

Flagbearer sees himself as lucky man

by Robbi Pickeral
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SYDNEY — Cliff Meidl remembers little of the accident that changed his life. He was told he struck three unmarked high-voltage cables while operating a jackhammer. He was told his body absorbed 30,000 volts of electricity — 15 times the charge of an electric chair.

He was told, 14 years ago, that he would never walk again.

"I consider myself an extremely lucky man," said Meidl, an Olympic kayaker who will lead the U.S. delegation — marching — as flagbearer at the opening ceremonies. Lucky in more ways than one.

Cyclist Lance Armstrong, basketball player Teresa Edwards and University of Minnesota alumnus Mike Wherley, a rower, were included in the list of 10 finalists in the flagbearer selection. Lance Deal, a hammer thrower, is the alternate. But it was Meidl's story — as inspiring as it is gory — that earned him an honor reserved for the athlete that best exemplifies both American and Olympic spirit.

"It was always a dream for me to be in the Olympics," said Meidl, 34. "But I never thought I'd be a flagbearer, and I'm really excited about the whole thing."

Meidl was 20 years old, and working his way through college as a plumber's assistant in 1986, when he struck three unmarked high-voltage cables with a jackhammer while puncturing a hole for water lines. He remembers drilling, and then everything went black.

The electricity blew Meidl out of the hole, then back into it. A co-worker tried to pull him out, but was shocked himself. He was saved only when someone turned off the power.

"The doctors have told me they don't know how I survived," Meidl said. "They think that because I was relatively young — 20 at the time — my heart was neither too mature nor too young, so I was able to withstand the three cardiac arrests. Also, it was an enormous amount of luck."

The blast blew off one of Meidl's big toes, blew open a portion of his skull, and badly burned his back. He later lost a second toe from gangrene. But his knees were the worst.

Skin was gone, but so was tendon and joint. When the doctors took protective casts off his legs the next day, they found raw bone.

Doctors initially wanted to amputate both of Meidl's legs, but his parents wouldn't let them. Finally, they found a plastic surgeon at the UCLA Medical Center who was willing to try a radical procedure: cutting his calf muscles and attaching them to his knees.

When Meidl woke up 12 hours after the blast, his chest hurt. Several of his ribs had been broken by all the CPR.

"It felt like I'd been hit by a truck," he said. The worst was yet to come.

He stayed in the hospital for roughly 2 1/2 months, moving from bed to wheelchair, then wheelchair to crutches. He stayed on the stilts for the next three years.

"I definitely suffered through the 'why me's' and 'why not someone else' thoughts," he said. "But I had to realize that was not the way to go. The negative feelings were much greater after the accident. They have lessened as time goes by. I try to think of things in a positive way."

Rehab helped. Realizing that his former favorite sports — track and cross country running — were no longer in his future, Meidl turned to paddling outrigger canoes in 1987, about a year after the accident. In 1996, in his first Olympic Games in Atlanta, Meidl's flatwater team was eliminated in the semifinals, but Meidl came back for a second try.

"I think a lot of it has been determination," Meidl said. "I used will to be able to get from not being able to use my legs, and transferred that to kayaking."

Meidl, who lives in Los Angeles, still has the clothes he wore the day he was electrocuted. His mother saved them, and he keeps them in a suitcase in his office.

He also has leftover scars from the accident, mental as well as physical. He has nightmares sometimes. He will always walk with a limp.

Still, Meidl said, he wouldn't change anything. "It is unfortunate to say that traumatic experiences bring out the best in us, but they do," he said. "I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had the accident, but I'm very proud to be here today. I'm proud of myself and proud of my country."



PHOTO BY KAREN T. BORCHERS (TMS)

ELECTRIFYING ENTRANCE. The United States Flag Bearer Cliff Meidl makes his way up the steps past the Australian Marching Band after the USA team took its place on the field during Opening Ceremonies of the 25th Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, Friday September 15.

Two athletes are sent home after testing positive for drugs

by Alan Abrahamson
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Los Angeles Times

SYDNEY, Australia — In the latest Olympic disgrace involving the nation of Bulgaria and the sport of weightlifting, a Bulgarian lifter was stripped Wednesday of his silver medal and sent packing because he tested positive for a substance often used to mask the use of drugs.

Ivan Ivanov, 28, who Saturday won silver in the bantamweight division, tested positive for the diuretic furosemide, the International Olympic Committee announced.

IOC Director General Francois Carrard said Ivanov had already left the Olympic Village. Carrard also announced Wednesday that Vadim Devyatovsky of Belarus, a hammer thrower, had been kicked out of the Games after testing positive for traces of the banned steroid nandrolone.

These are the first athletes banned as a result of tests conducted during the Games. Several others have been suspended following pre-Games tests, according to Prince Alexandre de Merode of Belgium, chairman of the IOC's medical commission.

Diuretics help the body flush itself of fluids. Cheaters use diuretics to hide the presence of performance-enhancing drugs.

Nandrolone builds muscles and helps athletes recover faster from hard training.

Weightlifting is so contaminated by drug use that a few years back Olympic officials considered taking it off the program.

The Bulgarians have their own sorry history. At the 1988 Games in Seoul, South Korea, Mitko Grablev won the bantamweight division and Angel Genchev the lightweight. Then Grablev was disqualified — after testing positive for a diuretic. Two days later, Genchev was disqualified for the same reason.

After the announcement of Genchev's test, Bulgarian officials withdrew the rest of their

weightlifters from the Games.

The International Weightlifting Federation, aiming to distance itself from the stain of drugs, actually went so far as to change all weight categories after the 1992 Olympics. That wiped out all world and Olympic records and gave federation officials the opportunity to boast that they were "starting clean."

Another shuffling of the weight categories occurred after the 1996 Atlanta Games.

Even before Ivanov's expulsion, events at the Sydney Games had already further strained the sport's credibility.

On Sunday, the IOC said it had kicked out the entire Romanian weightlifting team because three lifters — including two on the Olympic team — had failed drug tests this year. Under the federation's "three strikes" policy, the entire team had to go, the IOC said.

On Monday, the federation lifted the ban on five "clean" lifters after the Romanian Olympic Committee agreed to a \$50,000 payment, dubbed a "fine." Such a waiver is included in the federation's rules.

The Bulgarian Ivanov, meantime, had been so delighted at winning silver that he had kissed the barbell after clinching second place — behind Halil Mutlu of Turkey, who pound for pound may be the world's best lifter. The current bantamweight class is for men under 56 kilos, or 123 pounds.

Mutlu, who stands 4-foot-11, lifted a combined total — in the snatch and in the clean-and-jerk — of 305 kilos, or 671 pounds. Though he lifts for Turkey, he hails from Bulgaria.

By comparison, Ivanov lifted a combined total of 292 1/2 kilos, or 643 1/2 pounds.

With Ivanov out, the silver medal will go to Wu Wenxiong of China. China's Zhang Xiangxiang was elevated from fourth to third.

Carrard said the IOC intends to redo the medal ceremony.

Snapshot

Outta my way, girl



PHOTO BY CHRIS CARLSON, TMS CAMPUS

Cindy Parlow, left, of the US, pushes past Norway's Goeril Kringen during second half action of the USA women's 2-0 victory over Norway Thursday afternoon, September 14, 2000, at the Melbourne Cricket Grounds as part of the first round of competition in the 2000 Summer games in Australia.

Total Medal Counts

Country	G O L D	S I L V E R	B R O N Z E	T O T A L
United States	10	7	6	23
Australia	7	8	7	22
China	6	4	7	17
France	6	7	3	16
Russia	3	7	6	16
Italy	4	2	6	12
Germany	3	4	4	11
Korea	2	4	5	11
Britain	2	5	2	9
Netherlands	5	1	2	8
Ukraine	2	3	3	8
Japan	3	3	1	7
Bulgaria	3	1	1	5
Cuba	2	1	2	5
Slovakia	1	3	1	5
Romania	2	1	1	4
Switzerland	1	2	1	4
Czech Rep.	1	0	3	4
Belarus	0	1	3	4
Spain	2	0	1	3
Brazil	0	2	1	3
Turkey	2	0	0	2
Hungary	1	1	0	2
Poland	1	1	0	2
Sweden	1	0	1	2
Canada	1	0	1	2
North Korea	0	1	1	2
Greece	0	1	1	2
South Africa	0	1	1	2
Chinese Taipei	0	1	1	2
Belgium	0	0	2	2
Costa Rica	0	0	2	2
Indonesia	0	0	2	2
Croatia	1	0	0	1
Lithuania	1	0	0	1
Mexico	1	0	0	1
Colombia	1	0	0	1
Yugoslavia	0	1	0	1
Uruguay	0	1	0	1
Nigeria	0	1	0	1
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	1	1
Georgia	0	0	1	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Thailand	0	0	1	1
Estonia	0	0	1	1
Portugal	0	0	1	1
India	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1

100 Years Ago...

Paris 1900

Dates: May 14 - October 28

Participants: 1225

(1206 Men; 19 Women; 26 Countries)

Sports: 24

Events: 166

	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1 France	29	41	32
2 USA	20	14	9
3 Great Britain	17	8	10
4 Belgium	8	7	5
5 Switzerland	6	2	1

Top Athletes

Name (Country)	Discipline
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1 Alvin Kraenzlein (USA)	Athletics
2 Konrad Staheli (SUI)	Shooting
3 Ray Ewry (USA)	Athletics
4 Irving Baxter (USA)	Athletics
5 Walter Tewksbury (USA)	Athletics