

Sports

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Sigh of relief wafts over Seoul

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — A new sound is in the breeze over Lake Geneva these days, blowing from the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee.

It is a sigh of relief that, after seven years of threats, politics, demonstrations and death, the Olympics in Seoul are about to begin.

If, as IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch says, staging the Games has enabled South Korea to accomplish an economic dream, it has seemed at times like a nightmare for both Seoul organizers and the international committee itself.

Boycott threats have come from the Communist bloc and Africa.

Demonstrations by students and middle-class workers brought violence to the streets of Seoul and forced officials to hold presidential elections sooner than planned.

A Korean airliner was blown out of the sky, killing 115 people, and a North Korean agent said she did it to disrupt Olympic preparations.

Through it all, the IOC stood firm, refus-

ing to even discuss moving the Games to a less volatile site.

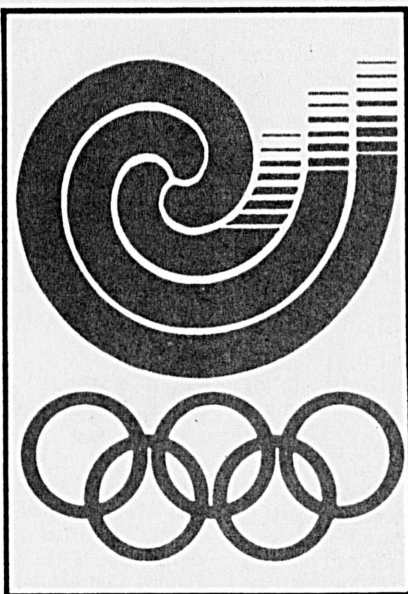
And now, with a record 161 countries ready to take part, it sees its faith about to be rewarded, with top athletes of East and West meeting Sept. 17 to Oct. 2 for the first time since 1976.

"When the IOC awarded the Games to Seoul in 1981, I thought it made the right decision; I still think so," Samaranch said.

No one would argue that the country and its capital have undergone remarkable changes since the IOC's decision at Baden-Baden, West Germany, seven years ago.

"Never has a city done so much for the Olympic Games, never in Olympic history," Samaranch said. "The Olympic Games have been very helpful for Seoul . . . and also the country."

"It has gone through an economic dream. And politically today, the Republic of Korea is a real democracy."



Samaranch has done all he could to ensure a complete, peaceful Games in Seoul. He was Spain's ambassador to Moscow before becoming IOC chief in 1980, and he used his diplomatic skills to stamp out the worst of the brushfires that flared.

They started when North Korea demanded in late 1985 it be declared co-host of the Games, something that never has been done.

Unless it was allowed to stage at least eight of the 24 events — roughly equivalent to the proportion of the population of the Korean peninsula that lives above the 38th parallel — the North said it would lead an East Bloc boycott of Seoul.

Boycotts had hit the previous three Summer Games, and Samaranch was determined Seoul would be spared. Through four sets of joint meetings, he kept the North and South talking, while travelling to Communist countries to try to convince leaders not to heed the call of Pyongyang, North Korea's capital.

When the deadline of Jan. 17 came for

countries to say whether they would participate, negative replies came from only six — North Korea and allies Cuba, Ethiopia, Albania, Nicaragua and the Seychelles.

The threat of another boycott, this one by African countries protesting South Africa's racial policies, was quashed earlier this summer when Samaranch held a conference on Olympism Against Apartheid in Lausanne.

And in South Korea, the IOC president met with government and opposition leaders and got them to urge their followers to unite behind the Olympic effort.

Student demonstrations, which helped bring about the balloting in which Roh-tae Woo was elected president last December, have continued as the Games approach. But Samaranch said fears that these often-violent protests, or terrorism from Pyongyang, would disrupt the Games were unfounded.

"The security arrangements at the Games will be very complete," he said.

East German stars preparing to shine

EAST BERLIN (AP) — From a network of secrecy-shrouded sports academies, East Germany churns out Olympic champions at an amazing rate.

That awesome sports machine has won 116 gold medals in four Olympic Games — eighth on the all-time list. Not bad for a country of fewer than 17 million people. That's about one gold medal for every 146,000 people.

Not bad when you consider the United States and the Soviet Union — countries with more than 240-million people — have a per capita gold medal rate about 10 times worse than the East Germans over that span of time.

And the machine is ready to make more gold.

Track stars Heike Drechsler and Thomas Schoenlebe and swimmer Kristin Otto lead another strong team to the Summer Games at Seoul next month.

The two German countries started sending separate teams to the Olympics in 1968. Since then, the East Germans have harvested 32 gold medals in track and field and 29 in swimming.

With 60 million people, the West Germans have only 12 track and field Olympic champions, and just two swimming gold medals, both won by Michael Gross at the 1984 Games in Los Angeles.

After boycotting the 1984 Los Angeles Games along with most of the Soviet Bloc countries, the East Germans are sending a squad to Seoul that is expected to rival the Americans and Soviets.

Drechsler is expected to be the main challenger to the Americans in the women's sprints and long jump. She is a co-holder of the world record in the 200 metres.

Schoenlebe, the 400-metre world champion, is another track contender. Otto is the 100- and 200-metre freestyle swimming world champion.

Becoming an East German champion doesn't guarantee a spot on the Olympic team. Sports officials set tough norms and only athletes believed to have a shot at medals or the potential to reach at least the finals are selected for the Olympic squads.

The extensive talent search, which East German officials say includes every second child, begins in state-run kindergartens.

Promising talents are sent to one of 21 sports schools across the country, where a rigorous program finds potential champions.

"Only 10 per cent to 20 per cent stay through to the end of their training program," says Gerhard Roessler, director of the Jena sports school. "But they become super-athletes."

Programs stress athletic training but regular subjects are also taught, with heavy emphasis on Marxism. Pupils take athletic performance tests every two months. Those unable to keep up are sent back to regular schools.

East German officials say the key to the country's remarkable athletic suc-

cess is due to the early talent search, comprehensive medical and social care, and advanced training methods.

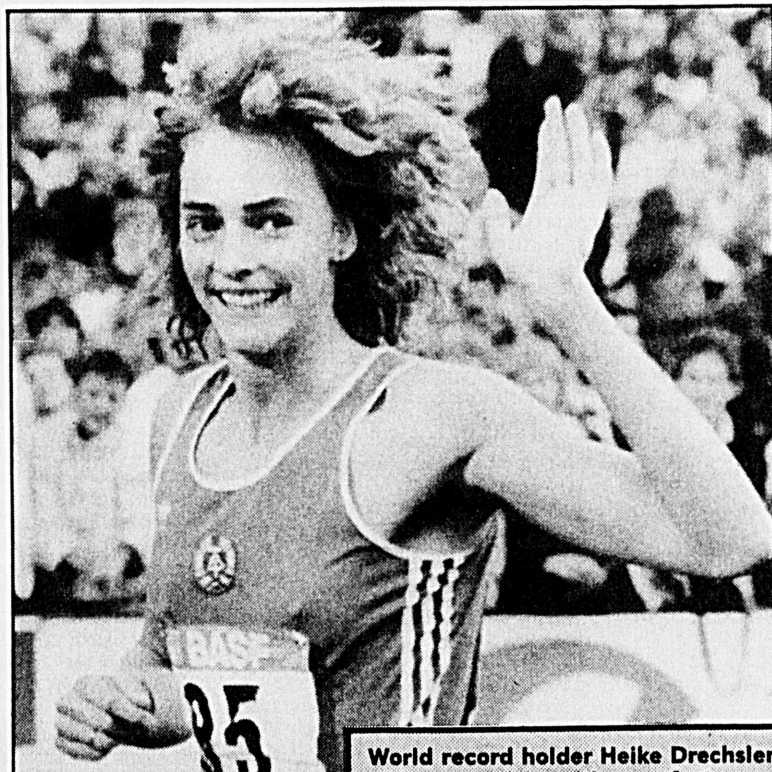
The program doesn't come cheap. East Germany in 1988 allocated 0.4 per cent of its annual state budget to sports — \$590 million U.S.

But sources in East Berlin say the sum is actually 10 times greater, with various ministries injecting more money.

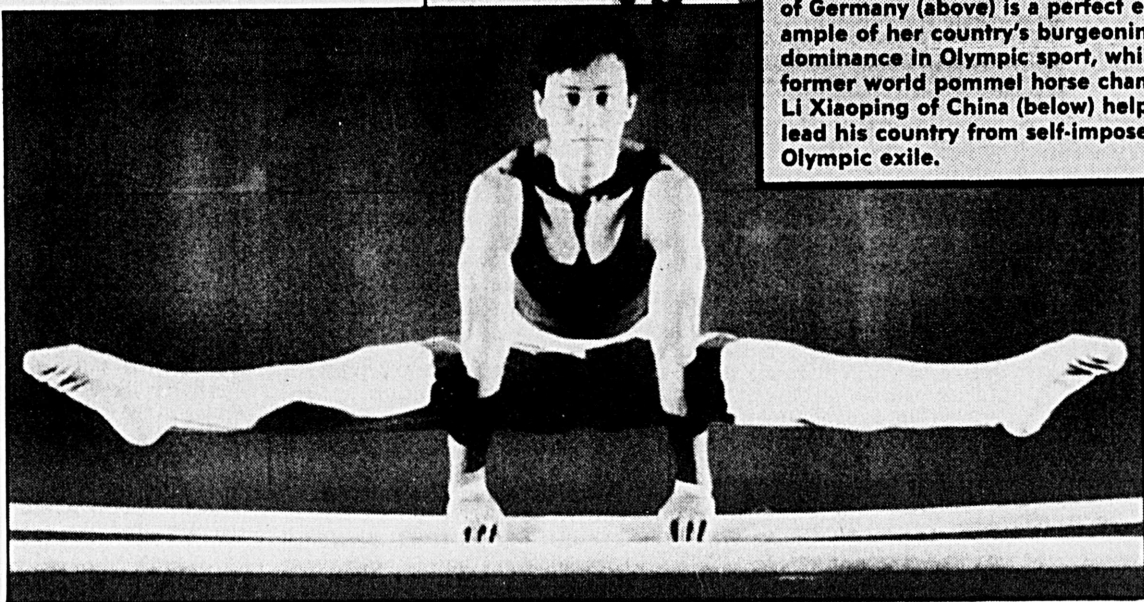
Training first-rate athletes and securing top-notch equipment requires plenty of hard currency and East Germany recently opened its doors to Western companies eager to advertise at its stadiums.

It is a major shift in policy for East Germany, which for long had sharply criticized commercialism in sports.

It also illustrates the significance of sports in East Germany, which is ready to bend a few ideological postulates to keep producing champions.



World record holder Heike Drechsler of Germany (above) is a perfect example of her country's burgeoning dominance in Olympic sport, while former world pommel horse champion Li Xiaoping of China (below) helped lead his country from self-imposed Olympic exile.



Chinese hoping for 30 medals

BEIJING (AP) — For more than three decades, China watched. When it came to play, it won. Now it looks to repeat its stunning performance of 1984.

China returned to the Olympics at the Summer Games in Los Angeles and emerged as a world sports power by capturing 32 medals, 15 of them gold. Only the United States, Romania and West Germany did better.

Despite the return in Seoul of the Eastern Bloc countries that boycotted the 1984 Games, China feels it can nearly match its effort in Los Angeles.

The Chinese look to be strong in gymnastics, diving, table tennis, weightlifting and swimming.

"We are hoping to get as many (medals) as last time," said Wang Li, an official of the China Olympic Committee.

In gymnastics, "the men's team is strong and promising and we think it can compete with the Soviets," she said.

The official Xinhua News Agency estimated the 301 Chinese athletes, up from 225 in Los Angeles, will garner about 30 medals in Seoul, with eight to 12 golds. China will compete in 20 of 23 events.

Still, the Chinese may surprise themselves, and their competition. While China may lose ground in gymnastics and shooting, it will field strong medal-winning teams in diving,

weightlifting, fencing, volleyball and women's archery.

Several Chinese women swimmers will be medal contenders, the diving team is overflowing with talent and table tennis, a sport in which China is unrivalled, will be an Olympic event for the first time.

South Korea may put up a challenge in table tennis, but China could sweep the medals in this sport, which has a wide following in Asia. China is led by men's world champion Jiang Jialiang and women's world champion He Zhili.

China is still weak in track and field, but it has some of the best women walkers in the world.

China's rise to sports prominence comes only a dozen years after the end of the decade-long Cultural Revolution, when the leftists in power linked sports to bourgeois decadence and the national sports program collapsed.

After the rise of pragmatic leader Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, China came to see sports as a vehicle for winning international prestige and promoting national spirit.

"Most Chinese are interested in the Olympics and it is very important to us," Wang said.

China will not announce who will go to the Seoul Games until just before the Games begin.

Soviets, Americans get together

by JAMES LITKE
Associated Press

Just say nyet.

To bombast, bureaucrats, boycotts and bitterness. To politics, pride, piety and piffle.

And let the Games begin.

American and Soviet athletes, kept apart at the last two Summer Olympiads in a tit-for-tat boycott of Moscow and Los Angeles, meet again after 12 years on the relatively level playing fields of Seoul.

"No problems, no regrets, no recourse; what's past is past," says Mac Wilkins, the seemingly ageless discus thrower who brought the United States gold at the 1976 Games in Montreal and will be trying to repeat in South Korea — his fourth Olympic appearance.

"When you look at it in a book, a gold medal in Moscow looks just as good as one in Los Angeles," Wilkins said. "But people in the sport, people who know what's going on, usually add something like an asterisk, because half the world wasn't there for one or the other."

The last superpower showdown at the Olympics was won decisively by the Soviets, with a then-record 125 medals in Montreal.

At the 1980 Games in Moscow — boycotted by western countries after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan — Lord Killanin, then president of the International Olympic Committee, urged "the sportsmen of the world to unite in peace before a holocaust descends."

But Soviet-bloc athletes did not attend the 1984 games, the Kremlin explaining that Los Angeles was not safe. U.S. athletes claimed 174 medals, 83 of them gold.

"The fact is," said hurdler Edwin Moses, heading to Seoul for his third Olympics, "they give out the medals on one particular day and whoever's there is there. I wasn't there in 1980 and I was disappointed as much as the Soviets who weren't in Los Angeles."

Added Moses: "Most athletes — and this is true everywhere — could care less about the political content of the world. But the one thing all of us learned is that politics are part of the Games and if politicians say you don't go, you don't go."

In some ways, the Montreal Games reflected the chaos and intrigue of superpower relations of the era.

Within days of the start of the Games, Soviet pentathlete Boris Onischenko, a silver medalist at Munich in 1972, was caught with an illegal epee and sent packing.

Then the manager of the U.S. diving team said a Soviet had approached him and offered favorable scores for American Phil Boggs in exchange for U.S. support of Irina Kalinina.

And 17-year-old diver Sergei Nemtsanov disappeared, the Canadians saying he had defected, the Soviets charging he had been brainwashed and everybody whispering he had been smitten by a young American woman. Nemtsanov went home after the Games.

As for this year's Olympics, "Many have waited 10 years or more for this opportunity," says Anatoly Kolesov, a Soviet deputy sports minister. "We are looking forward to closer and more friendly contacts among the athletes in Seoul."

Moses expects a high calibre of competition from the Soviets — and a higher quality of presentation than in the past.

Olympics weren't always so darn serious

by PETE McMARTIN
Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER — In the good old days, before they allowed bowling as an Olympic exhibition sport, there was the tug-of-war.

Teams of big, belly-laden beer drinkers, shod in army boots, pulling like Percherons. It must have been glorious.

The tug-of-war pulled its weight as an Olympic sport from 1900 to 1920, before church picnics and the like brought it down to the level of horseshoes. A sad day it was. The tug-of-war would still make a great Olympic sport. Better than bowling.

But tastes change. The tug-of-war disappeared: bowling goes global.

The history of the Olympics is littered with discontinued sports. Some seem arcane in today's high-calibre Olympics, some seem just darn silly.

Rope climbing, for example. It was an Olympic gymnastic sport between 1896 and 1932. First guy up the rope wins. Pretty straightforward, no points given for style. Not much you can do hanging from a rope, after all. Unless you're guilty.

Club swinging. (Yes, club swinging. No, I don't know how it was done.) It was held twice, in 1904 in St. Louis, and in 1932 in Los Angeles. It must have been peculiar to the U.S., because American athletes swept the medals. Perhaps they had more clubs to swing in than other countries, and more people who liked to swing.

The Plunge for Distance. A water sport. Contestants began with a standing dive, then glided motionless for 60 seconds or until their heads broke the surface of the water, whichever came first. Then the length of their dive was measured. It was held only once, in St. Louis in 1904, and

William Dickey of the U.S. won it with a plunge of 19.05 metres.

The 1900 Paris Olympics saw two quaint swimming events: the obstacle race and underwater swimming. In the obstacle race, contestants had to climb over a pole, then scramble over a row of boats, then swim under a row of boats. In underwater swimming, two points were awarded for each metre swum and one point for each second the swimmer was able to stay underwater. Charles de Vendeville, a Frenchman, won with a length of 60 metres and a time of 1:08.4.

The 56-pound weight throw. Why 56 pounds? Good question. The event was held twice, in 1904 and 1920. Etienne Desmarteau, of Montreal, won gold for Canada in 1904 and became a Quebecois hero. Wanting to compete in the Olympics, Des-

marteau asked for a leave of absence from the Montreal police force. Denied the leave, he left anyway and was fired. After he won the gold medal, the dismissal order was conveniently misplaced.

Stockholm in 1912 saw events in shot put, discus and javelin — with both hands. You threw left handed, then you threw right. Not at the same time.

What else we got here? Cricket. Croquet. Roque (the American form of croquet). Golf (won by Canadian George Seymour Lyon in 1904). Lacrosse (won by Canada in 1904 and 1908). Motor boating. Horse polo. Rackets, a squash-like game won by a British team in 1908 that included John Jacob Astor. Jeu de Paume, an obscure and extremely complicated form of tennis, played only in the 1908 London Olympics. Rugby. Running deer

shooting. Live pigeon shooting (held in Paris in 1900). And for the real sportsman, duelling pistols. It was held only once, in 1906. Lack of competitors, you guess?

Up until 1952, the Olympics used to stage art competitions. They were bona fide medal events in architecture, town planning, sculpture, medal design, painting, drawings and water colors, applied graphics, lithographs, literature, lyrics, dramatic works, epic literary works, music, and musical composition.

Only two Canadians ever won art medals: Vancouver's Robert Tait Mackenzie, who won a bronze medal in the medal design category, and Jean Weinzwilg, who won silver in London in 1948 for musical composition.

(Distributed by Southam News.)