

AN OFFICIAL FILM THAT HAS BEEN..

By Harry Gordon

Forty-four years after the Melbourne Olympic Games, it is now possible to see the entire official film of that festival -- incorporating 50 minutes of footage that have never been viewed before.

Much of that extra material had been effectively missing for decades. It did not take the form of leftovers on the cutting room floor, but it was locked away in vaults, deteriorating, gathering dust. It was in dire need of some curatorial affection.

The events of those Olympics were captured on more than a dozen cameras for the Melbourne organising committee by a team working under the supervision of a local director, Peter Whitchurch. A short highlight film incorporating that material was released soon afterwards, but nothing more. Now, after a lengthy process of search, discovery and restoration by the Olympic Television and Archive Bureau, the official film has finally been released. Its length has been stretched from 54 minutes to 104, and, while it's been a little late in coming, the result has warranted the wait.

Much of this new video is in colour, but it also includes some precious black-and-white film whose very graininess somehow enhances its authority. One such sequence includes the infamous water polo match between Hungary and the Soviet Union, which turned into a waterlogged, violent brawl. The blood which streaked through the water that evening can't be seen in black and white, but the action very surely can.

The rescue operation on the Melbourne film reflects great credit on OTAB, which worked on the project for nearly five years with the Olympic Museum on behalf of the International Olympic Committee and

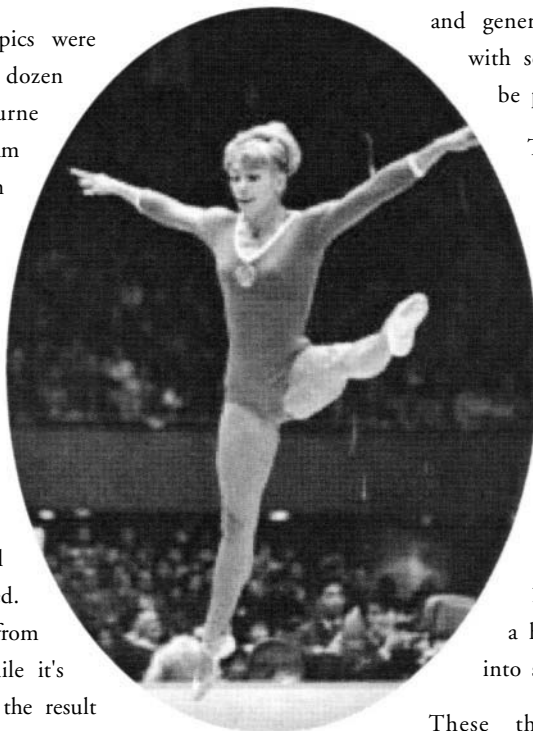
the Australian Olympic Committee. The finished product will be deposited with Screensound — Australia's national film archive — as a preserved piece of the nation's heritage.

The OTAB production team, led by the award-winning documentary maker Stewart Binns, worked off 22 technical films, and restored more than 50 hours of original camera trims that had virtually been abandoned. For Binns, and for his colleague Adrian Wood, the finished product is a triumph of reclamation. "We nearly lost the material to age and general deterioration," Binns says with some satisfaction. "Now it will be preserved forever."

The Melbourne film is part of an ambitious program involving 39 videos and two DVDs (Digital Versatile Discs) that cover 11 volumes of official films — London, 1948; Melbourne, 1956; Rome, 1960; Tokyo, 1964; Mexico City, 1968; Montreal, 1976; Moscow, 1980; Los Angeles, 1984; Seoul, 1988; Barcelona, 1992 and Atlanta, 1996 — plus a huge variety of material woven into selected themes.

These themes include histories of women at the Olympics, of African Americans, of medal ceremonies, and of a range of disciplines from track and field (sprint, middle-distance and marathon) through swimming and diving, gymnastics, equestrian, boxing and assorted aspects of the winter Games. Two volumes are devoted to the American Dream Team basketballers of 1992 and 1996.

For Binns and his team, this whole archival mission has been almost archeological in approach. It has also involved a certain amount of detective work, retrieving black-and-white 1920s newsreel material from Pathe and Chronos collections, discovering the original negative of the 1968 film (a task that took



WORTH THE WAIT



Images of '56

Soviet Union's 21-year-old Larissa Latynina (opposite page) started her extraordinary Olympic career in Melbourne 1956 by winning the women's all-around competition. She went on to become the greatest Olympic medallist of all time with 18 medals won between 1956-1964.

Australia's Hetty Cuthbert (left) winning the 100m.

Soviet Union's Vladimir Kuts' (below) "annihilation" of his British rival, Gordon Pirie, in the 5000m.

IOC Archives

two years), exploring archive sources from New Zealand and Australia to Japan, Russia, Europe, North America and Mexico. Always the accent has been not just on finding, but restoring.



From it all has emerged the Official Olympic Video Collection, a treasure trove of archive films and documentaries which has had a staged release in Australia through Warner Vision during recent months. Prices have ranged from \$A39.95 for the twin-video official films to \$A24.95 for the themed documentary material.

After the Sydney 2000 Olympics the collection will be supplemented by a two-volume program (in video and DVD) of highlights of those Games, and three volumes homing in on equestrian events at the Sydney Games. The release of the material in Australia and New Zealand has been timed to coincide with the lead-up to the Olympics. Selected titles from the collection will later be distributed elsewhere.

OTAB now possesses a great reservoir of reclaimed footage, all available for incorporation in separate works and themes aimed at special audiences. As a body of work, it makes a significant contribution to the history and heritage of the Olympic Games.