participating nations and setting a second meeting in April 1978 (Canary Islands).

So it happened and the following year, in the Isle of the Great Canary, the leaders of Japan, USA, France, Belgium, Scotland, England, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and Italy approved the first statute and regulation prepared by some technicians. It was also decided to organize a first non-competitive event called Open to be held in Italy, in Abano Terme and Venice in the spring 1979. Last but not least the first Federal Board was appointed. The members were: President, the American Lawyer Mr. John Kirkendall; Vice President, the Italian Mr. Peppino Giamminola; Secretary, the Scottish Mrs. Audry Montgomery; Treasurer, the American Mr. Jack Crum; Deputy Secretary Treasurer, the Japanese Mr. Aiko Takayama. Present were Mr. Paul Hofknes (Belgium), Mr. Ernest Turner (England), Mr. Juergen Ernst and his wife Barbara (Germany), Mr. Dick Van der Werf (Holland), Mr. Henry Gitz (Switzerland), Mr. David Guy (France) and Mr. Umberto Nobile (Italy) too.

The first meeting took place April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979 in Venice, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. To the astonishment and enthusiasm of the large public (how many tourists!) in Piazza San Marco, a new exciting sport event was held. Among the founders great emotion was evident as they were aware that the dream expressed two years before in London had come true.

The WBTF meetings followed one another with a steady rhythm starting from the one held in Abano: October 1979 in Paris, Seattle August 1980 (in this beautiful city on the Pacific the first completion on a trial

basis during and together with the U.S. Championship). Further meeting in Nice (here the first real competition in August 1981) while the following Championships were held later in Tokyo (1982), Milan (1983), Calgary (1984), Frankfurt (1985), Turin (1986), Paris (1987) and gradually all others so far until today!

Additional chapters in the history of the World Baton Twirling Federation and further news will be reported by "current" experts with the help of the latest media.

For a better understanding of the WBTF beyond names, dates and places above mentioned, we think it's important to remember the origins of the tool that the gymnasts use to twirl. It's a story which starts from two different paths as two are the versions that indicate location and time of its birth.

#### The first more relevant version

Towards the end of 1800 in the international world and especially in schools and in private and public gyms, you felt the need to develop the different parts of the human body in a better way. Not with surprise the modern Olympics were born at that time and with the Olympics new forms of gymnastics, performed not only with specific movements of the body but also with the introduction of small tools (balls, ribbons, hoops, clubs and ropes nowadays used in rhythmic gymnastics). However, the first tool introduced for these exercises was a stick of wood called *Jager* by the name of the Swiss engineer who created it.

As documented it was used by some Italian associations in the '20s such as the "Sempre Avanti" in Bologna, "Pro Novara", "Pro Vercelli" and "Ignis Ardens" in Oleggio. In Oleggio there is a museum in which some specimens are preserved. Later in the '30s, because of unexplainable reasons, its use as a teaching tool was put aside or reduced. At the same time a more manageable and competitive steel stick was set in the USA and gradually throughout the world.

#### The second and most striking version

Authoritative testimonials of American friends say that the stick had its origins in the Samoa Islands where skillful dancers used bright colored sticks which were called *batons* because of the influence of the French domination. Even today in the USA the tool is called *baton* as it was imported from the beautiful islands in the Pacific Ocean. Its development related to twirling and regardless of the birthplace is linked to the American nation where bands have been playing led by a dealer since the '20s. The dealer gave orders coordinating music, choreography and movements with a stick made of rattan wood with a finely worked sharp brass knob.

As time passed by, the dealers improved and were willing to have comparisons with their colleagues. The first competition was held in 1930. The sticks were modified to produce rotations, flips and relative sockets and in the years they became easier to be managed and took the form of the present *batons*. In these few notes, it seems to us nice to remember the first and the second placements: Mr. George Walbridge, owner of a batons company in Florida and Mr. Ray Gaedke, great designer of new batons (his friend Walt Disney wanted him to work in his offices). They became later our friends and speakers at the events we are now talking about. At the same time in the USA the first groups of *majorettes* were born (from the words Drum Major, instrument that guides the movements and the performances of the music bands). They were the

first groups of girls who performed with ability and choreography using both the baton and other objects such as the pompoms, flags, mock rifles and drums. They performed during spectacular parades scheduled in some cities during important events of the national life. In the '30s and '40s there were on one hand groups of *majorettes* that carried on mostly spectacular activities and, on the other hand, dealers committed to compete in events of acrobatic skills. Later on the sad time of the Second World War...men were sent to the battlefield and women, the *majorettes*, took their place and prevailed after 1945. Starting from the second half of the last century many of those girls, supported by clairvoyant leaders, have been aiming to transform twirling into a sport making in that way a deliberate choice and devoting their efforts to the technique of twirling and to competitiveness.

We end these few notes with the hope that they can be useful for the historical knowledge of the WBTF origins and of the discipline of the tool called *Baton Twirling*.

Umberto Nobile, some years gone by, Vice President of the European Twirling Federation