

by *Martha T. Fischer*

I am not an athlete, nor am I politically inclined. I am rarely moved to tears of patriotism. However, during the closing ceremonies of the XIIIth Winter Games, when our flag was raised and our national anthem was played I was as filled with pride in my American citizenship as my eyes were filled with tears.

Lord Killanin, in his closing statement, spoke of the spirit of understanding without prejudice, and received an ovation from thousands of spectators as the athletes mingled, hugging and kissing their friends from around the world. The hockey teams from Sweden, the USSR, and the USA hugged and cheered each other, as the spectators cheered each team during the presentation of their medals. Rodnina and Zaitsev, the pairs figure skaters from Russia, received a warm reception and cheers of appreciation from an audience who saw them, not as Russians-representatives of the country who invaded Afghanistan, but as a superb pair of artists and athletes ; just as people around the world shed tears of sorrow for Tai and Randy, not because they are Americans, but because they, too, are superb artists and athletes who, because of an injury were unable finally to compete face to face with Rodnina and Zaitsev. Similarly, the stories of Ken Read losing his ski, the skier who dislocated her shoulder leaving the starting gate, the ski jumper who crashed down the 90-meter slope and the many other misfortunes of the athletes brought tears to my eyes, as I am sure they did to others.

Eric Heiden said that it is not the gold, silver and bronze that are important, but knowing that you have given 100%, that you have done the very best you can. This spirit of competition was seen throughout the Winter Games, especially in the athletes who came knowing they had no chance for a medal, but to compete in the Games, to do their best. I thrilled at the stories of the Korean skier who completed the downhill course after losing his pole, and the Lebanese skier who fulfilled her dream of completing the downhill course in Olympic competition.

These are stories of the true spirit of the Olympic Games, stories of athletic competition coloured with patriotism and nationalism, but not with politics and prejudice. Political overtones are just that, overtones imposed, not by the athletes, but by the Olympic Committees of the various countries, by politicians, and by the media. The rejection of the Taiwanese athletes, the plans to boycott the Moscow hosted Summer Games, the tragedy of the Games in Munich ; these did not spring from the athletes, but from the outside.

The men and women who participate in the Olympic Games are concerned with their training and their competition ; they are dedicated to their sport. Their families have encouraged them and sacrificed for them. Their communities and countries have cheered them on in hopes that their neighbour, friend or idol will make it to the Games possibly even to the winners podium. This, too, is part of the spirit of Olympism.

According to *Newsweek* (28th January 1980), "The Carter administration wants it understood that the US is interested only in punishing the Soviets, not the Olympics." Boycotting the Olympic Games may hurt the pride of the Russian government, but the punishment meted to Olympism could destroy the spirit not only of the Games, but of the athletes as well. The spirit of understanding of which Lord Killanin spoke overcomes political differences ; it ignores invasions, elections, and world power struggles, replacing these with patriotism and nationalism on a higher plane, that of healthy athletic competition.

I reiterate my earlier statement, politics is a part of the Olympic Games only because it is superimposed on them by politicians and the media. Left to the athletes there would be no politics involved. To boycott the Summer Olympic Games would be to destroy everything to which the athletes have dedicated their lives.

Please, do not boycott the Olympic Games. It may mean that the United States Government would have to swallow a bit of pride and back down from a stand, but the pride I feel in being an American, thanks to Tai and Randy, Eric, our hockey team and the thousands

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of other American athletes who have participated in the Olympic Games over the years, and those who will in the future, a pride I am sure is shared by millions, would quickly replace it.

*M.T.F.*

