

# THOMAS KELLER MEDAL

2025 Media Guide





Thomas Keller and his son, Dominik Keller

# About the Thomas Keller Medal

The Thomas Keller Medal is the highest distinction in the sport of rowing. It recognises an exceptional international rowing career as well as exemplary sportsmanship and a legendary aspect. The award was named after the late President of World Rowing (at the time FISA), Thomas Keller (Thomi). Born in 1924, Keller was elected President of World Rowing in 1958, at the age of 34 and was then the youngest-ever president of an international sports federation.

Following the 1988 Olympics, Thomi Keller spontaneously awarded the FISA Medal of Honour to Peter-Michael Kolbe and Pertti Karppinen to commemorate one of the greatest rivalries in the history of the sport and recognising their exceptional talent and sportsmanship. This shaped the idea of the Thomas Keller Medal which was initiated by the Keller family following Thomi's passing in 1989. It was first awarded to the great Norwegian oarsman Alf Hansen in 1990.

## Selection Criteria:

The following five factors are taken into consideration when selecting the successful recipient:

1. Success at the international level, e.g. medal count taking level of competition into account;
2. "Type" of career e.g. overcoming obstacles, shortcomings;
3. Technical mastery of the sport e.g. success in different boat types as well as sculling and sweep rowing;
4. Sportsmanship e.g. respect for others, attitude, character, "smiling win or lose";
5. "Legendary" aspect e.g. how the rower is perceived by the rowing world and the world outside rowing

In principle, the medal may only be awarded to someone within five years of their official retirement.

## Privileges of the Keller Medal Winners:

A winner of the Keller Medal receives, in effect, a lifetime accreditation to all World Rowing Championships. Each year the winners will receive an invitation to complete the appropriate accreditation request form from World Rowing and are entitled to an accreditation for access to the boat area and a ticket in the President's Grandstand.

## Thomas Keller Medal Panel members

Chair:

Dominik Keller

Vice-chair:

Matt Smith

Members:

Jean-Christophe Rolland

Tricia Smith

Martin Cross

John Boulton

Lenka Dienstbach-Wech

Frida Svensson

Sarah Cook

Olaf Tufte

## About Thomas Keller

*Adapted from a piece by Christopher Dodd, journalist and historian at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, Great Britain*

Thomas Keller was born in 1924. He was elected President of FISA in 1958, and at the age of 34 was then the youngest president of an international sports federation ever. At that time he was still an active athlete himself, and he made it his principle always to give priority to the competitors' interests, an axiom which has been a guiding principle for his beloved sport ever since.

A chemical engineer, industrialist and company director, he presided over the Swiss conglomerate for sport timing, "Swiss Timing" for more than a quarter of a century (from 1972 to 1989). He was also President of GAISF, the General Association of International Sports Federations from 1969 to 1986.

In his youth, Thomi was a gifted skier and was a member of the Swiss university team for combined Nordic skiing and ski-jumping. It was in rowing, however, that he truly excelled. He was Swiss champion five times in the single and double scull, and a bronze medallist in the single at the 1950 European Championships.

Many of the changes made during Thomi's term as President still live on until today. The first thing he did was improve the standard of umpiring. Lane marking was introduced at the Olympic regatta on Lake Albano, Italy, in 1960. The rules of racing underwent a major overhaul in 1961. Early in the 1960s, FISA created a flag of its own of five oars in the five Olympic ring colours. The flag can still be seen floating over the victory ceremony pontoon during World Rowing events.

Through these times, the men's and women's European Championships were brought together, and the World Championships were introduced.

Championships for lightweights and regattas for Under 23s were also introduced. The FISA development programme began with support from Olympic Solidarity in the 1970s. In 1976, women entered the Olympic rowing arena.

Athletes were Thomi's pride and joy. He followed every championship and Olympic race, kept a close eye on officials, knew every detail of procedure and equipment, and greeted every established international by his or her first name.



# Thomas Keller Medal Winners

**2024** Richard Schmidt (GER)

**2023** Caryn Davies (USA)

**2022** Mahe Drysdale (NZL)

**2021** Olaf Tufte (NOR)

**2020** *There was no award in 2020*

**2019** Kim Brennan (AUS)

**2018** Eric Murray & Hamish Bond (NZL)

**2017** Katherine Grainger (GBR)

**2016** Caroline & Georgina Evers-Swindell (NZL)

**2015** Iztok Cop (SLO)

**2014** Drew Ginn (AUS)

**2013** Eskild Ebbesen (DEN)

**2012** Vaclav Chalupa (CZE)

**2011** Jueri Jaanson (EST)

**2010** James Tomkins (AUS)

**2009** Kathrin Boron (GER)

**2008** Elisabeta Lipa (ROU)

**2007** Mike McKay (AUS)

**2006** Agostino Abbagnale (ITA)

**2005** Matthew Pinsent (GBR)

**2004** Nico Rienks (NED)

**2003** Peter Antonie (AUS)

**2002** Marnie McBean (CAN)

**2001** Steve Redgrave (GBR)

**1999** Silken Lauman (CAN)

**1999** Kathleen Heddle (CAN)

**1998** Roland Baar (GER)

**1998** Kerstin Koeppen (GER)

**1997** Thomas Lange (GER)

**1997** Jana Sorgers (GER)

**1997** Carmine Abbagnale (ITA)

**1997** Giuseppe Abbagnale (ITA)

**1996** Rolf Thorsen (NOR)

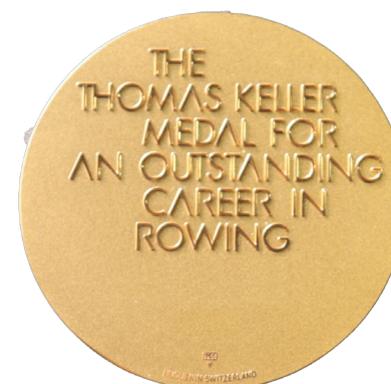
**1996** Nikolai Pimenov (RUS)

**1996** Francesco Esposito (ITA)

**1994** Yuri Pimenov (RUS)

**1991** Thomas Greiner (GER)

**1990** Alf Hansen (NOR)



# RICHARD SCHMIDT

## THE BEATING HEART OF THE DEUTSCHLAND ACHTER

For many, the eight represents the ultimate expression of teamwork. Nine individuals sublimate their technique, effort, and desire to the cause of their team. Usually, if an individual gets recognition it often is the stroke: Roland Barr, Nico Reinks and Simona Radis are just some of the 'stars' that have stroked their crews to Olympic and world championship gold.

But sometimes the eight has a beating heart; a guiding light; a role model who sets the tone for their crew. And that person may not always sit at stroke. Richard Schmidt won Olympic gold rowing in the five seat of Germany's 2012 eight. He won three of his six world championship gold medals from the seven seat. Add in two Olympic silver medals and three world championship second places, and it is very fitting that Schmidt's contribution to the legendary Deutschland Achter's incredible success between 2009 and 2021 has secured him the 2024 Thomas Keller medal. Max Planner, Schmidt's crew mate in 2017 and 2018 put it simply. "Looking back, I would say He's the Cristiano Ronaldo of rowing. Always pushing boundaries, never letting loose." And the double world champion went on to add: "He's very professional and for me the best athlete in the Deutschland Achter we ever had."

World Rowing's rankings in 2020 seemed to confirm that. Schmidt was then ranked the world's number one oarsman. And it is a measure of the man, that when asked about this, he humbly said. "I'm not the best. Eric [Murray] and Hamish [Bond] are better than me. And so are Andy Hodge and Pete Reed." During his career, Schmidt raced all those athletes. In fact, in the 2008

Olympics he raced as a young spare in the German four, which finished 6th, while Murray and Bond took a 7th place.

Martin Sauer, who brilliantly coxed the German eight during those years was perhaps in a better position than anybody to judge Schmidt's value to the crew. "He is a prototype personality. One that you need in the crew to be successful over a long period of time. Position in the crew doesn't matter, performance does." Said Sauer. Schmidt himself echoed Sauer's comments and explained: "In training we switch all the positions. In a good eight, each oarsman needs to be able to row in every place." Yet of course Schmidt's personal performance was exemplary. He finished either first or second – mostly first – in the crucial pair's trials that selected who would sit in the Deutschland Achter.

And in races he conquered his nerves to lay down a superb technique, a wonderful length all backed by a physiology honed by years of pushing



himself to the limit. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the incredible race when Schmidt and his crew took Olympic Gold. An unbeaten run of 35 races between 2009 and 2012 meant – in Schmidt’s words: “we just had to win that final.”

He was very nervous before the start and his crew were not having their most polished performance. With just 800m or so to go, the British hit the front. But when Sauer called with 600m to go, Schmidt realised: “It was now or never.” His crew regained the lead and moved away to watch one of the closest eight’s races in history unfold behind them.

In 2021, though the Deutschland Achter did not win gold, it was Schmidt’s efforts in his fourth Games, that helped take his crew through the British pre-regatta favourites to win a brilliant silver behind New Zealand. In the run up to that race, the German crew had struggled. But Planner explained: All of us knew, in hard times he had our backs. We could always count on him.”

Planner wasn’t just referring to Schmidt’s ability to find speed. Schmidt took on the role of athlete spokesperson for the German team. This was particularly challenging when tough selection choices were being made. But the rowers knew that Schmidt would always speak up for them. More than that, he was so committed in the fight to make sport clean that he took on a role as an athlete representative with WADA.

Unsurprisingly, there’s more too. Schmidt has always held a holistic view of what might support longevity in an athlete. He is a husband and father. Between training sessions he took time to study for a PhD in engineering. Understandably, he was keen to support World Rowing’s campaign to fund a rowing and water research centre on the Kafue River, Zambia. Since Schmidt has retired from international competition has pursued his interest in sustainable energy with Wilo, the long-term sponsors of the Deutschland Achter.

And though he has stopped competition, Schmidt is still the point of contact between the German eight’s squad and Wilo. Moreover, he still trains at the squad’s base and has regular contact with the current crop athletes as the Deutschland Achter squad look to rebuild.

For Schmidt, the Deutschland Achter project started with the great Karl Adam and his Olympic victory on Lake Albano in 1960. Since then, that light of that torch has been sustained by many great German oarsmen. Perhaps though it has shone most brightly when Richard Schmidt has been part of that historic crew.

*worldrowing.com, December 2024*



## **Thomas Keller Media Activities**

28 June, 2025 - Lucerne, Switzerland

Thomas Keller Medal Presentation

10:00

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