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## Recollections of An Olympic Torchbearer

By FRED SPARKS

SINCE the first Olympics were held in 776 B.C., they've been recorded in story, poem, play, legend, song, and the *World Almanac*. Victors have been deified on papyrus, monuments, friezes, vases, and boxes of breakfast cereal. Everyone has had his say, from Socrates to Red Smith.

The realization that for 2,724 years experts had been doing this appalled me when, in 1948, I was ordered from Paris by the Chicago *Daily News* to cover the first postwar games in London. No one writing for newspapers at the time had less knowledge of sports. Even Emily Post knew a thing or two about croquet. With half a floor of crack sportswriters, why had my discerning editor, Basil L. ("Stuffy") Walters, selected me? Me, who thought runners came from Wall Street and discus throwers advertised Jockey shorts.

As we bobbled over the Channel, I saw the light! Stuffy had not lost his touch; he was sending me, a feature writer, because few readers give a hoot about the technical side of the games. Suppose someone does crack the hop-skip-and-jump record? How many papers would that sell? Particularly in the summer of '48, when Senator McCarthy was going through the State Department like Sherman through Georgia and Thomas E. Dewey was winning the Presidency in a walk. (Since then, of course, TV has brought the athletes' agonizing exertions into the living room,

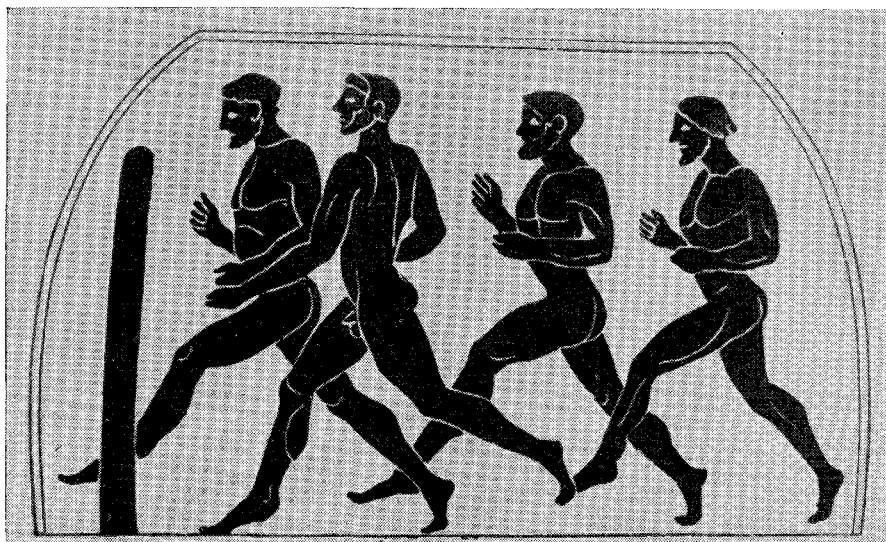
providing an exceptional opportunity for deodorant commercials.)

I can't say I was entirely uninformed; I *had* lived in Greece a year. I remembered that the Marathon stems from Pheidippides's run to Athens carrying the "We Stopped Persia" message. Those of us who have seen, in more recent times, Western Union boys in action know Pheidippides was the last messenger who ran.

I also recalled how, in an early Olympic, one brute killed his opponent in the pancratium, a severe boxing-wrestling combination. The judges agreed that killing was permitted, but the killer had fouled; they named the deceased the victor. *He* was one Olympic hero who could not open a restaurant, like Duke Kahanamoku, or play Tarzan, like Johnny Weissmuller.

Stuffy was right: *non-sports* incidents always won the meatiest headlines. Take 1936, the last pre-war Olympics, when Germany was the host country. That year Eleanor Holm, the back stroke whiz, commanded national attention by *not* competing. Miss Holm, later married to Billy Rose of AT&T, was removed from the team aboard the *SS America* on the way over by Avery Brundage, then, as now, head of the American Olympic Committee. Miss Holm, it was indicated, broke training with a few of the boys over Piper-Heidsieck; Mr. Brundage, ever the house mother, felt this a shabby example for the 4H Clubs.

In Berlin it was politics that won most newspaper space. Herr Hitler, who



Long distance runners, from a vase painting, 6th century.

—Bettmann Archive.



staged the flashiest Olympics ever, had been preaching, you will recollect, that the Nordic was Superman; a week before he had put Negroes high on his list of inferiors. Adolf was the main attraction as he arrived, surrounded by his oldest comrades, most of whom have since been hanged. Der Fuehrer intended to congratulate each winner personally. Suddenly, his blond heavens darkened. The opening events were copped by Americans, Jesse Owens, Ralph Metcalfe, Johnny Woodruff, and Cornelius Johnson. Not one could qualify for a Mississippi lunch counter. As they lined up to receive his blessings, 110,000 spectators watched, enthralled. Herr Hitler fled the field! Official spokesmen mumbled something about "a head cold" and "it looked like rain." "America's Black Auxiliaries," as Goebbels labeled them, had forced the first Nazi retreat.


Politics infests every Olympics; 1948 was no exception. The Arab athletes had folded their tents and were prepared to depart when the International Olympic Committee forbade Israeli participation; the new state lacked proper recognition. A princely Saudi Arabian whom I first met in Beirut was immensely relieved. "I would have had to go with the rest," he sighed, "after spending a fortune on passage for six of my wives."

**I**F you're going to Tokyo and, like me, cannot take scores seriously, you'll still tingle at the attendant pomp. TV couldn't handle that for me; I can't love a parade vicariously. Unfortunately, the particulars of surrender peeled from Japan its showy trappings. You've got to have at least one mounted, ceremonial troop to do these things up. No doubt Tokyo will *try*, and some samurai will be atop armored ponies, even if borrowed from Toho Studios.

The British, as was expected, did wonders. Helsinki, '52, Melbourne, '56, Rome, '60, couldn't rival the regal inauguration at Wembley. The Household Cavalry, helmets gleaming like palace silver, made fanfares. Then there was a crash of Marine brass and drums, surely heard at Land's End, followed by Sol Hurok's Own: the Regimental Band and Massed Pipers of the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment, each kilt's pleat pressed, each bare knee Simonized. King George and family made *their* entrance, as Cecil Beaton clicked away, and a decent number of Grenadiers, in tall bearskin headdresses, fainted.

Now the Empire stepped aside and the teams passed in review in alphabetical order—but for Greece, given the lead for her seniority. Finally a local boy—a Cambridge blue, naturally—materialized with the sputtering torch, grandly circled the track, ran up the peristyle, and ignited a vast bronze urn like a crêpe suzette for Zeus. Then a sol-

SR/March 14, 1964



So much fun  
even the sun  
stays up  
late in


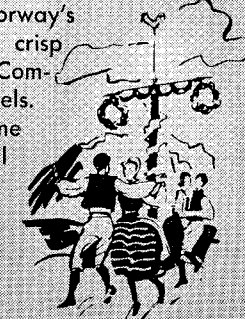
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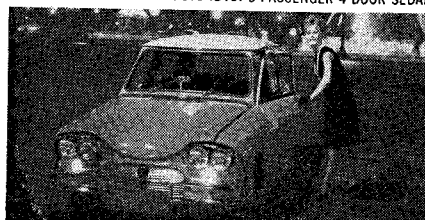
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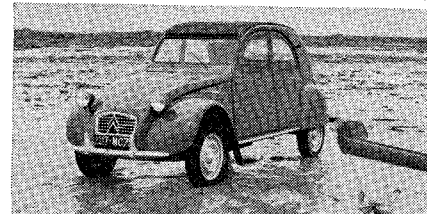
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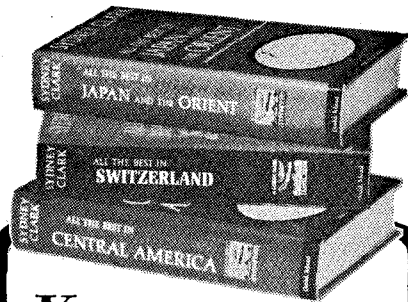
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emn chorus chanted Kipling's "Olympic Hymn," and the Archbishop of York allowed that pagan rites were not offensive to the Church of England.

At circuses I enjoy side shows more than the formalized doings in the three rings. Similarly, I was amused by the side-show Olympics more than track-and-field, the main event, in Wembley; I sought out games I had not seen before. If your unguided middle worries you and you've thought of Vic Tanney's, witness a bout of weight-lifting in Tokyo. After watching the well-muscled chaps in London push overhead what appeared to be railroad wheels on axles, I resolved to remain forever a *before*.

None of the contestants watched those performing. They looked at themselves in the many "guide" mirrors—madly, madly in love with their own gross biceps, triceps, pectoralis, and hamstrings. It's just as well; no one else could love a weight-lifter *except* another weight-lifter. One Turk—he must have been 6 foot 7 and 305 pounds—was followed around by a simpering fan who carried his towel, resin, comb, brush, scent, and moustache wax.

**I**F water polo is a "sport," so is strolling in front of speeding Fifth Avenue buses. I saw an English ball carrier, in the fullness of his youth, pulled under by two human whales. When they wrenched away the ball and let him come up for air, he looked ready for Medicare. He had swallowed enough chlorinated water to disinfect Lake Erie.

If you are in Tokyo without your wife, don't miss the women's gymnastics. The moment I entered the hall in London I saw everything that a young, middle-aged, or old man needs. Beauty that you wouldn't believe flew through the air with the greatest of ease, each specimen fit for three *Playboy* pages. The Americans never shine at these Sokol-type acrobatics, but it does such miracles for the female torso that I advise Elizabeth Arden to unload her vibrator belts and install parallel bars.

I fell in love, five or six times, particularly with a Swedish side-horse specialist who could make a ninety-two-year-old Republican explode in his wheelchair. Flashing my press card, I asked to interview her. That night? She agreed to come to the Chicago *Daily News* flat on Victoria Embankment. This would be *my* best story—I FOUND ROMANCE AT THE OLYMPICS.

I hastened to Fortnum-and-Mason's and splurged on iced Russian caviar, tinned Polish ham, jarred French escargots, and boxed Danish pastry. The candles and my heart were burning expectantly when Helga arrived, flashing teeth such as Ipana never saw. Alas, still in training, she brought her own brown bag with black bread, yellow

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cheese, and green yogurt, of all things.

After dining she said: "Now, for the interview"—and took off her dress. Underneath was a leotard. "All writers ask how we keep fit," she said. She showed me, bending, twisting, stretching, gyrating. Then Helga ate a fig and asked: "Anything else you want?" Fortunately, the jangling doorbell smothered my reply. There stood a man with shoulders so wide I thought he'd forgotten to take the hanger out of his jacket. Helga introduced me to her fiancé, a member of Sweden's wrestling team.

My way-out Olympic coverage was *not* impressing the sports desk; for the first few days Stuffy withheld comment. Then, out of the blue, I had a banner-line windfall that drew his cabled compliments.

I received a call from a man I can best describe as the Bobby Baker of Fleet Street, a nonwriting fixer always available to assist visiting newsmen—for the King's penny. "I have in my kitchen," said Percy, "a Czech pole-vaulter."

No sooner said than I was taxiing to his digs in Chelsea. I had anticipated defections from the East, but never dreamt the first would be mine, exclusively. Over Bass Ale and admirable Chilton, I got the classic quotes: "The weather might be foul in England, but here you can soar free without a Communist on your back." Percy "borrowed" twenty pounds.

**I**N THE last days of the London Olympiad so many Czechs and Hungarian athletes emulated *my* pole-vaulter that a disgusted Iron Curtain official said: "Next time we'll buy one-way tickets." The same sort of thing is bound to happen in Tokyo. If only the Russians who don't want to go back home will defect *before* they participate; then we'd have a chance.

The Americans had a few days, after Zeus's urn was formally extinguished, to do London. They shook off the long moral arm of Avery Brundage and, with precious hard currency in their pockets, swept through Soho as they had swept the Olympics. Few, I am sure, sought cultural opportunities; not one, to my knowledge, climbed the Tower.

I intend to go to the Tokyo Olympics and there I shall, as in London, leave the springing and foot-racing to the hungry electronic eye and concentrate on politics and romance. If we could merge these elements! What a story!

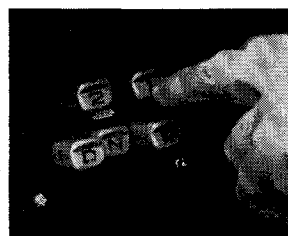
Imagine a lady Russian 200-meter runner flipping for a clean-cut American oarsman from, say, Spearfish, North Dakota! They could marry at the U.N., Chairman Khrushchev giving the bride away, with President Johnson as best man. *That* would, in the true Olympic spirit, thaw the cold war.

SR/March 14, 1964

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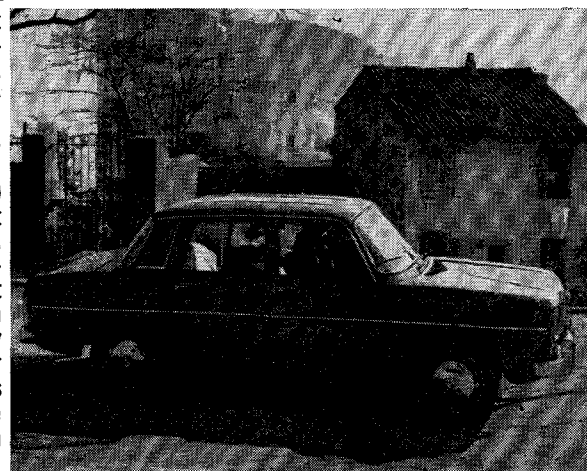
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\*New York Post

## Where to See Practically Everybody

By HENRY C. WOLFE

**C**HARLES DE GAULLE'S dinner, the night of August 25, 1944, was catered by the Café de la Paix, the restaurant rimmed by sidewalk tables at that frantic crossroads, the Place de l'Opéra. There was still fighting in the Paris streets—the main German battle line was only a few miles away—but behind the closed doors of the café chefs and waiters hurriedly assembled a cold meal of sorts and dispatched it to the improvised headquarters of France's top military hero.

Several years later, when Harry Truman made his first post-Presidential visit to Paris, he lost no time in getting to the terrace of the Café de la Paix. In 1918, as a young AEF captain on leave, he had spent pleasant hours there watching the passing show.

Since 1865, French social and political life has swirled about this world-famous establishment so close to the Opéra. (Philippe Egalité had a special suite in "La Grange aux Belles," which once occupied the location of the Café de la Paix.) Revolutions, wars, and military occupations have shaken the café but never conquered it. In the course of its ninety-eight years it has been the rendezvous of artists, musicians, writers, princes of the blood and of finance—of Massenet, Zola, Father Dupin, Diaghilev, Concourt, Rothschild, de Maupassant. It was in its spacious Second Empire rooms that these and other celebrated patrons created the legend: "Sit long enough in the Café de la Paix and you will see everyone worth seeing."

After World War I, it is true, the *avant-garde*, especially the American expatriates of the "lost generation," gathered in Montparnasse at the Dôme, the Rotonde, and the Coupole. Since World War II, a second expatriate generation—Fulbright scholars and student GIs—have made the Flore and the Deux Magots in the St.-Germain-des-Prés sector their hangout. But the Café de la Paix never lost its popularity among international celebrities and celebrity-watchers. Tourists from every where still scurry for a place at the lit-

tle round table on its sycamore-shaded terrace.

The Café de la Paix has seen—by candle-light, gas lamps, and finally electric bulbs—the melodrama of the 1870-71 siege of Paris, the bloody period of the Commune, the lush era of *la belle époque* which came to a crashing end in 1914, two world wars, German occupation. During the liberation of Paris there was fighting on the café terrace, and bullets shattered some of the mirrors. In 1948, Allied officers met in a heavily guarded, second-floor dining room to map out the formation of NATO.

Once Paris was liberated, American soldiers, like their fathers in World War I, headed for the place they had heard so much about. A few hours after the German garrison had surrendered, GIs were waving slips of paper bearing the café's name and asking how to get there.

Even the Eiffel Tower holds no stronger fascination for tourists than the Café de la Paix. Patrons come from every part of the globe; at the height of the French vacation season, foreigners heavily outnumber the natives. One August day, they say, a Frenchman saw a Parisian friend sitting there



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