Soviet, American make own Olympic detente

Associated Press

INNSBRUCK — U.S.-Soviet detente has reached the point where an American Olympic under-achiever can be dispatched to Siberia with Russian cooperation.

But John Morton, who stayed in bed with intestinal flu and sent a substitute who fell on his face and broke his rifle in the biathlon competition in the 12th Winter Olympics here, willingly faces the ultimate boondocks.

Morton's upcoming trip is an exception to all the exhausted platitudes about sports fostering international understanding, and the uninterested stares that usually pass for relations between athletes from the West and Communist countries.

Morton, 29, from Anchorage, Alaska, and Alexander Tikhonov, 29, from Novosibirsk, Siberia, are simply friends. By international standards, Morton is a rather mediocre performer in the skiing-shooting competition and Tikhnov is a four-time world champion, but they poke fun at each other as equals.

When Tikhonov, an army captain, invited Morton, an eighth grade English teacher, for an open-ended stay in Siberia, where the normal permitted time for Westerners is two days, Morton said yes.

"Hey, John," Tikhonov says in his mixture of German and English. "You rifle nix good. Sight nix good. Sling nix good. Nix good rifle. But you get me one please." They both roar.

The friendship dates to 1969 when Morton and Tikhonov met at a world championship in Poland. They saw each other at various competitions and Morton's wife, Mimi, made Tikhonov a ski hat with a hammer and sickle motif.

"It blew his mind," Morton said. "He won the world championship with it on and is very superstitious about it now. It and another thing really cemented the relationship.

"We were in Lake Placid, N.Y., and Tikhonov came up to me and said, 'John, klein problem. Levis good in Soviet Union. Long play records also. Suitcase empty. Nix dollars.' What he meant was that he wanted to buy presents, but he didn't have any cash. I had $33 in my wallet and I gave it all to him. The man never forgot."

The invitation from Tikhonov came two years ago. Because the Russian has the title "merited master of sport" and is a Soviet celebrity, he assured Morton that the bureaucratic details on the Soviet side would be ironed out. But he didn't know the problems in the States.

"I thought I could go and train with Tikhonov, maybe for a period of up to six months, and bring back all the Soviet expertise to the United States," Morton said. "But I needed help. The State Department and the state of Alaska both said they thought it was a great idea. And there it stopped. They didn't give me a nickel."

Now Morton plans to stay with Tikhonov for a month to six weeks, enjoying what seems like the Soviet good life. Tikhonov has two cars, his own house and a dacha by a lake.

★★★

Associated Press

INNSBRUCK — Evgenity Kulikov of the Soviet Union won the gold medal in the 500 meter men's speed skating event in the 12th Winter Olympic Games today.

Valeriy Muratov of Russia won the silver medal and Dan Immerfall of Madison, Wis., was third, winning the bronze medal.

Mats Wallberg of Sweden placed fourth and Peter Mueller of [illegible]quon, Wis., who had high hope[illegible] gold medal in this event, fi[illegible] fifth.

Kulikov's winning time wa[illegible] seconds followed by Muratov's [illegible] and Immerfall's 39.54.

Immerfall, 20, beat o[illegible] better-known teammate Peter [illegible]ler to take a bronze in the 500-[illegible] event which was won by Russia[illegible] Evgeniy Kulikov in 39.17 se[illegible] an Olympic record. Valeriy Mu[illegible] of the Soviet Union was seco[illegible] 39.25 and Immerfall was th[illegible] 39.54.

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