

Moment is golden for Slay

by Helene Elliott
Los Angeles Times
November 13, 2000

Six weeks after U.S. freestyle wrestler Brandon Slay lost the 167.5-pound gold medal to Germany's Alexander Leipold at the Sydney Olympics - and a month after the International Olympic Committee recommended that Leipold be stripped of the gold for testing positive for two anabolic steroids - Slay will be recognized as the Olympic champion Wednesday at New York's Rockefeller Plaza.

NBC will televise the ceremony during the "Today" show.

Anita DeFrantz of Los Angeles, an IOC vice president, will

favor holding it in his hometown of Amarillo, Texas. Another plan, to give him the medal on NBC's "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno," was vetoed by the IOC.

Slay and officials of the U.S. Olympic Committee, the IOC and USA Wrestling decided "Today" would provide the widest possible audience and a suitably dignified setting.

"It's been a learning process. It's so novel. It's never been done before," said Steve Brunner, USA Wrestling's director of marketing.

"We've been going back and forth on a lot of ideas. We sat down and we all talked, giving our ideas. In the end, it was Brandon's decision on what he wanted.

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-Steve Brunner,
USA Wrestling's director of marketing.

present a gold medal to Slay, silver to third-place finisher Moon Eui-jae of Korea and a bronze to Adem Bereket of Turkey. U.S. freestyle wrestling great Bruce Baumgartner, who won two gold medals, a silver and a bronze in four Olympics, will present flowers to the trio, following Olympic protocol.

All three will probably receive new medals. Leipold didn't return his medal to the IOC until last week, and a source said it was no longer in pristine condition. A new silver medal will be awarded because the original was damaged by careless handling, a spokeswoman for DeFrantz said.

Several possibilities had been discussed for the ceremony. Slay

"... he said, 'Given the fact this will be on national TV and I didn't get to have a ceremony in Sydney and that was taken away from me, this is the best way to do it, so friends and family that can't come can still see it.'"

A podium identical to those used in Sydney will be constructed on West 49th Street, where the Today show often stages concerts. Flags of the winners' homelands will be raised and the U.S. national anthem will be played.

And unlike its coverage of the Sydney Games, NBC will show the medal ceremony live in the East and Midwest and only briefly tape-delayed in the rest of the country.

Kournikova wins in a Landslide

by Shannon Ryan
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
November 09, 2000

VILLANOVA, Pa. - While Americans waited for their votes to be counted on election night, fans at the Advanta Championships added another name to the ballot at Villanova's Pavilion.

Anna Kournikova, the tournament's sixth seed, defeated Mashona Washington Tuesday night, 6-2, 6-0, in front of a crowd of Abercrombie-clad young men shouting marriage proposals and wearing T-shirts endorsing the Russian beauty for the presidency over Al Gore and George W. Bush.

Four 18-year-old Haverford College students collected as much attention for their creative signs as Kournikova did in an attempt to escape the first round and eventually capture her first singles title.

"We don't know tennis," one sign proclaimed. "But we'd like to know Anna," another read.

Their 19-year-old idol gave them plenty to cheer about on the court.

After a shaky start, going to deuce often in the first set and letting Washington keep her aggressiveness corralled, Kournikova took command. She and Washington traded control through the first four games, knotted at 2-2.

But Kournikova pumped up her attack and, with precision, won 10 consecutive games, closing out the match in only 47 minutes with a punctuating overhand indicative of her strong style.

"I think I'm playing much more aggressive," said Kournikova, ranked 10th after a successful fall season. "The last couple of months, I've played a lot of tennis."

She reached the final in Moscow, the semifinals in Luxembourg and the quarterfinals in Zurich. Earlier this year, Kournikova defeated No. 2 Lindsay Davenport and No. 8

Nathalie Tauziat in San Diego.

She arrived in the United States on Saturday from a tournament in Leipzig, Germany, where she was a semifinalist. Kournikova showed no signs of weariness from the long flight, however.

"I still have jet lag," she said. She said she also had to adjust to the small blue and white court.

"I had to get used to it in the first couple of games," Kournikova said.

The recent achievements are significant to Kournikova, who has been tabbed as more of a tennis sideshow beauty than the main court showcase. "I'm playing much better this year," she said. "I'm much more confident than I was last year."

Kournikova's stay in Philadelphia was much briefer then.

In the last two years at the Advanta Championships, she bowed out in the first round, losing in straight sets.

"As you can see, I felt very comfortable," she said after beating Washington, a qualifier from Houston.

Kournikova will play Australian Nicole Pratt in the second round tomorrow. Pratt was a 6-2, 7-5 winner over Ai Sugiyama of Japan in the first round.

But Kournikova has a tough group to beat trying to boost her ranking and reputation. She will team with Martina Hingis for a doubles match today against fellow Russian Elena Bovina and Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia.

If Hingis can't make it, Kournikova had plenty of offers to pair up with her.

"Anna, may I be your doubles partner?" read a sign held by Haverford freshman Ted Cleary.

He and his three friends were among the crowd of 6,309 that was representative of those that show up for basketball at the Pavilion.

Before the match, a dozen young men hoping for an autograph and praying for a date hung over a railing waiting for Kournikova to appear.

Eyes shifted from the American flag to the curtain where she would emerge to walk onto the blue court.

In the middle of the match, an announcement reminded spectators that flash photography was prohibited. And shouts of "I love you" rang out between sets.

Other signs asked Kournikova to a dance and begged her to call a cell-phone number.

"She read our sign," Joe Hoffman told his friends, who took turns watching Kournikova through binoculars from their front-row seats. "I swear to God."

"Just to be within 10 feet of her is great," he said.

"Eye contact would be ideal," Cleary added.

Kournikova, accustomed to the attention, took it in stride. She hit tennis balls into the stands and signed caps and ticket stubs.

"I think it's great that they're interested in tennis or anything," she said. "I'm happy that young people have something to do."

And if tennis isn't exactly what drew them to the match?

"As long as they're here," she said.

Alexandra Stevenson, a hometown favorite here, retired from her morning match yesterday after straining her right hamstring.

After winning her first set, 6-3, against Daniela Hantuchova, the recurring injury forced her out of the tournament. Hantuchova will move on to play Nathalie Tauziat of France.

Later last night, ninth-seeded Chanda Rubin outlasted Amy Frazier, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3.

In the doubles competition, Stevenson and her partner Lilia Osterloh did not compete against Conchita Martinez and Patricia Tarabini, who advanced on a walk-over.

The hamstring strain is the most recent problem for Stevenson.

After reaching Wimbledon last year, she dropped 25 of 37 matches and fell to a ranking of 80.

Eye problems force Joe Amato to retire

by Shav Glick
Los Angeles Times
November 12, 2000

POMONA, Calif. - Joe Amato, the winningest top-fuel driver in drag-racing history, went out on a losing note Sunday after announcing his retirement an hour before the Auto Club Finals began at Pomona Raceway.

Winner of a record five National Hot Rod Association championships, Amato, 56, said problems with torn retinas forced him to make Sunday his final appearance.

"I'm not pleased to get out, but my doctor said I would be at risk if I continued racing, considering the high G-forces we undergo," he said.

According to his doctors, Amato has thin retinas, a hereditary condition.

"My plan was to drive a fan-appreciation farewell season in 2001," Amato said, "but last Thursday I decided the smartest and safest thing for me to do is get out of the car right now."

He finished fourth Sunday.

"It's hard to give up that adrenaline rush you feel when you're going 300 mph in a hot rod, but I'll stay close to drag racing as a team owner and maybe in some other capacities. I'm close to getting a sponsor for 2001, and when I do I'll announce a driver for my car and we'll be ready for the Winternationals in February."

In the first round Sunday, Amato's final run went up in a cloud of smoke as his tires spun violently coming off the starting pad. It made David Grubnic an easy winner in 4.918 seconds, the second slowest top-fuel winning run.

Ewing in Sonics uniform an uncomfortable fit

by Michael Wilbon
The Washington Post
November 13, 2000

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. - It was kind of like watching John Unitas play that last season in a Chargers uniform, or Bobby Orr wearing a Chicago Blackhawks sweater, or Joe Namath in that Rams jersey. Patrick Ewing with "Sonics" across his chest was out of place, something we should never have been allowed to see. After 15 years of playing for the New York Knicks, after leading them twice to the NBA Finals and carving out a Hall of Fame career, Ewing returned to metropolitan New York as a Seattle SuperSonics Saturday. It wasn't a homecoming to remember.

Ewing's 13 points and five rebounds meant little in New Jersey's 126-91 rout of Seattle. He got a warm ovation from the crowd of 14,443. Then he and his teammates got scorched by Stephon Marbury's 41-point performance to drop to 2-5 this season.

"It's not the way I would have liked to come back here," Ewing said. "Yeah, it's a homecoming. I live here (in New Jersey). It felt good to be back. I got the chance to hang out with some family and friends in familiar surroundings. But I didn't have a particularly good game. I missed, what, four free throws in a row? I missed layups, which doesn't usually happen. Hopefully, I'll play better Tuesday (against the Knicks in Seattle) than I did here."

Ewing made it clear he has "no problem with the Knicks, the fans or the media... It was just time for me to move on and management felt the same way. It was just time for me to go."

It didn't have to be that way. Knicks boss Dave Checketts and his coach, Jeff Van Gundy, made it that way. They went out of their way to make the franchise's signature player

uncomfortable. They made it plain by the way they shopped him in trade talks that they didn't want him, even though Ewing at this moment would be the best center in the Eastern Conference with Alonzo Mourning ailing.

We know who's supposed to be starting for the Knicks now - the recovering Luc Longley. Okay, Dikembe Mutombo is back now, but who else is any good?

I was standing in the hallway just before the tip-off when Nets executive Willis Reed headed toward the court. Reed still couldn't get used to the notion that Ewing isn't playing for the Knicks.

"I admire the guy," Reed said. "I would love to have been a power forward next to him. (Center) is still the hardest position to play. Patrick was the best center to ever play for the Knicks."

Now, that's a conversation-stopper. Willis Reed, the former Knicks captain and two-time NBA champion, said Ewing is the best center to play for the Knicks. "To do the things he did consistently, night after night, for all those years... not many teams in basketball have had better ones. He did his job. I know they didn't win (a championship), but you have to look at the four other positions."

Ewing was traded to a team that appears to be better than average at four other positions. Gary Payton is the best playmaker Ewing has ever played with, by miles. Vin Baker is a four-time all-star. Rashard Lewis and Ruben Patterson are young high-flyers with huge potential who have impact on both ends of the floor. But the Sonics have been terrible through seven games. They were downright dreadful Saturday. Ewing is averaging 11 points and nine rebounds. His coach, the once estimable Paul Westphal, doesn't seem to know how to incorporate Ewing's low-post savvy with what had been a running team, which is the same thing that confounded Van Gundy.

"Patrick has to go and tell (Westphal) himself how he wants to be used," Payton said. "But Patrick is not that type of guy. He's not going to go demand something... I can't go up there and say, 'Patrick should be on the low block 15 or 20 times and get his 20 shots...'"

So now, the Knicks have an absolute hole in the middle of their lineup (and will even once Longley returns).

The Sonics are a team in search of an identity, and Ewing is spending the twilight of his career 3,000 miles from his home. He is wearing a new Seattle uniform that appears to be some shade of rust, and could be the ugliest uniform in professional sports since the Chicago White Sox wore hot pants and jerseys with a clown collar back in the '70s.

Filmmaker Spike Lee sat in the front row Saturday for the sole purpose of seeing his friend Ewing. "It's so strange," Lee said, "to see him in... whatever color that is."

Lee thought back to the spring day in 1985 when he first bought Knicks season tickets.

"I loved Patrick at Georgetown," he said. "That was my team. The day after we got Patrick in that, ah, rigged lottery I bought two seats in 334, in the green seats." Halftime was about to end, and Ewing came over to give Lee a hug. "People are so fickle," Lee said. "Most of those people chanting his name Halloween night in the Garden (in a humiliating Knicks loss to Philly) were the same ones groaning when Patrick got the ball down low and were the same ones saying the Knicks would be better without him. People are so fickle... Couldn't something have been worked out?"

In today's sports climate, with the egos and personalities involved, positions quickly become rigid and everybody forgets the good times.

"You look at Patrick Ewing in that uniform," Nets guard Sherman Douglas said, "and you are reminded that this is a business."

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