

Sports

Olympic Games

Not much has changed over all these years

By MADELEINE JACOBS
Smithsonian News Service

It is midsummer, and the Olympic Games are about to begin. From all over, spectators and political leaders are arriving to witness the spectacle promoted for months in advance. Accommodations are nearly nonexistent, roads are jammed and athletic facilities are strained to capacity. It is hot and dusty and people are complaining about the fierce heat and noise.

Everywhere are booths, and stalls with vendors selling snacks and hawking souvenirs. Musicians provide further diversion.

Having trained for months, even years, the athletes are nervous, aware that all too soon their events - and the chance for fame and perhaps fortune - will be over. News of the winners will travel fast, and victors will be feted in their hometowns with parades and sought for personal appearance at other festivals.

This is how it was at the Olympic Games in ancient Greece circa 300 B.C. In many ways, not much has changed.

"We don't know if the ancient Greeks had an official cheeseburger of the games, but they probably had an equivalent," says Dr. David G. Romano, a classical archaeologist specializing in ancient athletics at The University Museum in Philadelphia. "In fact, almost every problem and situation we face in the modern Olympic Games existed in antiquity."

"Politics, including boycotts and other politically motivated actions, were always a part of the games," he says. "In the fourth century B.C., for instance, Athens unsuccessfully threatened to boycott the Olympic Games because one of its athletes had been fined for cheating in the pentathlon. Earlier, in 420 B.C., the Spartans were refused permission to come to Olympia to participate in the game."

But the ultimate in politics may have occurred at Olympics in 364 B.C. "At those games," Romano says, "a military battle actually took place in the middle of the pentathlon, when the people of Elis, who had usually been responsible for the games, fought a battle with the Arcadians and Pisatans who had tried to seize control."

And yet, Romano says, there are several important differences between the ancient Olympics, which endured for almost 1200 years, and the modern Olympics, first held in 1896 and scheduled this year in Los Angeles from July 28 to Aug. 12.

"From the beginning, the Olympic Games, in fact all the Greek athletic contests, were primarily religious festivals," Romano says. The religious nature of the games may account for their longevity despite wars and political upheavals as well as for their demise: The

Roman emperor Theodosius I, a Christian, put an end to the "pagan" games in A.D. 393.

"Most important, the ancients didn't have to deal with the question of 'amateur' status," Romano says. "The Greeks did not even have a word for 'amateur,' only a word for 'athlete,' meaning 'one who competes for a prize.'"

The prizes at the four Panhellenic ("all-Greek") games were only wreaths - an olive crown at Olympia, laurel at Delphi, pine at Isthmia and parsley at Nemea. "But when the athletes got home from these 'vegetable games,'" Romano says, "they often became rich and famous. Some received subsidies, pensions or free meals for life from their home cities or wealthy patrons and politicians."

In short, Romano says, "the idealistic image of an 'amateur,' which our modern athletes are told to emulate, did not exist in ancient Greece."

That we know so much about games originating nearly 3,000 years ago is a tribute to the work of classical historians and archaeologists. "Think of a civilization thousands of years from now," Romano suggests, "trying to reconstruct our modern game of baseball from the excavations of a few stadia around the country where Baseball, among other sports, was played. Add a few fragmentary newspaper clippings mentioning a player's batting average and salary and you have an idea of the dimensions of the problem."

Athletic facilities - stadia and dromoi (racecourses), for example - and the religious temples and sanctuaries associated with them are known from excavations of the Panhellenic sites, beginning with Olympic sites from 1875 to 1881 and concluding in the past decade with Nemea, the last Panhellenic site established in antiquity. Numerous festivals of lesser importance were held all over the Greek world, and stadia and dromoi have been excavated at many of these sites; the process has unearthed many small objects used by the athletes - discs, weights to enhance performance in the long jump and implements to scrape off oil and sweat.

The first games are recorded at Olympia in 776 B.C., but "that date is suspect," Romano says, "because the Greek alphabet was introduced about that time and earlier written records may not have existed." Archaeological evidence indicates that religious activities which may have included athletic competitions were taking place at Olympia as early as 1000 B.C.

Each of the Panhellenic games was dedicated to a god - Zeus at Olympia and Nemea, Apollo at Delphi and Poseidon at Isthmia. The Greeks believed that the gods bestowed on the athletes and physical prowess that enabled them to take part in the games. "Each athlete made an individual offering

to the god in whose honor the games were held," Romano explains. "Victory was the ultimate expression of honor." In fact, victory was all that mattered. No prizes were given at the "Big Four" games for second and third places.

Very little remains of the early stadia at the Panhellenic sites, but, at each site, the stadium was undoubtedly a religious structure located near the sanctuary. "Fifth-century B.C. stadia excavated at Olympia and Isthmia give us a good idea of what a classical stadium looked like," Romano says. The running area was 600 "feet" or a "stadion" in length, although the length of the ancient "foot," varied greatly from place to place and from century to century.

Spectator comfort was not on the stadium builder's mind. "Early stadia provided seats only for the judges and a few VIPs," Romano says. The rest of the crowd - 25,000 people or more - either sat or more probably stood on the gradually sloping earth embankments surrounding the running area. The word stadium, in fact, is probably derived from the Greek verb "to stand."

In the fourth century B.C., there was a trend to move stadia out of the sanctuary to a nearby location to provide more spectator room. About this time, some stadia were built with seats. Others, such as the one at Nemea, also had vaulted entrances providing the athletes with direct access to the stadium from the sanctuary - "and a place to carve graffiti," says Romano, who directed the stadium excavation at Nemea for three years.

From such inscriptions on vaults, tombstones, statues and monuments, scholars have pieced together achievements of individual athletes, lists of citors, even the costs of running events. Another rich source of information comes from vase paintings, primarily from the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., depicting various athletic contests. The illustrations are not always technically correct, however, since the artists seem to have been more interested in aesthetics than accuracy.

"But they weren't far off in their depictions of physique," says Dr. Lawrence Angel, a physical anthropologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., who has studied ancient Greek skeletons. "In general, the skeletons do fit the figures of the paintings and sculpture - stocky, muscular, fairly long trucks, widish shoulders and hips. This is the stuff of which basic effective athletes can be created."

And created they were, through vigorous training that began in boyhood. For many years, only the sons of the wealthy could afford the time and expense of training, but eventually athletes acquired patrons, and the games became more democratic.

Still, only male citizens of Greece with its far-flung colonies were allowed to compete at Olympia, and only males - and unmarried women - were permitted to attend the events as spectators. Women had their own festival, dedicated to the goddess Hera, but woe to any married woman caught breaking the all-male rule: She was to be tossed off a nearby mountain.

Like today's athletes, ancient olympians tended to specialize in a single event. For the first 52 years at Olympia, the sole event was the stadion race, which continued to be the most prestigious even after other events were added. Eventually, athletes, competed in wrestling, boxing, the pankration (a brutal, no-holds-barred combination of wrestling and boxing), the pentathlon (discus, javelin, long jump, foot race and wrestling) and a race in armor.

Contrary to popular belief, the marathon and the torch race of the modern Olympics were not part of the ancient games. "There were torch races in antiquity associated with religious festivals," Romano says, "but not at olympia."

In contrast to the original Olympics, the 1984 Olympics in Long Angeles, despite the Soviet-led boycott, is expected to attract thousands of athletes from dozens of nations, competing in 21 events and two demonstration sports. Some 700,000 spectators will see the \$500 million games, and 4,000 officials will be on hand to decide the victors. An Olympic Arts Festival will feature an international array of 75 performing arts events and 20 exhibitions. Television via satellite will bring the games to an estimated 2.5 billion people, more than half the Earth's population. The spectacle would be Greek to the ancients.

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The late Betsy Snyder

Dedication of 1984 season is a lasting tribute to her

By CHARLOT M. DENMON
Staff Correspondent

Most boys and girls in Back Mountain Baseball and the Back Mountain Elementary Wrestling Club were familiar with the late Betsy Snyder.

Not all of them knew Betsy by name, but they were used to seeing her working in the stand at a game, working in the kitchen at the Dallas High School during one of the wrestling club's tournaments or coaching one of the Division I Girls' Softball teams.

The many volunteers working with the Back Mountain Baseball Inc. realized only too well the amount of time Betsy gave to that organization and this year, to perpetuate her memory, the association dedicated its season to the memory of Betsy Snyder.

Betsy, the former Betsy Johns, was married to George Snyder. They were the parents of three girls: Betsy Ann, Kerri, Cathy, and one boy, Christian, age 9. Betsy was only 37 years old when she died following surgery last February, but spent at least 10 of those 37 years giving her all for the benefit of young boys and girls.

In baseball, she coached, managed and kept score for Division I girls' softball. She worked in the food stand, kept records, transported children to and from games and pitched in wherever needed.

She was active in Back Mountain Elementary Wrestling from the time it was organized, assisting with dual meets, working at tournaments and taking charge of the food concession.

Officials of the Back Mountain Baseball Association discussed various ways of honoring Betsy's memory. After discussing the



Season dedicated

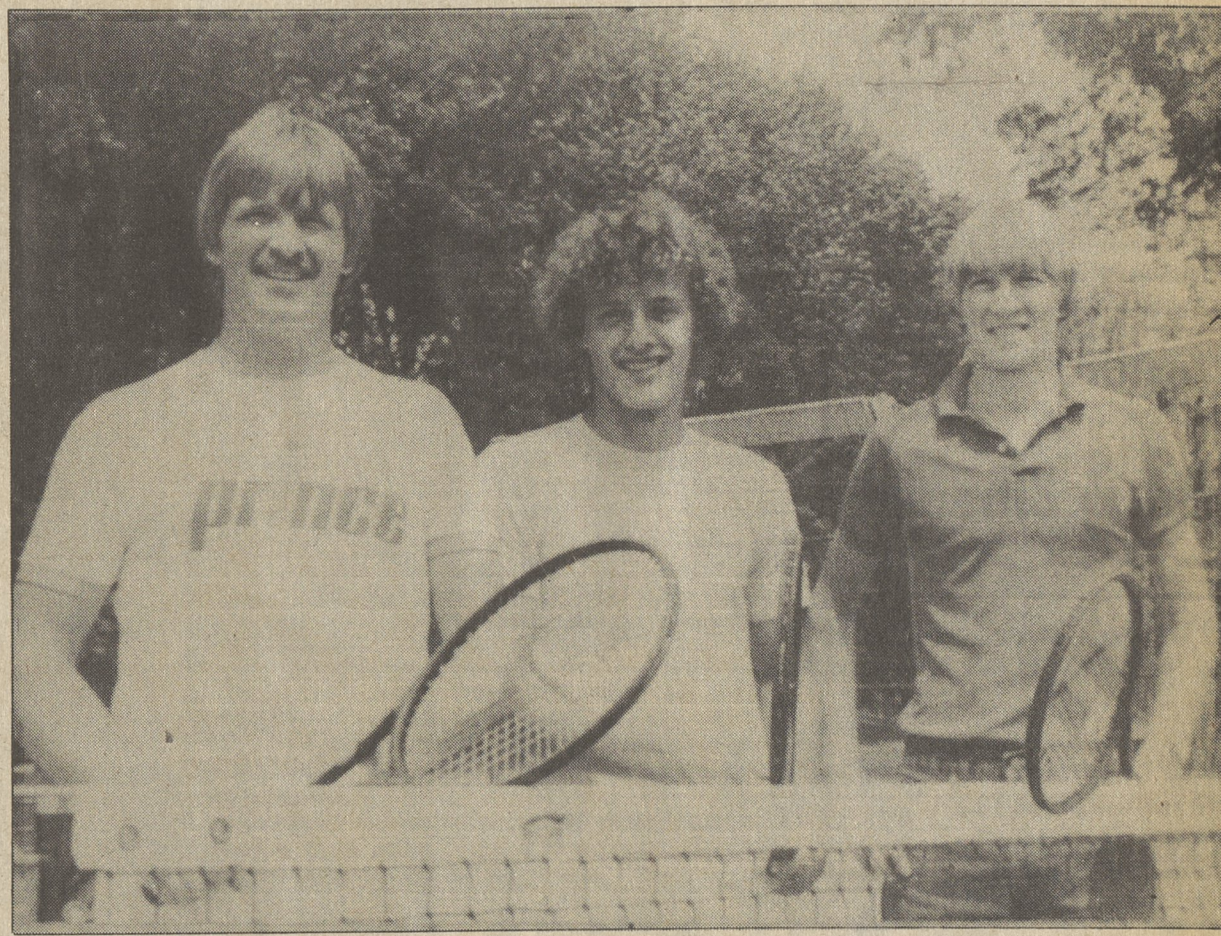
The late Betsy Snyder, above left, is shown here in a recent photo with her eldest daughter, Betsy Ann. Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. dedicated its 1984 season to Betsy Snyder, in honor of her years of dedicated service.

subject with her husband, George, and her daughters, it was decided that an award would be given at the end of the season to the 12-year-old girl selected as the Division I "Outstanding Sportsman." The members of the seven teams in Division I will vote for the girl they believe deserves the award and from these names, the managers of each of the seven teams will select the girl they believe most deserving. In the event of a tie, William Gabel, chairman of the

committee, will select the recipient.

The award will be presented at the end of the season picnic, which will be for all boys and girls in the Back Mountain Baseball Association. Both Betsy's family and the league officials believe that nothing could please her more.

It is hoped that the award will become an annual event to perpetuate Betsy Johns Snyder's dedicated service to youth of the Back Mountain.



Tennis players

Back Mountain residents are vital to the success of the King's College tennis team of Coach Bill Eydler. From left to right are Capt. Bill Downs, Jerry Ross and Jay Downs. The Downs brothers played for Lake-Lehman, and Ross, for Dallas High School.

'Back Mountain Connection'

Locals lift King's tennis team

Coach Bill Eydler of the King's College tennis team proudly refers to it as King's "Back Mountain Connection."

He points to the presence on his 15-7 team of brothers Bill and Jay Downs, and of Jerry Ross, all Back Mountain residents who are big factors in the success of the net Monarchs. Eydler keeps close tabs on players from this area!

Jerry Ross, son of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Ross of 96 Ridge St., Shavertown, has a lot going for him on the tennis circuit. A graduate of Dallas High School, Jerry was coached by Mr. Thomas Kilduff at the time. "He helped me more mentally in my game," commented Jerry of Kilduff.

Presently a psychology and marketing major at King's, Jerry gives tennis lessons at Kirby Park. When asked about King's tennis program, he stated, "I think Coach Eydler is improving the program. He puts a lot of extra effort into it and it's starting to show."

"I think we'll do very well next year," he added. "We're getting good recruits and only losing one graduate."

Career-wise, Jerry is interested in the marketing field, but would like

to continue as a tennis instructor.

"King's College has a very good program and Coach Eydler is doing a good job to make it even better," was Jay Downs' comment when asked about the King's College tennis program.

Jay Downs, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Downs of RD 4, Box 213, Dallas, attended Lake-Lehman High School, coached by Joseph Martini. Off a year due to a leg injury, Jay has a confident outlook for next year.

"Next year's program should be better than this past year's since only one person graduated," he explained. "I want to keep playing tennis and having fun around the

valley in tournaments."

The computer science major hopes to pursue an engineering career.

Brother Bill Downs was King's captain as a junior and was half of the doubles tandem which made the MAC tourney finals this year. Also a Lake-Lehman grad, he played under Coach Joe Martini.

"Our level of players in college is much higher and it makes you work all the harder to improve your game," said the team captain.

"With the addition of Ned Featherstone from Coughlin, we should have a fine season," said the business administration-marketing major.

U.S. has most tennis players

The U.S. has more tennis players, and more world-class professionals, than any country in the world. The United States Tennis Association, the governing body of tennis in the U.S., believes that expert coaches and teaching pros are the key to this success. As a measure of its commitment to keep those working in the industry at the peak of their profession, the USTA is presenting

the 1984 National Tennis Teachers Conference at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City, August 29, 30, 31.

Now in its 14th year, this convocation of outstanding tennis leaders has received national and worldwide acclaim for preparing coaches to face the ever-increasing pressure to develop players with superior skills and winning attitudes.

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