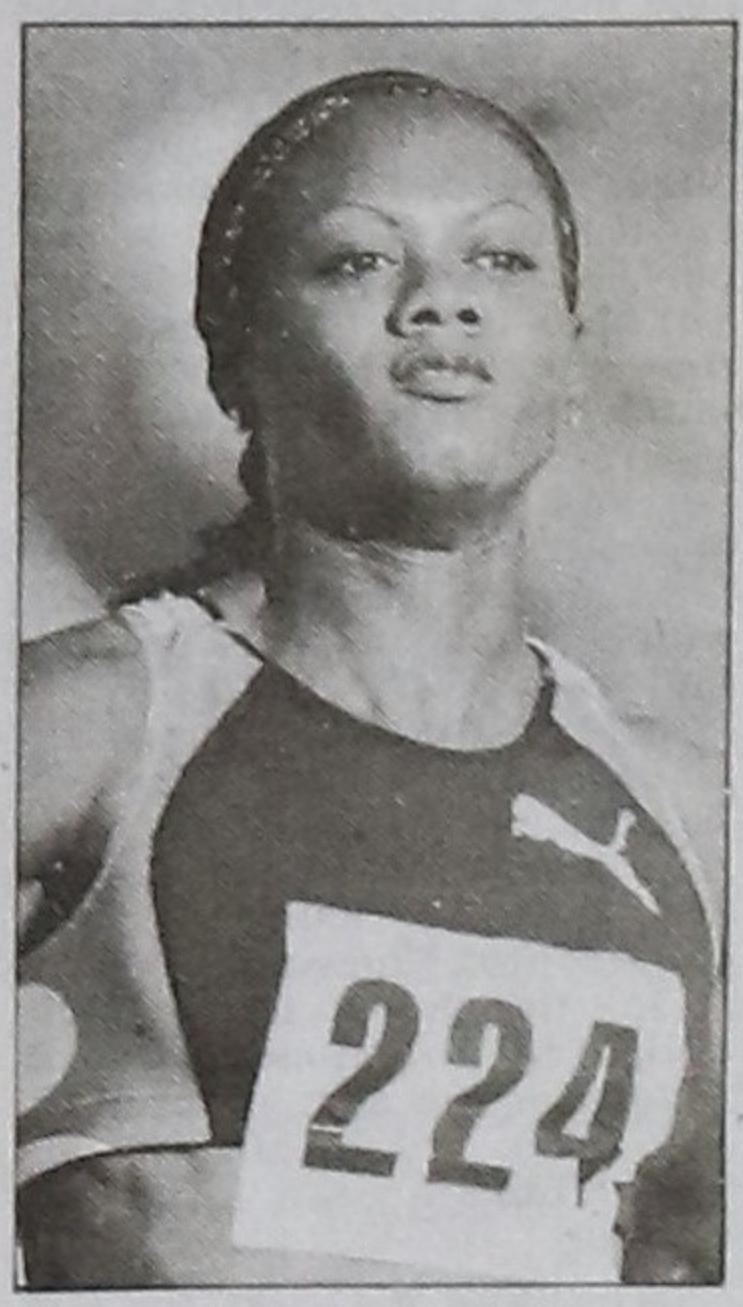


Ottee's anxious 6 days

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Legendary Jamaican sprinter Merlene Ottee will not learn whether she will participate in the individual 100 metres here at the Olympics until September 20 — just two days before the opening heats — the team manager told AFP here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Warren Ulett, who is part of the selectors that will take the



decision, added that 40-year-old Ottee, winner of 34 medals at major championships since she made her Olympic debut in Moscow in 1980, could still make it into the event if one of the three athletes who beat her at the trials didn't meet their standards in training.

Ottee, a two-time world 200m champion and known as the 'Lion Queen' since she strode the 1997 world championships with a mane of golden hair, had said at the Zurich Golden League meeting on August 11 that she should be selected because she was one of the three best sprinters in Jamaica and that was how the selectors always played it.

However, Ulett said that the rules for selection were a bit stricter than how Ottee — who has only recently returned to the track after the arbitration commission of the sport's ruling body the IAAF quashed her two-year suspension for nandrolone because there was no

enough proof — had interpreted them.

"We will stick to our rules and will not break them for anybody," he said.

"Under those rules the first three in the trials qualify but if any of them turn up for the Olympics in worse shape than at the trials then we have the right to replace them with an alternate," he added.

Ulett, who was watching several of his athletes go through their paces at a 'meeting' at the Sydney Olympic training track, made it clear that Beverley McDonald, national 200m champion and runner-up in the 100, whom Ottee has said had volunteered to step aside for her, would run in both events.

In a rather complex web of claim and counterclaim 30-year-old McDonald, who won 200m world silver last year, denied that she had ever made such an offer and in any case Ulett said it didn't matter who was telling the truth as McDonald was within her rights to change her mind.

"Beverley McDonald is not involved in this matter. She has qualified and that is that," he said.

"Merlene Ottee does not select the team, the selectors do," Ulett added.

Ulett, who said that Ottee was currently training alone so she could escape the press and would arrive in Sydney on September 17, made it clear that he wasn't very impressed with the veteran's behaviour over the issue.

"She's clearly overexcited at the moment," he said.

"She is probably the greatest athlete in history in terms of longevity and this has always been down to her being totally focused and hyped up which she clearly is now," he added.

Ulett, who said he hoped to return home with eight medals mixed with a bit of gold, said that he was not worried whether Ottee would also pull off the 4x100m relay team if she was upset at their final decision.

"I don't think it would affect us as Merlene did not run in the relay at Athens and was banned for Seville," he said.

"Although she would obviously enhance our medal chances I still think we can win a medal with or without her," he added.



WELCOME TO SYDNEY: Local residents with Australian flags and balloons await the arrival of the Olympic flame at Gladesville on 13 September. —AFP photo

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 14 (AFP):

Australia's Madame Butterfly Susie O'Neill will be using her two 100m events at the Sydney Games mostly to jump-start her career in the 200m butterfly and freestyle.

O'Neill is seeded seventh in the 100m free and sixth in the 100m fly, but her coach Scott Volkers reckons she has only an outside chance of a minor medal in either.

Asked about O'Neill's prospects in the 100m fly when it kicks off on Saturday, Volkers joked: "Is that on? Is that an event?"

CATHY THE MAORI...

Australia's golden girl Cathy Freeman — an inspiration to women across the globe and arguably the most world's most famous Aboriginal.

But the message had not quite got through to American broadcasters NBC until recently.

The Olympic television rightsholders' website had described the 400-metres runner and gold medal favourite as an 'Australian Maori' until some body spotted the error.

BRAZILIAN BONDING

Tensions seem to be rising in the Brazilian triathlon camp after two of their men's team were spotted brawling outside the Sydney Opera House following a training run.

One was seen knocking the lunch out of the other's hand, resulting in a full-blown scuffle in which kicks were aimed and abuse hurled.

A female Brazilian team member had to intervene in front of embarrassed onlookers.

"I was more shocked than anything that athletes could act like that in a public place," said one observer.

JUST DYING TO GO

British triathlete Sian Brice, who has been busting a gut to get herself in contention for Saturday's opening event, nearly became an unfortunate victim of the new EPO tests. Selected to be tested after a final swim practice on Wednesday, there was insufficient time for the respective blood and urine samples to be collected before Brice was whisked off to a formal press conference under the Opera House.

Professing beforehand to be "dying to go", she was then

forced to sit patiently through the rambling affair before nature's call proved too much and she slipped away quietly from the top table before the end of proceedings to do her duty.

A JELLY GOOD SHOW

British triathlete Michelle Dillon fears that athletes could be stung by jellyfish during the swim section of Saturday's event in Sydney Harbour.

"He's a super hero in Australia. But he's a just very nice guy," said van der Hoogenband, winner of six gold medals at last year's European champs.

ALL THAT GLISTERS

Souvenir hunters have pushed sales of commemorative Olympic coins to more than double the volume offloaded during the Atlanta Games period four years ago.

They have paid 131 million dollars (72 million US) for the mementoes, the Royal Australian Mint and Perth Mint — partners in the coin program — revealed Thursday.

Five million Sydney 2000 coins had been sold by the end of August, compared with 2.4 million for the entire Atlanta Games period.

Of the 53 various medal designs, several of the limited editions have sold out and are trading through dealers for four times their initial purchase price, a spokesman said.

IN QUEST OF A MAIDEN

Record breaking Dutch swim star Inge de Brujin, searching for an Olympic medal after a remarkable eight world records this year, has revealed she's very superstitious before her races.

"Australia is like swimming heaven," said five-time Olympic gold medallist Jenny Thompson.

"I love it because they really look at their distance swimming," chimed in Brooke Bennett, who is still smarting from the fact that none of her 1996 800m freestyle triumph was shown on US television.

Said defending 400m medley gold medalist Tom Dolan: "We had fun at training camp looking at the papers and seeing swimming not only on the front page of the sports section, but on the front page of the paper. We are going to be the number one show."

MR NICE GUY

Ian Thorpe's room mate Michael Klim has made sure the Australian swimming ace has come into early contact with his most dangerous 200m rival,

Dutch swimmer Pieter van der Hoogenband.

Van der Hoogenband was strolling around the village with fellow Dutch star Inge de Brujin when Klim called de Brujin on her mobile phone.

When they finished chatting, de Brujin handed the phone to van der Hoogenband and Klim slipped his phone to his roommate — dual world record holder Thorpe.

"He's a super hero in Australia. But he's a just very nice guy," said van der Hoogenband, winner of six gold medals at last year's European champs.

GO-GO IN NAKED!

Three-time Wimbledon runner-up Goran Ivanisevic received a 29th birthday surprise from cheeky Croatian teammate.

Ivanisevic, who was bundled out of the US Open in the first round last month, was getting a massage in the Homebush Bay athletes village on Wednesday when his teammates burst in wearing a tennis racket-shaped cake.

"We surprised him while he was on the massage table," said Croatian team spokesman Ante Drpic.

Ivanisevic, a bronze medalist in Barcelona, was naked at the time, but Drpic said he was allowed to dress before cutting the cake.

HEAVENLY WELCOME

US swimmers, used to toiling in obscurity, are thrilled to be in the Australian swimming spotlight.

"Australia is like swimming heaven," said five-time Olympic gold medallist Jenny Thompson.

"I love it because they really look at their distance swimming," chimed in Brooke Bennett, who is still smarting from the fact that none of her 1996 800m freestyle triumph was shown on US television.

Said defending 400m medley gold medalist Tom Dolan: "We had fun at training camp looking at the papers and seeing swimming not only on the front page of the sports section, but on the front page of the paper. We are going to be the number one show."

LOGO A NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

GO NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

IAAF lawyer

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Lawsuiting athletes have forced the world governing body to hire its first in-house lawyer to ensure that their suspensions stick, it was revealed here on Thursday.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) spent an estimated 500,000 dollars in the past year on defending arbitration cases against athletes who had tested positive for banned performance-enhancing drugs.

"Until now we have always used a firm of lawyers," a senior IAAF source told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Now we are looking at hiring an in-house lawyer for the first time to help us to save on legal costs."

The IAAF's 1998 arbitration case against Dennis Mitchell, the American sprinter who was eventually banned by the IAAF despite his explanation that his abnormal testosterone levels were due to a session of sex and beer with his wife, was said to have cost the international federation 125,000 dollars in legal costs.

Of the 53 various medal designs, several of the limited editions have sold out and are trading through dealers for four times their initial purchase price, a spokesman said.

Ivanisevic, a bronze medalist in Barcelona, was naked at the time, but Drpic said he was allowed to dress before cutting the cake.

"Australia is like swimming heaven," said five-time Olympic gold medallist Jenny Thompson.

"I love it because they really look at their distance swimming," chimed in Brooke Bennett, who is still smarting from the fact that none of her 1996 800m freestyle triumph was shown on US television.

Said defending 400m medley gold medalist Tom Dolan: "We had fun at training camp looking at the papers and seeing swimming not only on the front page of the sports section, but on the front page of the paper. We are going to be the number one show."

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

Koreans at ease

SYDNEY, Sept 14: North and South Korean athletes and officials will mix freely and wear identical uniforms when they march together at the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony on Friday in a gesture of peace and reconciliation, reports AFP.

"Nobody will be able to distinguish who is from the North and who is from the South," Ryu Song-II, general secretary of North Korea's Olympic Committee, said Thursday.