

# THOMAS KELLER MEDAL

2023 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

Members:

Jean-Christophe Rolland

Tricia Smith

Matt Smith

Thor Nilsen

Martin Cross

John Boulton

Lenka Dienstbach-Wech

AC Chair, Frida Svensson

Sarah Cook

# 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.

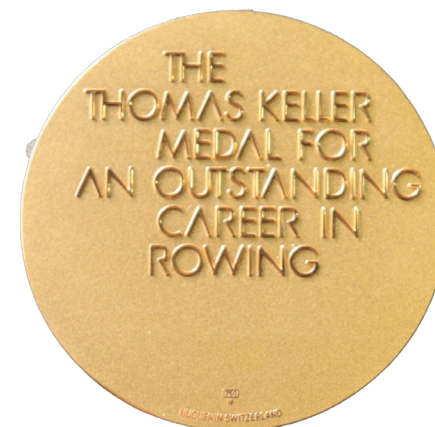
Athletes were Thomi's pride and joy. He followed every championship and Olympic race, kept a close eye on officials, knew every detail of procedure and equipment, and greeted every established international by his or her first name.



# Thomas Keller Medal Winners

**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)



# MAHE DRYSDALE

## 2022 Thomas Keller Medal Winner

Who can forget Mahe Drysdale's stroke-for-stroke race to the line in Rio against Damir Martin? Or watching Drysdale being stretchered off at the end of his Beijing Olympic final? Or replacing Marcel Hacker's World Best Time in the single with his own? Or helping put together the 'Great 8' of the best single scullers in the world?

Now one of the greats of our sport has another accomplishment to add to his list, the 2022 Thomas Keller Medal.

There's no doubt that Drysdale is extremely well-placed for winning the rowing world's most prestigious award. The medal is awarded for an outstanding career in rowing and exemplary sportsmanship.

His kickstart to an international career began when he watched fellow New Zealander Rob Waddell cross the

line in first at the 2000 Olympic Games. Drysdale was rowing and studying at the University of Auckland at the time. Two years after Waddell's Olympic gold, Drysdale was on the New Zealand team and racing in the men's four. Two years after that he was competing at the Athens Olympics, where he finished fifth in the four.

Moving to the single, Drysdale suffered a major setback when he was hit by a water skier while rowing and severely injured his back. He was able to return to rowing within a couple of weeks and



went on to win his first World Champion title later that year in the single. This was the beginning of Drysdale's dominating years in the single, which saw him win five World Championship titles and three Olympic medals, two of them gold. There's also a very large number of World Cup and World Championship medals of every colour.

Drysdale also made a point of competing in regattas around the world and following the World Rowing Championships he would regularly go on a circuit taking in a season of head racing. He was a regular at the Head of the Charles in the United States, Henley Royal Regatta in Great Britain, the Dutch Holland Beker regatta, the Silverskiff in Italy, Switzerland's Basel Head and New Zealand's Billy Webb Challenge and many, many more.

Throughout his remarkable training and racing regime Drysdale built friendships and helped unite the single scullers into a group that was fiercely competitive on the water and great friends off the water.

"What I'm most proud of is the friendships developed through rowing," Drysdale said after receiving the award. "To go to the World Champs this year and race in the tribute to Ondrej Synek. To get those guys together that have been my biggest competitors but also my biggest friends through my whole rowing career is special.

"It's pretty special when you can go and visit Europe and you can stay in your friends homes and just enjoy each others company knowing all the tough times you've been through on the water and now you've got that friendship that's been developed."

There are numerous stories of Drysdale training and travelling with his rowing rivals and friends. Just after winning gold at the London Olympics, Drysdale was hiking with fellow Olympians Australia's Kim Brennan, Sweden's Lassi Karonen and his then partner, now wife Juliette Drysdale (nee Haigh). They made news by helping to rescue an injured tourist.

Drysdale was regularly in the news through his career including his lead up to the Beijing Olympics when Rob Waddell challenged him for the Olympic spot in the men's single. Waddell and Drysdale had New Zealanders on the edge of their seats as they competed in a best of three series of single sculling races. Drysdale won two of the three to get the singles spot with Waddell ending up in New Zealand's double sculls.

He was also in the news more than once for cycling accidents Drysdale was known to use cycling as cross training for rowing and he always travelled with a bike. One crash was with a truck in Korea leading up to the 2013 World Rowing Championships. Another was a collision with a car in Germany as he prepared for the London Olympics.

After winning gold in an epic battle with Damir Martin of Croatia at the Rio Olympics, Drysdale continued in the single but then swapped to the quadruple sculls for the 2018 world Rowing Championships. As the New Zealand team began their preparation for the Tokyo Olympics, Drysdale joined fellow Olympic Champion Hamish Bond in his country's eight. They just missed out on qualifying the boat for Tokyo at the 2019 World Champs. That turned out to be Drysdale's last international race.

He retired in 2021 before the delayed Tokyo Olympics.

Drysdale was awarded the Thomas Keller Medal remotely and posted on social media;

"I'm humbled to be recognised alongside some of the legends of World Rowing with the Thomas Keller award. This is the highest honour in the sport of Rowing and very proud to be awarded it. Thank you to all those that were part of the journey and helped me achieve the success that I did. I was on the water alone, but it's absolutely true there was a village of people on the land that enabled me to perform. Without them I couldn't have achieved all I have."

*worldrowing.com, 12 December 2022*

## **Thomas Keller Media Activities**

8 July, 2023 - Lucerne, Switzerland

Shuttle Bus from Finish area to Boatpark  
10:20

Thomas Keller Medal Presentation  
10:35

Shuttle Bus from Boatpark to Finish area  
11:00

Enquiries:  
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