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U.S. Needs National Effort to Win in 1980 Olympics, Says Former Israeli Olympian

In a 1976 article by Milton Cole, Dr. Gideon Ariel, a former Israeli Olympic discus thrower, expressed concern over the performance of U.S. athletes in the Montreal Olympics. Ariel, who founded a firm that uses computer analysis to improve human performance, argued that the U.S. was being surpassed by other nations, particularly Communist ones, due to their more organized and rigorous training programs. He criticized the U.S.'s "hit-or-miss" approach and lack of national programs, which he believed put American athletes at a disadvantage. Ariel also noted the absence of a throwing coach on the U.S. Olympic team and the poor state of training facilities. He suggested the establishment of a federal agency to oversee the training of athletes for national teams, and the creation of a national institute of sport with top-notch facilities and coaching staff. Ariel warned that unless the U.S. took steps to improve its athletic program, it would face further embarrassment in the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

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Below find a reprint of the 1 relevant pages of the article "U.S. Needs National Effort to win in 1980" in "Doily Hampshire Gazette":

U.S. needs national effort to win in 1980

By MILTON COLE

AMHERST — For the first time in 48 years the United States had no Olympic medal winner in the 100 meter dash.

After 46 years of domination, the U.S. for the first time since Franklin Roosevelt's last year of his first term as president, had no medalist in the shotput.

The American men and women this Olympics have done poorly in other track and field events and while the U.S. men did superbly in swimming the U.S. women were sunk by the East Germans.

And as bad as the Montreal Olympics have been for U.S. athletes, the 1980 games in Moscow could be even more embarrassing, unless the U.S. takes a bold step to put its Olympic and national athletic house into order.

That's the evaluation of a former Israeli Olympic discus thrower who just returned from the Montreal games.

Dr. Gideon Ariel, a founder and the guiding hand behind the firm that analyzes human activities with a computer and finds ways of improving the human or the equipment he uses, feels that the U.S. athletes have not gone downhill.

"But he feels that the other nations of the world, and particularly the Communist ones, have just surpassed the U.S. in preparation of their athletes while the United States has a hit-or-miss, every-one-does-his-own-thing kind of program."

Gideon, who earned his doctorate at the University of Massachusetts and founded Computerized Biomechanical Analysis Inc., with offices on Route 9 in Amherst, feels that the U.S. hodge podge system sends Americans into competition at a serious preparation disadvantage.

The other countries have national programs. The Communist ones, in particular, set up national institutes and then tell their athletes that they have to stay and train at the institute for months on, end or they can't compete for the national teams.

"We see how well they succeeded at the games. Are the Russians better shotputters than the Americans or the Hungarians better at the javelin? I don't really think so from what I saw."

But we have a crazy system. We didn't have a throwing coach on the Olympic team for the last two games. How can a running coach train a thrower at this level of competition?

And some of the training sites facilities are pitiful. There's a group here, a group there and none really has the equipment and best program and coaching available to it regularly.

"We have let the world pass us by in preparation, and if we don't want it to happen at Moscow in 1980 on a far greater scale we had better do something about it now."

Gideon notes that the U.S. is unsurpassed in auto manufacture, in space exploration and even in professional athletics, because in each case money is involved and to maximize profits and chances of success the best type of trained people are gathered to set up and oversee a program aimed at producing the best possible success.

"We didn't gather a lot of scientists together and say 'We want to get to the moon, so you guys figure out the best way,' and then let them go every which way with no one coordinating what each was doing."

Why then do we think it will work for us in athletics? The athletes are like scientists. They have the skills to do what is needed but they must be led and coordinated and trained.

Gideon who competed in the 1964 Olympics, feels that a federal agency should be set up to help in the training of athletes for national teams.

The government should finance the establishment of a permanent administration to run a national institute of sport and then build a facility, perhaps in California or some other weather-worried-free area.

There would be assembled the latest and best equipment for training, all sports, track, field, gymnastics, winter, summer etc.

There, too, would be facilities for the athletes to live and eat as well as train. And there would be gathered a top-notch coaching staff and trainers, and other scientists, involved in athletics.

"Of course there is no way that we could run such an institute the way the Communists do. We could not tell someone he has to go to the institute and train for three months or six months and give up anything else."

"But we can make it available and let any athlete who can pass a minimum entrance standard of achievement in his or her athletic specialty, know that he or she is welcome to spend as much time as desired at the institute. Room and meals would be provided free of charge as well as the expert coaching and other assistance."

"There would be no pay and the athlete would realize that he or she has to make some financial sacrifice to attend. We are not like other nations that pay their athletes to perform."

But Gideon feels that if athletes know that such a place is available and the proper coach is available and that the nation is willing to support its athletes in this fashion, then they will come and will train.

When the team is selected for international or Olympic competition it will be better prepared to do battle with the rest of the world, much which is passing the U.S. by in track and field and similar athletic activities he said.

"Of course it depends on the leaders and the people. Maybe they don't really care about a national athletic program and maybe they feel that winning Olympic medals is not the least bit important. Then they should forget the Olympics if they think sending in people with little or no chance to win is fair to the athletes or the nation."

To the rest of the world, says Gideon, it means a lot to compete and win the gold. And in 1980 in Moscow the Communist world will be trying for a real showcase of success.

Unless the U.S. moves to organize and improve its disjointed athletic program the Marxist nations will certainly succeed at the expense of the U.S.

Gideon also said: "That the athletes at Montreal were very upset with the Taiwan ban and the African walkout."

"Many of them had trained so long and hard they felt betrayed and those who did stay felt that the Olympics were not meant to be a showcase for politics."

That many if not most athletes at the Olympics were using aabolic steroids even though they are banned. The steroids boost the body's ability to strengthen muscles and stamina.

Recent use is detectable by tests but the big problem is that experiments have shown that steroids work best about two weeks after being taken and can not be detected if not taken for a week.

So many athletes have been taking steroids up to two weeks before the Olympic games and have peaked at strength for their events but their steroid activity is not detectable.

Some of the success of the East German women swimmers and sprinters, Gideon feels, is traceable to steroids as well as the national training program.

That the word was that several leading manufacturers of athletic shoes had been trying to bribe athletes to use their shoes in Olympic competition.

One firm, said Gideon, who has done research leading to development of a new athletic shoe by another firm, has put up a fund of \$5 million to try to make certain all the gold medal winners are wearing its shoes.

He said one athlete was promised up to \$50,000, although the athlete and proof of such a claim are not available.

He did say that the firm for which he is doing research is planning an anti-trust suit to break a stranglehold a few firms have on the athletic shoe business. Alleged proof of payoffs to athletes will be used in that suit, Gideon said.