

ARTICLE

OLYMPIC SHAME

BY MARK TEICH
AND PAMELA WEINTRAUB

As you read this, hundreds of American athletes are feverishly preparing for the 1988 Summer Games in Seoul, South Korea. Come September, they will try for the Holy Grail of athletic competition—an Olympic medal. For most, it has been a long and single-minded quest. From childhood, they have combined arduous daily workouts with full school course loads. To survive, many took on night jobs during high school and college, then went into full-time professions unrelated to their sport as soon as they graduated. Through it all, their training rarely slackened, leaving little time or energy for family and friends. And when they approached Olympic caliber, their outcast status only became more extreme. They now spent longer and longer periods training and competing away from home, putting everything in their lives besides their sport on hold.

PAINTING BY ROBERT FLORCZAK

Why did they sacrifice their youth in this way? Not for money; except for elite athletes in one or two sports, most Olympic hopefuls suffer financial deprivation. Perhaps it was partly patriotism, and partly a narcissistic hunger for acclaim. Mostly it was their inborn need to explore their limits—to test themselves at white heat against the best athletes in the world.

At Seoul, they will have the chance to do just that. For the first time in the contemporary Olympic era, the world's best summer athletes will finally be competing. It has been a dozen years coming. Not since 1976 have the major world powers gathered for the Summer Games. In 1980, after the United States Olympic Committee (U.S.O.C.) had supposedly revolutionized our program with its new high-tech training camp at Colorado Springs, we never got the chance to prove it. Instead, Jimmy Carter's vain political boycott of the Moscow Olympics left the Russians and East Germans to wade through their opposition largely uncontested. When the iron curtain countries returned the favor by boycotting the Los Angeles Games in 1984, the Americans went on a medal spree unparalleled in Olympic history. We trumpeted our glory, though it was just as tainted as the results at Moscow.

But this time all the big boys will be there at the opening ceremonies. Once the torch has been lighted to loud fanfare, once the doves and colored balloons have been sent aloft, the tension of imminent combat will thicken the air. As the athletes from the Great Red Bear and its satellites march purposefully along, as the American athletes swagger out in their native garb, the clash of our opposing systems will be palpable. Everyone will know that the next fortnight will transcend spectacle—it will measure the successes and failures of our different ways of life.

And, sad to say, America will be tried in the balance and found wanting. Our athletes will give their all, but they will be helpless against the onslaught. Every time they look up, a Russian or East German will be winning another medal, in track and field, in cycling, in fencing—in just about everything. By the time the final curtain slams down on the Games, our grand anticipation will have given way to excuses and bitter finger pointing. This smoke screen will not hide the essential fact that we have become a second-class sports power.

But don't we have wonderful talent? The most sophisticated sport science in the world? Financial resources to build an awesome long-range program? The answer on all counts is probably yes. Raw talent, however, can't win medals if it isn't properly nurtured and coached, or even discovered in the first place. Sophisticated science doesn't mean squat if it doesn't get beyond the laboratory. And resources can't accomplish anything if the money doesn't reach the athletes.

At Seoul, our Olympians will be blown away because the people charged with their success have been too conservative or just plain incompetent. This includes a national government that generally hasn't wanted to be bothered; power-jockeying U.S.O.C. officials who have often been more concerned with pomp and circumstance than actual athletic performance; unfocused national governing bodies (N.G.B.'s) that rule each sport and allocate funds to a whole range of programs at the expense of Olympic competitors; and inadequately trained coaches who lack enough scientific knowledge to prepare their athletes for high-level competition. It includes wealthy corporations that pay millions of dollars for TV advertising during the Games, but pump little of their ample profits back into our program. And it includes us, the American public, who completely forget our athletes for three years running, then expect them to appear magically in the

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So when the ax falls at Seoul, don't blame the athletes. Our system has let them down. Their Eastern Bloc competitors have been monitored, funded, and provided for by ingeniously organized programs, while the Americans have been left mainly on their own. Rewarded for their commitment with weak leadership, disorganization, and neglect, they have been deprived of the chance to be truly competitive.

The seed for the coming debacle was planted almost a century ago, when European aristocrats revived the Olympic Games. To recapture the purity of the first Olympics in ancient Greece, they declared that all competitors had to be amateurs who made no money from a sport and pursued it in their leisure time. These gentlemanly Olympians were necessarily part of the idle rich—the only ones with time and money to train and compete in the Games.

In the modern era, virtually every country except America came to understand that this elitism no longer worked. Excellence in sports required hundreds of hours of training every year, and there

weren't enough idle rich around who could afford to do this on their own. So if a nation wanted to compete successfully, it had to make the opportunity available to others. The Soviets led the way following World War II. Seeing the chance to publicize the success of its revolution, Russia primed for its first Olympics in 1952, and built an Olympic program that was anything but "amateur."

First, the Soviets created a Ministry of Sport to oversee every move their athletes made. They left no stone unturned to find young talent, establishing compulsory exercises in preschool and elaborate sports leagues in elementary school. Scouts attended national competitions called *Spartakiads*; and by age 12, kids with star mettle entered year-round children's sport schools. No one had to coerce them; they ate better than other adolescents and earned cash bonuses and better living arrangements for their parents.

Simultaneously, the government had top scientists and medical experts devote themselves exclusively to sport science. They experimented with steroids and other drugs that could add to size and strength, and used the laws of physics to make competitors swifter and more efficient. Whenever there were holes in their knowledge, they invited experts over from the U.S. and other countries, then wined and dined them and plumbed their brains.

By the end of the 1950s, the U.S.S.R. began winning the Olympics convincingly. By 1976, even its tiny copycat satellite, East Germany, humbled the U.S. at the Montreal Olympics. Though the U.S. had 12 times their population, the East Germans captured an astonishing 40 gold medals to our 34. (The Russians took 49.) It was the first time in decades we had finished lower than second place. This cold-war embarrassment sent America staggering into the "high tech" sports era. Shortly after the '76 Games, President Carter signed the Amateur Sports Act, which empowered the U.S.O.C. with responsibility for all amateur sports in America. Its urgent mission: to take our Olympic program out of the Stone Age.

The U.S.O.C. concluded that its only hope was a sport-science program of its own. It established the Olympic Training Center in an old Army camp at Colorado Springs, and chose New Jersey cardiovascular surgeon Irving Dardik, team physician for the previous Winter and Summer Olympics, to head the effort. "There was no organized approach in the U.S.," Dardik recalls. "Medical care and scientific research were totally random. Not even competitors at the highest levels were getting state-of-the-art training or treatment. *Something* had to be done."

Working as a volunteer, Dardik began by recruiting scientists such as David Costill, the widely respected exercise physiologist, and Gideon Ariel, who had

pioneered computerized biomechanical analysis—a method that allowed him to hone athletes' technique by manipulating stick-figure images of their performances on a computer screen. Ariel donated his own software, then cajoled several corporations into contributing millions of dollars' worth of computer and graphics equipment, establishing one of the best biomechanics labs in the world. He also persuaded various fitness manufacturers to outfit a spectacular weight-training facility.

The Colorado center was soon heralded as the future rival of East Germany's all-encompassing Sports Institute at Leipzig. According to the plan, the finest coaches, doctors, and researchers would always be on hand, enticing premier competitors from all over the country. The athletes would live at the camp year-round, working in unity with the team of experts. And for those who wouldn't live on-site, Dardik conceived the Elite Athlete Project, which when instituted would have dispatched squadrons of mobile vans full of high-tech testing equipment to 20 designated centers around the country. This would allow Olympic hopefuls to receive personalized scientific training at home.

The 1980 boycott had come and gone, and the new emphasis on science seemed to pay off at the 1984 Summer Games. American athletes won an unprecedented 83 gold medals, showing more speed, endurance, strength, and precision than ever. Ignoring the absence of the Russians and East Germans—who might have cut our gold-medal total at least in half—the progress appeared phenomenal. And thanks to Peter Ueberroth's business management, the Games garnered a \$215 million surplus that could be poured back into the program. When the innovative Jack Kelly became U.S.O.C. president soon after the Games, the future seemed boundless.

But things soon unraveled. Gideon Ariel, branded an egotist and self-promoter by many at the camp, had already been forced off the premises after fights with officials about his corporate connections, aggressive fund-raising techniques, and the rights to his software. The lab that he had put together almost single-handedly was left to others to manage. Then, in 1985, Jack Kelly died of a heart attack while running on a street in Philadelphia.

As Dardik explains it, with his allies Kelly and Ariel gone, he was powerless to push his programs. More conservative elements regained control, and he watched them dismantle his mobile-van program, as well as many of his other plans for long-range research. Furious, he returned home to lick his wounds and pursue his own projects. Robert Helmick, president of the U.S.O.C., explains it in a different way. "I finally let Dardik go because of disputes he had had with General George

Miller [the executive director] about finances and other matters. Dardik wanted to make financial commitments on his own, without the approval of Miller." Dardik denies these charges and says that the parting of ways occurred because of arguments over the investigation into the blood doping of U.S. athletes. Whatever the truth is, officials who considered Dardik as abrasive and self-interested as Ariel were happy to be left in peace and quiet.

Today, four years later, that's where the American Olympic movement finds itself—in quiet, peaceful stagnation. The soaring progress suggested by the '84 Games has slowed to a two-step. "It's not that we've gone backward," explains Edwin Moses, two-time gold medalist in the intermediate hurdles. "It's just that the rest of the world has moved forward and we've stood still."

The results were there for all to see this year at the Winter Games in Calgary, a

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fiasco so complete that it compelled Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.), to chastise our program publicly in the middle of the Games. As each day another competitor collapsed physically or emotionally, we became the laughing-stock of Canada. Even in the painfully few winter events where we won medals, there was evidence of far-reaching problems and chaos.

For example, after speed skater Bonnie Blair won a gold medal in the women's 500-meter race, we learned that she'd trained by sneaking into a rink each day before dawn. "The rink was too crowded during its regular public sessions," her mother explains. "Furthermore, there were no funds available during that period to pay the high cost of ice time." She had an insufficient support system. Perhaps her teammate Dan Jansen did, too. Picked to win a gold medal in the men's 500, he lost his sister to cancer on the day of his race. The Soviets probably would have rushed in a sport psychologist to decide if he could compete. If so, they would have drilled him intensively to block out the trauma. Jansen, however,

got a helping hand from family, friends, and even the team physician—but no psychologist. When he tumbled to his knees on the first turn of the 500 and slid off the track, then did the same in the 1,000-meter event four days later, some observers commented on the lack of psychological counseling. "Every athlete has the choice of using a sport psychologist or not, and to my knowledge, Dan Jansen did not work with one at the Olympic Games at Calgary," says Mike Moran, the U.S.O.C.'s director of public information and media relations. "Frankly, I don't see what the relevance would have been in that situation."

Figure skater Brian Boitano, who won a gold, fared better than Jansen. But after his stunning performance, he noted that his family had covered his huge expenses over the years. That's in contrast to most potential American champions who suffer because their families don't have that kind of money.

Still, speed and figure skating were our best events. We didn't win medals in any others. Here's the litany of failures:

Ice Hockey. This team's inability to reach the medal round triggered President Samaranch's diatribe about America's lack of preparation. Though defense is the heart and soul of hockey, the U.S. team focused excessively on offense.

Skiing. In the Nordic events, our one predicted medal winner, Josh Thompson, came in 25th. In the Alpine events, which we dominated in 1984, we never came close to a medal, since a significant number of the best Americans had been put out of commission by injury in the past half-year.

Luge. Bonny Warner took sixth place, our best finish in history. Meanwhile, the East German women in Warner's event took first, second, and third. East Germany, a country as populous as California, reportedly has three world-class training runs. The United States has one.

Bobsled. After we spent a significant amount of money designing five different bobsleds, America's best driver, Brent Rushlaw, ended up using an Italian model, which, according to the bobsled N.G.B., was simply faster than those we had designed. Using the Italian model, Rushlaw's team lost to the Russians by two-hundredths of a second.

When the Games were over, Russia led with 11 golds and 29 medals total, followed by East Germany with 25 medals, nine of them gold. America harvested two golds and six medals—finishing in ninth place. Apologists claim the carnage means little: America, they say, is summer-oriented and never did well in the Winter Games.

But the cry of "We'll get 'em in summer!" won't hold up anymore, either. Our summer athletes were outperformed at various world competitions in '87 and '88 not just by Russians and East Germans, but also by Western Europeans, South Americans, and Africans. In boxing,

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which netted us nine gold medals in Los Angeles, we recently lost a dual meet to Cuba, ten matches to two. In basketball—a “purely American” game—we were upset at the Pan-American Games by the Brazilians, no less. In track and field, traditionally our next-strongest summer sport, we took a paltry nine gold medals at the 1987 World Championships in Rome, compared to the 16 we won in 1984 at Los Angeles. “And that’s all we’ll do at Seoul,” laments Edwin Moses. “We used to dominate; now we’re praying for a few medals.”

Apologists have an explanation for this, too: “We just have a gap in the cycle this year,” says Charles Dillman, former head of the sport-science program and currently assistant executive director for programs at the U.S.O.C. “Because of the boycott, we had a lot of good athletes held over from the 1980 Olympics who stayed on to compete in 1984. It was our most powerful team ever. But now these people have retired, and we have to build up our reserves. We’re making significant progress and should have very respectable performances in 1988. However, we should be really strong in 1992.”

But the ones who count—the athletes—won’t buy it. “I don’t believe there’s a cycle like that,” says Moses. “Our young people are about the worst physically prepared in the world. We don’t have a system for identifying kids at an early age and developing them through the years. We still depend completely on raw talent. If we don’t improve our Olympic program, we’re going to be winning fewer medals by 1992.”

“The Russians and East Germans don’t have gaps,” says Mac Wilkins, who won a gold medal in the discus throw at the 1976 Montreal Games. “We have gaps because we lack organization and continuity. We leave everything to chance.”

The problem begins at the top. In this crucial Olympic year, for example, the U.S.O.C. has been unable to preserve even its own continuity. “It’s the executive-director-of-the-month club,” says one U.S.O.C. insider.

“The movement has suffered because of several changes in executive directors,” says Colonel F. Don Miller, the executive director who hired Dardik in 1978. “I left in 1985, and General George Miller [another military man] replaced me. But he and [U.S.O.C.] President Robert Helmick didn’t see eye to eye. Miller was replaced by Harvey Schiller, who left soon after for personal reasons. Now Baron Pittenger has taken over. I hope he stays in. There’s a lot of polarization in the organization; everyone is protecting his own turf. The whole organization is not working together to accomplish common goals. We need leadership.”

Unfortunately, the most vigorous lead-

ers always risk being cast aside by the Olympic establishment. According to Keith Henshen, a sport-psychology consultant who has worked for years with our women gymnasts, “The U.S.O.C. has a long arm; if you become a thorn in its side it can eliminate you. Those of us in the trenches are interested in the athletes; but at the U.S.O.C., it appears they like the travel and recognition, and are more interested in protecting their positions than dealing with the programs and the athletes.”

In the military-style hierarchy of the Olympic Committee, he notes, rewards tend to be based on long service and obedience rather than insight and innovation. Pushy idea men such as Ariel and Dardik, with all their edgy energy, rock the boat too hard to stay welcome—even if they’re the ones who set the boat sailing. “It goes slower without them,” says the U.S.O.C.’s Charles Dillman. “They’re people who move things—entrepre-

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neurs. You need that personality as well as rock-solid scientific guys.”

But that entrepreneurial spirit offends the traditional notion of amateur sport. According to Mac Wilkins, many Olympic administrators “live in a dreamworld,” and don’t want their dreams to die. “They fear that athletes will lose sight of the gentlemanly goals of sport,” he says. “But they’ve lost sight of the true sports credo: higher, faster, stronger. We can’t be good enough anymore, practicing a couple of hours a day after work.”

Olympic bureaucrats can’t figure this out, Wilkins insists, because they know precious little about sports. “They’re self-righteous, condescending, and paternalistic toward competitors. They think they know what’s best, but they’ve never been notable athletes themselves and can’t understand athletes’ needs.”

Wilkins cites his own run-ins at the Montreal Olympics. To preserve his psychological balance, he decided not to live in the overcrowded Olympic Village. “I felt I’d become overstimulated and lose energy and focus,” he explains. “So I made plans to stay in an apartment. The U.S.O.C., which had done nothing for me

but pay for my plane ticket and give me a uniform, hassled me for weeks. They found it so difficult to handle a request made by an athlete for his own benefit. An official who didn’t even know my sport came and said, ‘Just do what we ask, son, and everything will be okay.’ Meanwhile, the East Germans and Russians had arranged for their athletes to be outside all the Olympic Village ruckus.”

Kris Korzeniowski, a Polish-born coach who has helped to revitalize the U.S. rowing team, has other complaints about the U.S.O.C. After taking charge of the team, he scheduled two days of meetings with officials at Colorado Springs. “Out of the people I spoke to,” Korzeniowski says, “not one asked me how I intended to prepare my team for Seoul, yet it seemed as if half of them had already been to Seoul to prepare the celebration. There was no one I could talk to about getting my athletes ready to compete.”

But the U.S.O.C.’s Mike Moran doesn’t understand the reason for the meetings at all. “There was no reason for him to schedule meetings with any division heads,” he says, “since the athletes’ training is supervised by the N.G.B.’s, not the U.S.O.C. The rowers don’t even train here. I’m baffled by what he said.”

Foreign coaches who move to the U.S., however, frequently express concern about our attitude toward Olympic sport. They come over here thrilled with their freedom, rubbing their hands at the prospect of so much talent to work with. But before long, they’re hopelessly frustrated at the American approach to athletics as well as the lack of support and control.

“In America,” Korzeniowski states, “we are oriented toward short-term goals. We exploit the athlete. The philosophy is rah-rah-rah, let’s be No. 1! But the real goal should be drawing up a plan of systematic development for the young athlete over a period of years. We expect our young people to be No. 1 consistently. By the time they reach an international level of competition, they are often burned out and leave athletics altogether.”

Despite the conflict in Eastern and Western training philosophy, American N.G.B.’s are quick to snatch up the foreign coaches because they’re so much better trained than our own, often boasting exclusive, advanced degrees in coaching. The honeymoon wears off when these coaches start doing what it takes to win. Take the case of the Israeli Ari Selinger, who almost single-handedly revitalized the American women’s volleyball program, bringing them from a No. 12 ranking in the world to a silver medal in 1984. He started by scouting other sports and selecting by computer those who were best-suited for volleyball. He then spirited his selections away to Gideon Ariel’s biomechanics center in Southern California. He kept the women together as a unit for four years, using strict discipline and all the available tools of sport science in their training. After they

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won the silver medal—and even though the team members revered him—Selinger's contract was not renewed. The reason? "We needed a breath of fresh air," says Al Monaco, executive director of the U.S. Volleyball Association. Explains Selinger's wife Aia, "He wasn't a yes-man."

Most athletes in America, meanwhile, can't even find coaches with scientific training to help them hone their technique. "I had a coach who started me off in the right direction in the beginning," says Mac Wilkins. "But in my effort to continue to improve, I had to research and analyze the information myself." And says Edwin Moses, who has a background in physics, "Unless you have an aptitude for technical material, that's difficult to do."

An even bigger problem than coaching—the most overwhelming problem for our athletes, in fact—is money. "I've spoken to the Eastern Bloc athletes I've competed against," says Bob Berland, a silver medalist in judo and a member of the U.S.O.C.'s Athletes Advisory Council, "and they're completely supported by their governments. The only thing they have to worry about is training. American athletes also have to worry about paying the rent and who might take their job while they're gone. They get transportation to the competition, and room and board while they're there; but for everything else, they've got to find their own corporate support or depend on their parents or their spouse." As Edwin Moses puts it, "It all adds up to impossible stress. Most American athletes are carrying rocks on their backs."

Like most American athletes who've finished college, Berland has a separate full-time profession. He works as a commodities trader at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, which fortunately has sponsored him. "There's no real judo in Chicago, so if I have to leave and train in Japan, say, for six weeks, the Merc compensates me for lost wages," he says. He's luckier than most of his peers. Even so, Berland has only been able to train full-time since the beginning of this Olympic year. "Soviet Bloc athletes have support for life," he says. "They've trained five or six days a week for years. I just get six months before my event."

So in this "richest of all countries," where are the funds that could help? Who knows? Congress recently instituted a coin bill, authorizing the minting of a 1988 Summer Games coin, with proceeds from its nationwide sale to go toward training and facilities. But the millions it will hopefully bring in will only be a tiny tip of the iceberg. And aside from corralling these public donations, the government contributes nothing, unlike most of the other 167 countries that compete. For its part, the U.S.O.C. simply doesn't raise enough

to finance a maximum Olympic effort. "We feel we're very much short of the goal," says the U.S.O.C.'s Mike Moran. "In 1978, the President's Commission on Olympic Sports determined we needed a one-time infusion of \$300 million plus four-year budgets of well over \$300 million. Those numbers were calculated in 1978 dollars; yet here we are in 1988 with a four-year budget of \$149 million, by far our largest. We are confident we can reach the \$300 million mark, but that is no longer enough."

According to members of the Athletes Advisory Council, much of the money the U.S.O.C. does raise goes back into the organization itself. "When people donate money to the U.S.O.C., they *think* it's going to the athletes," says Christopher Dorst, head fund-raiser for U.S. water polo. "But the U.S.O.C. is a big, slow-moving animal. Once it's paid for itself, not much is left."

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Moran points out. "Putting money into the organization means supporting three training centers, sport-science laboratories, and Olympic festivals, among other projects," he says.

"In fact, of the \$149 million," says Moran, "almost \$100 million is directed toward athlete programs, with actual cash grants going to the 38 N.G.B.'s. In addition, the N.G.B.'s received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the money raised by Peter Ueberroth at the Los Angeles Games."

But according to members of the Athletes Advisory Council, much of the money going to the N.G.B.'s is filtered through administrative layers as well.

Moreover, some N.G.B.'s support not just Olympic sports, but the whole gamut from recreational and youth sports to handicapped sports. Some members of the Athletes Advisory Council estimate that after the money has been filtered through the administrative layers of the U.S.O.C. and the N.G.B.'s, then passed around to various nonelite athletes, the Olympians are lucky to get about five percent, for direct stipends on which they can live while they train.

"The U.S.O.C. says its mandate is taking care of *all* amateur sport," Korzenowski complains. "But an Olympic committee should support *Olympic* sport. At least if you want to win."

According to Edwin Moses, individual athletes will never get the funds they need until we find a way to get more contributions to them *directly*, skipping the administrative layers of the U.S.O.C. and the N.G.B.'s. But until that day comes, say many athletes and coaches, corporate America must pick up the slack.

That advice, however, often falls on deaf ears when it comes to so-called minor sports, such as water polo. Back in 1984, when Christopher Dorst's team won the silver medal, he and other team members went into debt to complete their training. But with an M.B.A. from Stanford University and experience as a high-tech marketing consultant, Dorst thought he could do better for the '88 team. "I've been marginally successful," he says, "in that I've raised \$75,000 from Kiwanis Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and private individuals. But corporations don't seem interested. We're just too low-profile for them. That's a shame," he adds, "because the strong, handsome, articulate members of the U.S. water polo team would be great spokespeople. They've balanced jobs, education, and marriages, all while achieving Olympic-caliber success."

If sports such as water polo, team handball, and judo suffer because of corporate disinterest, a sport that does get corporate sponsorship—track and field—seems also to have declined, since only big-name athletes garner the support. "I coach a bunch of 30-year-olds," says Tom Jennings, coach of New Hampshire's Pacific Coast Club. "Look at the field now. From Steve Scott to Carl Lewis to Billy Olson, no one quits. These people have names, and they're in demand for every major track meet. Since track events have limited entries, there's hardly any room for newcomers. These younger athletes simply can't get into competition. And to get good, you have to compete against the best in the world." In other words, the next generation isn't getting the chance to develop.

American companies have backed only a select number of our Olympians, says one gold-medal-winning track-and-field athlete who asked to remain nameless, "because they are mostly interested in advancing their own good. Getting the Olympic logo on the product is the extent of their involvement. They like going to the parties and meeting the athletes; they like taking pictures. But they don't really care if the athletes get aid. They'll help one or two and feel they're doing their job. But large companies like Coke and 7-Up have to be much more involved."

Even when programs are well funded, however, they may lose much of their value because not enough athletes have access to them. Consider the thriving research labs at Colorado Springs. While

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exciting work takes place in them, most American Olympians don't get to see a lot of it. They lack the constant flow of information and supervision given to all Eastern Bloc athletes throughout their careers. As Gideon Ariel says, "We have the best potential technology in the world, but it's not being utilized by athletes." It's in the laboratory, but not on the field.

To be sure, the Colorado Springs center *does* boast some highly accomplished researchers—people capable of doing athletes a lot of good. Charles Dillman is one of the most competent biomechanists in the country. Psychologist Shane Murphy, head of the sport-psychology department, has been lauded for his ability to help athletes achieve the appropriate mind-set right before a competition or game. Jay Kearny and Peter Van Handel of the physiology lab have instituted some excellent applied-research projects, measuring subtle biochemical factors so athletes at the center can improve their times and speeds as they train.

Yet with all this expertise, the science only sporadically gets out of the lab. Part of the problem certainly is resistance and

a lack of scientific training on the part of American coaches. And part of the problem is the inaccessibility of the training center itself. It's hard to travel there by plane. And the high-altitude location is inappropriate for summer athletes, whose events are only infrequently performed at high altitudes. Even with recent improvements and innovations, it's ugly and forbidding, with inadequate facilities. Due to insufficient gym space, some teams must leave the premises to train. Most elite athletes simply don't use the center. "Colorado Springs does me no good," Mac Wilkins declares. "There is no discus-throwing field."

Indeed, though some 20,000 athletes pass through the U.S. Olympic Committee's training centers each year, Mike Moran himself notes that these facilities attract few of the best Olympians. "Edwin Moses is not going to come to a training center when he can train in Southern California," Moran explains.

Since most elite athletes don't make it to Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs has to find a way to bring the fruits of its research to the athletes. Unfortunately, there is not an organized communications system for everyone to tap into. "In Russia and East Germany," says Ann Grandjean, chief nutrition consultant for the U.S.O.C., "diet and exercise pro-

grams are dictated to the athletes. In America, that's not so. Whether an athlete uses any particular diet is up to the athlete. This is paired with the fact that we lack a system to rapidly convey information to the athlete. An Eastern European coach once told me that if someone in his country came up with a brilliant new high-performance diet, all the athletes would be on it within four days. In this country, on the other hand, the opposite often happens: Because of the press, our athletes are barraged with *misinformation*. They may get their nutritional information from pseudoexperts, whose advice is totally wrong."

Given all the problems, many American athletes suggest we revitalize the Olympic movement from the ground up. "Up until now," Mac Wilkins explains, "we've relied on that rare individual genius to come to the fore." But the independent, maverick spirit we so firmly believe in—the underdog pulling himself up by the bootstraps—can no longer cut the mustard against arsenals of world-class science turned on magnum force.

Instead, suggest Wilkins, Edwin Moses, and many others, we have to start early, creating an organized nationwide system to identify talented athletes in their youth. Tiff Wood, a member of the rowing team and the Athletes Advisory Council, recommends "placing a far greater emphasis on physical education in the schools, much like science and math," he says. "There are a lot of positive things one can learn from sports."

Once everyone was engaged in systematic physical activity, it would be possible to observe the talent pool early on, and select possible future Olympians while they're young. Once we have found the talented few and used sport science to determine in what sport they might perform best, we can nurture them through the years.

And when we have found Olympic talent worth nurturing, the experts say, we must set up places for them to work and train. There's almost no outlet, for instance, for junior high school students interested in the throwing sports such as the javelin or the hammer throw, even though those who get special training earlier will have a huge advantage. To deal with that problem, Mac Wilkins, working with Ed Burke, an Olympic hammer thrower, has set up a throwing academy through the Explorer Scouts of America. The academy attracts young people for workshops virtually every weekend of the year. Wilkins and Burke are seeking assistance to establish six more facilities.

To nurture our future Olympians, we must also make sure our coaches are better trained in sciences that now remain mostly in the lab. Instead of being forced to double as football coaches and history teachers, our track-and-field coaches should be learning the essentials of biomechanics, nutrition, and physiology required to groom runners



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OLYMPICS

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and jumpers. That means setting up a long-term nationwide system of instruction that reaches coaches and athletes across the land.

"America will never be like Leipzig, with all the athletes gathered in a central place," says Irving Dardik. "Since we can't bring the athlete to the sport science, we must bring the sport science to them." In the short term, Dardik hopes to see fully equipped mobile vans, manned by scientists, reach elite athletes around the country. In the long run, he'd like to see all athletes train at home, armed with myriad portable sensors to detect heartbeats, muscle patterns, and brain waves. "These sensors send information directly into the athlete's home computer, which would then communicate the information to a central clearinghouse," he says. "Once every aspect of the athlete's current performance has been analyzed, experts could prescribe future training programs. The athlete would thus get specialized instruction even if he is not entrenched at the Olympic Training Center."

To accomplish such far-reaching goals, obviously funds are needed. Christopher Dorst would like to see the people at the U.S.O.C. use more aggressive marketing techniques. "I guess I think they're just too conservative," he says. "If they did things like make exercise videotapes or sell the Olympic rings to put on T-shirts, the money might start rolling in."

But no matter how aggressive the U.S.O.C. is, it cannot force the corporate hand. "A company will not sponsor the Olympics just to be nice," rower Tiff Wood says. "There has to be a profit for them. To make Olympic sponsorship pay off, we have to change the public's perception of the Games. In Italy, the athlete of the year was a sculler—that would never happen here."

For that reason, among others, Mac Wilkins believes we must go the way of almost all the other 167 nations participating in the Olympics and give our athletes government subsidies to train. "There is no other way," he insists, "that we can raise the money to provide our athletes with total support."

Edwin Moses agrees. "Athletes who have qualified and distinguished themselves need to be subsidized. It's as simple as that. Everyone has been bouncing around the subject for years; but the fact is that our athletes go into the Olympic Games under stress financially and emotionally, and most of them have been under that sort of stress for years."

As far as Moses is concerned, mere financial support may not be enough. We might not ever win in the Olympics, he says, "unless we establish programs similar to those of East Germany and the U.S.S.R. I don't see an alternative. It's got

to be done. People are always saying, 'Oh, the East Germans, they take their kids and force them to do it, turn them into robots.' We think that we're the happy ones, but it's just not true. They're probably happier to compete for their country than we are for ours. You see, without the structure, our resources aren't really doing much good. Moreover, what you'd ultimately like to do in athletics in any country is identify the people who have the right talent and the right attitude, people who want to do it and who can be helped, and put them with someone who can help them. That's a completely legitimate thing to do."

Legitimate, maybe. But the ultimate question is whether such radical changes are worth it. What do we lose by losing? Why have the East Germans and Russians devoted so much money and national energy to winning? If we can keep up with them at the Olympics, how much would we gain? Would we just be sacrificing our freedom and millions of dollars for mere fun and games?

Rowing team member Tiff Wood believes the freedom afforded the American athlete may be worth the price of losing. "We may never win doing things our way," he concedes. "But winning isn't important enough to put sports under a government-enforced, authoritarian sort of control."

Ann Grandjean agrees. "I would not want to be in a country where I, or someone else, could dictate every bite that every athlete took and what hour they got up and how many hours they practiced, and where they traveled and even where they lived. I happen to like freedom."

But like painters who want the freedom to paint and novelists who want the freedom to write, many world-class athletes would consider it freeing *not* to be shackled by all the financial pressures they now face. And the fallout from Olympic fever would be positive, to say the least: Our youth would learn perseverance and teamwork; and our population would benefit from a renewed emphasis on physical fitness, sport medicine, and sport psychology, a discipline that teaches us how to focus our energies, set goals, and succeed.

Finally, winning at the Olympics would restore some of America's trampled-on world prestige. The Olympics, after all, is one of the most highly publicized events in the world. The Soviets are convinced that their victories are the best possible P.R. for their political system. Why shouldn't we feel that way, too? With the Japanese burying us at trade and manufacturing, and with our space shuttle exploding, it feels as if America has been second-rate for the longest time. The Olympics would be a wonderful place to snap out of it. This country can obviously compete with any country in the world at anything it wants to compete in. As Edwin Moses says, "It's embarrassing to go in there and get beat up all the time." OT