

## CATERING AT THE GAMES

**S**tate-of-the-art sports equipment, relaxing accommodations, modern training facilities - what else does an Olympic athlete need to perform at the world-class level? Food. Nutrition is the fundamental element that fuels the performance of all athletes.

Through the decades science and technology have helped Olympic athletes move faster, higher and stronger. More and more, the science of nutrition has been playing a role in improving athletes' performances. For example, energy bars and drinks provide vitality and replace important fluids, respectively.

Administering specialised food programmes, however, is a relatively recent development of Olympic organising committees. Developing an international menu to serve a wide variety of tastes and nutritional requirements really parallels the

by Randy Williams

growth of the Games themselves. As the Games have grown in the number of countries, athletes and media attending them, so has the food operation of the host organiser to accommodate them.

Very little emphasis was placed on athlete nutrition in coordinating the early Winter Games.

The United States hosted the Winter Games for the first time in 1932. With the worldwide depression, food services at Lake Placid were very simple. The next opportunity for American Olympic organisers came at the VIII Olympic Winter Games in Squaw Valley, California, in 1960. Everything from housing, stadiums, and venues had to be built from scratch. This resulted in the first complete Olympic Village in the history of the Winter

Games. At the athlete's centre in the Olympic Village was the kitchen and dining centre. It was designed for fraternisation and socialising between athletes and officials from all nations. They ate in an area accommodating 900 at one sitting, in a room with large stone fireplaces and flags from all the nations hanging from the beams. There was a stage where performers entertained after dinner. Hollywood legend Danny Kaye brought out his talents there.

An executive chef with 50 years of culinary experience gathered together a crew of internationally-trained cooks. Emphasis was placed on broiled, steamed, roasted, and boiled items. Very few fried foods were served. At least one dish typical of each country was featured during the Games. There was a wide selection of fruit juices, honey, beef, stewed fruits, and milk available. Instant powder potatoes were used because the cold climate made the handling of fresh potatoes impractical and loss though freezing would have been costly.

At Squaw Valley menus were translated and placed in the athletes' rooms. This sparked a deeper interest in the feeding programme. Russian athletes asked for their favourite soup, borscht, to be put on the menu. It was. While the Finns and Swedes brought over much darker bread they certainly enjoyed the many American breads equally as well. The Japanese requested one Oriental meal a day, as their hockey team had been in the United States two months without any. The staff complied with this request.

The 1960 Games saw a more international menu grow with the active par-



*The Olympic restaurant in Lake Placid in 1980.*



*The Salt Lake Olympic Village*

ticipation of the athletes and a more globally oriented food services department of the host organising committee, planning a very well received operation. The food was excellent. The only complaint came from the coaches and trainers, who said it was so good it encouraged overeating and extra pounds!

It would be two decades until America again hosted the Olympic Games. By the time of the 1980 Winter Games in Lake Placid, New York, the Games had grown tremendously in terms of the total number of athletes, media and Olympic family members attending. Food service to the Olympic operation had now become one of the largest catering functions in the world. More than 7,000 people had to be served three times a day here. That meant nearly 14 tonnes of food product, 600 gallons of hot beverages and soup with 200 staff members working around the clock. An illustration of just how big the food service operations of the Olympics had become can be demonstrated with numbers. The 1980 Lake Placid organisers served the following: 8 tonnes of bananas;

20,000 pounds of pasta; 6 tonnes of coffee; 50,000 pounds of steak; 8 tonnes of bacon; 196,000 boxes of cereal; 280,000 cookies.

To handle the mammoth menu tailored to meet the diversity of ethnic tastes as well as the carefully balanced requirements of nutritional content, calories, vitamins, and minerals, the Lake Placid Organizing Committee contracted out to ARA Food services. This American service firm had previously worked the 1968 Mexico City and 1976 Montreal Games. ARA, in addition to planning and preparing menus, hired all the staff, from chefs to waiters. It also had its own departments for purchasing, operations, venue management and transportation. Lake Placid certainly offered logistical challenges for its food operations. There was limited storage, restricted supplier delivery time, and of course bad weather. Getting 14 tonnes of goods around a 25-mile long area over mountainous terrain on two-lane highways in a blizzard and creeping traffic was accomplished by using radio-equipped cargo trucks working 21 hours a day.

Certainly, a lot of food was provided at the Olympic Village (meal times were generally: breakfast 6-10 a.m., lunch 11 a.m.-3 p.m., and dinner 4-8 p.m.; an international buffet was available from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m.), but a key to the whole operation was the distribution of boxed lunches. These were designed to satisfy nutritional requirements of athletes during training and competition as well as of support personnel at the eight venue sites. A typical lunch consisted of a ham and cheese sandwich, fruit juice, nuts, crackers, granola bars, fresh fruit, hot soup, and condiments. Twenty-two years later comes the ultimate test: the XIX Olympic Winter Games. And the kitchens of the world are brought to Salt Lake City to feed and fuel the best athletes in the world.

Yes, there'll be kimchi for the Korean speed skaters, dark pumpnickel bread for the Austrian skiers, smoked salmon for the Norwegian biathlon competitors, and pasta for the Italian bobsledders - available 24 hours a day. But there is so much more than that as the Salt Lake Olympic Organisers have gone to great lengths to help athletes achieve their goals on

the field of play by embracing a total culinary experience at the Games.

For over two years, under the direction of Don Pritchard, SLOC has incorporated the building of menus based on many factors including past Winter Games needs and other major winter events such as World Cup skiing, hockey tournaments, as well as requests from various nations and sports federations.

However the challenge of the day-to-day operations of a round-the-clock operation serving 16,000 to 19,000 meals daily in the Olympic Village falls to Dave Lucas, the Food Services Manager, a veteran of over 20 years in the food and beverage resort management business, including working with Olympic athletes at the Sydney Summer Olympics. Lucas explains what his experience has taught him, "The thing to remember is no matter where the event is, it's all about

knowing who your "customer" is and to meet or exceed their needs using common sense resolve. That applies to a resort guest, the world's most elite athletes, or our own volunteers, who we couldn't produce the Olympic Games without."

Lucas' poignant comment about the importance of the help of volunteers to help feed the athletes of the world is more readily evident by looking at a few numbers.

Here are some examples of what Lucas projects to be needed to fuel the athletes of the XIXth Olympic Winter Games:

- 20,000 pounds of pasta
- 27,000 pounds of beef
- 60,000 pints of milk
- 28,800 pounds of bananas
- 1,300 pounds of kimchi

To accommodate the different tastes, basic dietary needs, and diverse nutri-

tional requirements of the world's athletes, the SLOC has a challenge worthy of a gold medal performance in the culinary category,

Through the decades, we have seen Olympic organisers work more and more with doctors, coaches, nutritionists, and athletes to devise a perfect menu, for the never-ending search for improving performance will always include food. Nutrition that supports athletic performance; foods evoking a sense of "home" and well-being: meals tailored to ethnic and religious preferences; great taste - these are the food service challenges facing Olympic organisers as we enter into the 21st century.

Having come a long way from the days of egg whites and brandy, Olympic athletes' nutrition has a pretty healthy outlook in the third millennium.

## MENU AT THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE ON 8 FEBRUARY 2002, DAY OF THE OPENING CEREMONY

### Breakfast (6 a.m. to 11 a.m.)

Scrambled eggs  
Omelette station  
Rice bowl with smoked kippers  
Sausage Patties/Turkey Links/Bacon  
Hash Browns  
Pancakes  
Hot cereal / Oats

### Lunch/dinner (11 a.m. to 10 p.m.)

Wild West Chili  
Soup: Chicken Gumbo/ Pork Loin Schnitzel/Chicken Piccata/Ginger wasabi Halibut Brochette  
Asian Bowl: Spicy chicken/Sticky rice/Shrimp and vegetables with noodles  
Sides: Zucchini and Yellow Squash/Egg noodles  
Pasta: Meat Lasagne Bolognese/Penne Caprese with Smoked Mozzarella  
Grill: 6 oz. Sirloin steak/4 oz. Chicken breast/Andouille/Frankfurter/Daily special/4 oz. Simpled grilled tuna  
Pizza/Taglio: Mozzarella & Basil/Salami & Mushrooms/Goat cheese & Zucchini  
Daily baked potato bar (12 oz. potatoes): melted cheese/chives/sourcream/diced tomato/bacon/chili con carne/broccoli/chicken julienne/shredded cheese, butter  
Sandwiches: Roast beef and Watercress/Tuna salad on Brioche/Italian Sausage on Semolina Baguette  
Special salads: Thai beef Salad/Soba Noodles with chicken