

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

Athletes go for gold with Russian secrets

By Bob Holmes

Everything stops for sport in Australia, and now Canberra is trying to secure even more medals by buying Russian expertise in six Olympic events. Australia, reports a Gemini News Service correspondent, is sports crazy.

ON reading the recent headline "Aus pays a million for Russian secrets," a defence official in Canberra is said to have stormed angrily: "That'll blow the budget!" However, once he realised the cash was strictly for training programmes in six Olympic sports, he calmed down and exclaimed happily: "What a steal!"

True or false, the probably apocryphal story illustrates perfectly where Australian priorities lie. In the laid-back land that seems oblivious to many of the world's woes, sporting performances matter more than a sound economy.

As host of the 2000 Olympics, Australia has ignored its budget deficit and will spend US\$260 million on a government-funded programme aimed at winning a swag of medals in both Atlanta in 1996 and Sydney four years later.

So another million is but a drop in the southern ocean for securing Russian expertise in athletics, boxing, wrestling, shooting, weight-lifting and judo.

"We are buying 70 years of success," claimed Australian Olympic Committee director of sport Craig McLatchey after signing the deal. "The Russians need a source of funding because many of their programmes are short of money," he explained.

He omitted to mention that Australia, with a world-acclaimed institute of Sport and a marvellous track record, was not exactly strapped for either know-how or success. But the arrangement underlines Canberra's determination to maintain its astonishingly high per capita success rate on the playing fields.

With less than 18 million people, Australia won 27 medals at the Barcelona Olympics — swamping most European countries two and three times its population. In Sydney it has set itself a target of 60 medals, including 20 golds, which it is now more confident of achieving after securing the Russian whereabouts.

All the six sports chosen involve multiple events and will greatly increase Australia's potential medal return on its investment. According to McLatchey: "In these particular sports, Russia is clearly the best and this agreement is aimed at producing successful sports programmes across the board in Australia to go beyond 2000." Australia's sons and daughters have made the word sit up and take notice. Cynics might say it is the only time Australia makes the news, but the average Aussie does not mind that

in the least. In a celebrated putdown of his Australian counterpart, former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once said: "I don't think of Australia when I'm shaving in the morning."

Had he been quicker on his feet, the Australian Foreign Minister might have retorted: "May be that's because you're a soccer fan." But even in the round-ball game, Australia is

enclaves, rugby union and rugby league struggle to make an impact and Australian Rules holds sway. In Victoria, Rules is a religion. Even when soccer's World Cup was in full-swing last year, Rules would get five pages-of coverage to soccer's one.

So fanatical are Rules followers that on a wet, wintry night in Melbourne when one nondescript Melbourne suburb plays another, it is nothing ex-

game at 10:00 pm is impressive.

Australians also showed their appreciation when their all-conquering heroes came home with 87 gold medals from last year's Commonwealth Games in Canada. The team was given not just one ticker-tape parade in Sydney — but similar welcomes in Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.

In such a huge and thinly-populated country, the great majority of fans watch most of their sport on television and a glance at the schedules leaves many non-sporting visitors, watching the commercials as the only way of avoiding it. Weekends offer wall-to-wall sport on three of the four major channels.

Some countries would find it staggering that one-day cricket could be shown from 2:20 pm until 10:30 pm let alone puffy aside soaps, films and game shows — and top the ratings! But that is what Channel 9 does throughout the southern summer.

Perhaps even more amazing was that during the Kangaroos 1994 rugby league tour of Britain, one in three Sydneysiders watched the second Test — at 2:00 am.

No wonder the stories chronicling such devotion are legion. During the early hours of an all-night telecast of the 1993 Ashes cricket series in England, a small device exploded in a Sydney suburb. Police were called and when a witness was asked the time of the explosion, the reply came: "Dunno, mate, but Border was 9 not out and Healy had 8."

That evokes memories of a famous pre-World War Two plane crash on the rugged New South Wales-Queensland border. After several days at the site, unable to walk and barely alive, a survivor's first words to his rescuers were about an innings by the great Australian batsman: "Is Bradman out yet?" he asked.

Sport frequently make the top stories in the TV and radio news bulletins and guess what tops the charts every Christmas — the latest outrageous spoof of TV sports commentators.

Last February a news bulletin telling how Cyclone Bobby had scythed through a small town in Western Australia and left 11 people missing was rudely interrupted — by the racing results.

As the Russians are no doubt aware, their sporting "secrets" are in safe and enthusiastic hands.

— Gemini News

About the Author: Bob Holmes is a British sports journalist who recently moved to Malaysia after two years in Australia.



now narrowing the gap between itself and the major powers.

In two of the other three football codes, Australia is world champion. At both rugby union and rugby league, it has conquered more populous northern hemisphere rivals — feats made all the more remarkable by having just two states (New South Wales and Queensland) from which to draw its players.

exceptional for 70,000 people to turn up. Last December England's much-maligned cricket team still drew 74,000 to a "day-night" match against Australia. Test matches attract over 50,000, while the Sydney Cricket Ground — cricket is Australia's only truly national sport — regularly bursts its 40,000 capacity seams.

To watch a crowd of such proportions chanting, cheering and mostly appreciating the finer points of a one-day

An apology for stimulants

LONDON, Mar 16: In an increasingly competitive sporting world, where the boundaries between fair and foul play are often blurred, one maxim has remained seemingly inviolate, reports Reuter.

Performance-enhancing drugs must be banned, drug cheats must be punished.

Now, in defiance of all conventional wisdom, an English academic has published a book containing a chapter in which he argues that drugs in sport should be legalised.

According to Ellis Cashmore, professor of sociology at Staffordshire University, the case for banning drugs is, morally flawed, contradictory and unenforceable.

The traditional argument for banning drugs was restated by the New York Times in an editorial last month after news broke that 11 Chinese athletes in four different sports had tested positive at the Asian Games.

The problem has reached such disturbing proportions that only the most Draconian penalties for all concerned — athletes, trainers, coaches, physicians and national sports federations — can deter further abuses," the Times said.

"The testing must become far more comprehensive and hard to evade in all affected sports. If those who use, administer or condone performance-enhancing drugs were banned from sports competitions, for life, all concerned would hesitate to take even the smallest step towards chemically-enhanced stardom."

The Times refers to Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, stripped of his gold medal

after winning the 1988 Seoul Olympics 100 metres final when he tested positive for steroids.

"The false coin of drug-assisted dominance unfairly diminishes the accomplishments of drug-free athletes... the runner-up, America's Carl Lewis, never quite felt like the champion he deserved to be," it said.

For Cashmore, the Johnson case was crucial to his conclusions on drugs in sport. But his views differ radically to the propositions advanced by the New York Times.

"Who has the right to tell the athlete not to take drugs? It seems so arbitrary."

Cashmore's book making sense of sport, argues that drugs, far from giving some people unfair advantages can compensate for unfair social disadvantages.

He instances Kenyan athletes who have the advantage of living at altitude, which encourages haemoglobin production in the blood and gives them an advantage over athletes who live and train at sea level.

"Sporting competition has

letes and legalise all others.

"There are no logical drugs policies," he said. "The athletics policy is to come down hard on drugs. The reason is they don't want to drive away the corporate sponsors."

Cashmore's final point was dismissed out of hand by International Amateur Athletic Federation spokesman Chris Winner.

"It's simply not the case," Winner said. "On the contrary, it would probably be better for the sponsors if we didn't from time to time embarrass the whole athletics movement."

"But look, we said Ben Johnson is a cheat and we took away his medal."

Winner said it was obvious sports federations could not stop people from taking drugs. But he said taking the further step of making them legal was "An interesting but fatuous argument."

"It goes against everything sport is founded on," Winner said. "It would step on some of the hallowed principles of culture and step on those of religion."

Cashmore agrees sports have little meaning if they are not played to the rules.

But he maintains the federations' regulations are out of date. "Athletics has a history of being three or four steps behind reality," he said.

He was sympathetic to the view that parents will not want to encourage their children to take part in sports where drug use is rife.

"I'm uncomfortable about that," Cashmore admitted. "I would like to see a world free of drugs."

World Cup 2002 battle kicks off

By Phil Minshall

The race to host soccer's World Cup in 2002 is about to start in earnest. South Korea, Japan and Mexico have put in their bids and have begun more than a year's lobbying of the sport's governing body. Gemini News Service looks at the three-sided contest.

THE battle for the right to become the first Asian country to host the Soccer World Cup is getting dirty — with South Korean warnings against Japanese domination of Asia.

Japan is an economic superpower but if Japan tries to dominate the whole of Asia it will be very unhappy for all Asian people," said South Korean Football Association (FA) president Chung Moon-Joon in a clear allusion to Tokyo's World War Two atrocities.

Seoul and Tokyo are slugging it out to decide who will end nearly six decades of European and Latin American domination of World Cup hosting.

Originally, when Joao Havelange, the omnipotent Brazilian president of the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA, the sport's governing body), announced that the tournament should go to either Africa or Asia, China was considered the nation most likely to succeed. But the 1989 Tiananmen Square violence put a stop to that.

Hosting the Cup brings major international prestige and big profits, so it was no surprise when first Japan and then South Korea, two of Asia's economic giants, stepped forward to duel for the privilege of staging the first tournament of the new millennium, after France in 1998.

Both countries have a good track record of organising major sporting spectacles: South Korea staged the enormously successful 1988 Olympics while Japan put on the 1991 World Athletics Championships, the 1993 Under-17

World Cup and last year the Asian Games.

However, they are fierce rivals both on and off the pitch, a reflection of nearly a century of enmity, dating back to the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910.

Japan first looked at the possibility of staging the World Cup back in the 1960s after successfully staging the 1964 Olympics.

By Italia '90 the first hints that Tokyo had rekindled its enthusiasm started to appear and soon a full-scale advertising and promotional campaign was underway.

Three years later, Japan's professional J-League was launched to a worldwide fanfare. It boasted instantly recognisable — if rather over-the-hill — international stars such as England's Gary Lineker and Brazil's Zico.

Japan looked to be home and dry in the race for 2002, especially as the stadiums required, even for the re-vamped 32-team tournament, were in place or soon would be.

Then came South Korea's bid. Seoul started propagating its own proposals two years ago.

Initially, many believed it was just a spoiling bid to make sure Japan would not have things its own way, but in the last 12 months the prospect of the 2002 World Cup going to South Korea has become increasingly likely.

The government is using it as a vehicle to promote reunification with the North, both countries having achieved a modicum of soccer success: North Korea made the 1966

World Cup quarter finals and their southern rivals have qualified for the final stages on three occasions.

Chung Moon-Joon, who is leading the bid, strengthened the Korean position by being elected vice-president of the Asian FA. The Japanese candidate was relegated to last place.

Chung has been touring the world for nine months trying to convince everyone who is anyone in world soccer about the validity of the Korean bid, especially as the country has had a professional league up and running for the last 12 years, albeit with less fireworks than its Japanese counterpart.

Park Kun-Woo, the secretary of KOBI 2002, the Korean bidding committee — in more measured tones than Chung's warning about Japanese domination — points out that "We have a long football history. Before the Korean war we had a very high standard, even if the game was a little stronger in the North. We first qualified for the World Cup in 1954 and have done so for the last three tournaments. No other Asian country has done that."

Park damns the Japanese efforts with faint praise: "They have been working hard for the last three years. They say they have always had the same level of interest in soccer as us, but I don't think so. Our history goes much further back."

The qualification of the South Korean team for USA '94 at the expense of Japan added more credibility to Seoul's bid and was a blow to Japanese

aspirations.

The Koreans sent an investigative team to USA '94 to accompany their footballers and studied every aspect of staging the World Cup in microscopic detail, from stadiums to media, from hotels to transport.

"I remember when it came to the bidding for the 1988 Olympic Games that we were not among the favourites. It was thought that we had made our effort too late but, perhaps to the general surprise, we won," says Park.

"We staged the Olympic Games with a level of efficiency and expertise which astonished the rest of the world. What we have achieved once, we can achieve twice," he comments confidently.

Last year, into the middle of this contest walked Mexico. The move surprised many observers, but the country is unlikely to have put itself forward without a healthy hint from within the corridors of power that the bid would be welcomed.

The prospect of a second Cup in the Americas must count against the Latin American contender, which has already staged the World Cup twice, in 1970 and 1986. But that apparent disadvantage could be turned into proof of its experience and competence.

Senior FIFA vice-president Guillermo Canedo is a director of the Mexican TV channel Televisa which acquired the TV rights to the 1986 finals and then virtually financed the competition by providing additional finance for the finals to go ahead. He is also a long-time associate of the octogenarian autocrat Havelange, a good connection in the less-than-egalitarian FIFA environment.

Another Mexican plus is that it already had the stadiums to cope with a 32-team final.

However, recent political and economic events have meant the odds on a third World Cup for Mexico have crashed almost as fast as the peso.

The country's economic plight will repel many potential sponsors and has made it unlikely that there will be enough money to refurbish any new stadiums that did not get scrubbed up in 1986.

The pendulum has swung South Korea's way since USA '94, but whoever gets the nod in June 1996 it is unlikely that the story will end there. Just like Morocco's rejected bid for the 1998 World Cup which spurred allegations of racism, the bitterness will endure for years.

— Gemini News

Sierra Nevada a good investment

SIERRA NEVADA, Spain. Mar 16: When banks wanted to foreclose on Sierra Nevada a decade ago, it was a run-down ski resort — but a potential resource in this impoverished part of southern Spain, reports AP.

Gian Franco Kasper, perhaps the most powerful player in the skiing business, has bleak memories of his first visit to Europe's most southern winter resort.

"It was a very small little sleeping village with a chair lift and nothing else. It looked very ugly," said Kasper, a Swiss who heads skiing's world governing body FIS. Kasper said the resort needed a "white knight."

That champion turned out to be Jeronimo Paez, a bookish 51-year-old tax lawyer and former national ski champion who coaxed the regional government and the city of Granada into buying the resort in 1984, pitching it as a cost-effective source of jobs in an area where one person in three is out of work.

The decrepit resort — modernized with about \$150 million in public funds in the last five years — has become the largest winter employer in Granada province, generating about 3,500 jobs in the peak season, up from about 500 a decade ago.

It also attracts three times more skiers than it did 10 years ago to the highest

mountain range in continental Spain, which locals say you can see across the Mediterranean to north Africa on a clear day.

Sierra Nevada is equipped with Europe's most sophisticated snow-making and weather-monitoring technology. From a control room lined with television monitors and large, three-dimensional maps of the mountains, technicians monitor 38 miles (60 kilometres) of slopes and control 130 snow cannons.

However, even that technology couldn't save January's World Alpine Skiing Championships, which had to be postponed for the first time because of a snow drought.

"Of course we were disappointed, but getting the championships here was really just a pretext to develop the resort and get some badly needed jobs," said Paez, who headed the championships and is the director of the government-run company that manages the resort.

The postponement has brought Paez criticism from people who charge overspending to lure the championships — a charge he dismisses. Paez has also been attacked by environmentalists critical of the resort's development and encroachment on national park land.

Paez responds that Sierra Nevada has been a better investment than the billions of dollars in public money spent

on the Seville World's Fair and the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

"What we've spent in Sierra Nevada and Granada to create thousands of lasting jobs is about what they spent in Seville to build a few bridges — or on the opening and closing ceremonies in the Olympic Games," Paez said.

Imaculada Vilardebo, a former journalist who works with Paez, described him as a businessman but in a public context "who loves his homeland of southern Spain and has come up with creative ideas and projects to get it out of its historic poverty."

Paez also spearheaded a drive to start the Paris-Dakar auto race this year in Granada instead of Paris, a change that will continue next year.

About \$150 million in public money has been spent in the last five years in the resort and Granada — about \$150 million in the ski resort for snow machines, new lifts and accommodations. Two new hotels have also just opened, modelled after similar accommodations in the Canadian resort of Whistler, British Columbia.

The rest has gone to the city of Granada, largely to modernize an old airport, for new stretches of road and tunnels linking the city to the ski resort 25 miles (40 kilometres) away, and for other infrastructure improvements.

Johnson terms it 'white people's campaign'

KINGSTON, Jamaica, Mar 16: Disgraced Jamaican-born Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson was reported on Tuesday as saying he had been banned from world athletics because of a "campaign by white people," reports Reuter.

Johnson, in Jamaica to work on a self-sponsored documentary on his life, was reported by the Jamaica Observer newspaper as saying his life ban was planned by whites who were campaigning to crush black sports stars.

He cited former heavy-weight boxing champion Mike Tyson, who is nearing the end of a jail sentence for rape, as another who had suffered at the hands of whites.

"My life ban stems from a white people's campaign," Johnson was reported by the Observer as saying.

"I was getting too powerful as black athlete. Every time a Black man tries to succeed in life they try to put him down. Black guys are making some good money and the white people don't want to see them succeed. Mike Tyson is another good example."

They 33-year-old Johnson was banned for life in 1993 after testing positive for banned drugs for a second time. He first tested positive at the Seoul Olympics in 1988 after crossing the finish line first in the 100 meters final.

"I was unjustly treated by the Canadian Athletic Federation and the IAAF (International Amateur Athletic Federation)."

World Cup hosts



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|-------------|-----------|
| Uruguay | 1930 |
| Italy | 1934, '90 |
| France | 1938, '98 |
| Brazil | 1950 |
| Switzerland | 1954 |
| Sweden | 1958 |
| Chile | 1962 |
| England | 1966 |
| Mexico | 1970, '86 |
| W. Germany | 1974 |
| Argentina | 1978 |
| Spain | 1982 |
| US | 1994 |

Another Mexican plus is that it already had the stadiums to cope with a 32-team final. However, recent political and economic events have meant the odds on a third World Cup for Mexico have crashed almost as fast as the peso. The country's economic plight will repel many potential sponsors and has made it unlikely that there will be enough money to refurbish any new stadiums that did not get scrubbed up in 1986. The pendulum has swung South Korea's way since USA '94, but whoever gets the nod in June 1996 it is unlikely that the story will end there. Just like Morocco's rejected bid for the 1998 World Cup which spurred allegations of racism, the bitterness will endure for years. — Gemini News

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