

Officials excited about possibilities

Festival stresses amateur athletics

United Press International
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — The first National Sports Festival, which begins Thursday with more than 2,000 athletes competing in events ranging from archery to field hockey, eventually may provide young American athletes with the national exposure they deserve, according to a U.S. Olympic official.

Baron Pittenger, U.S. Olympic Committee director of special projects and director of the festival, predicted Sunday the festival would be one of the nation's top sports attractions within 10 years.

"Ten years from now, we believe this will be the single greatest sports event in the country," Pittenger said. "Compared to anything — Super Bowl, the World Series, anything.

"You will have the best athletes in 26 sports together at the same time. It will be a hell of an event, a showcase for the nation's top amateur athletes."

Pittenger, who Sunday met some of the 1,200 arriving athletes, said five cities, including Colorado Springs, already have expressed interest in hosting next year's event.

"Actually, the festival is designed for three things," Pittenger said. "One is to provide a focal point for our pro-oriented society of amateur athletes and athletics.

"We get excited once every four years and then forget about amateur athletics," he said. "The festival will be a yearly reminder of the quality and activities of our athletes."

Pittenger said the festival also would provide a high level of competition for athletes and give them the incentive to use the summer well. The third goal, he said, is to give exposure to a wide range of sports in the Olympic program, including many that aren't widely followed in this country.

The 1,200 athletes who arrived Sunday joined another 965 already in town preparing for the four-day festival. The undertaking will in-

clude most of the events programmed for the 1980 Summer Olympic Games and Pan American Games, as well as ice hockey and figure skating for the Winter Games.

A team competition format involving four sections of the nation — East, South, Midwest and West — will be used.

Track stars Marty Liquori, Franklin Jacobs and Al Oerter,

gymnasts Kurt Thomas and Kathy Johnson and figure skater Linda Fratianne will compete.

Jacobs, a sophomore at Fairleigh Dickinson University who set a world indoor high jump record of 7 feet, 7 1/4 inches earlier this year, heads the East track and field team.

Oerter, a former Olympic champion, said one advantage of the festival was the fact that many amateur

athletes now had to travel to Europe to get good competition.

"This will keep athletes at home," he said. "It will bring athletes and various events a lot closer to the public eye. The Olympics are a little obscure. They happen every four years. Now there will be more exposure before the Games."

Opening ceremonies tonight will feature the lighting of a festival

torch with a flame brought by a chain of runners traveling a 26-mile course from the top of Pikes Peak. Carrying the symbolic flame on its final lap will be runners Mary Decker of Colorado University and Ric Rojas of Denver University.

F. Don Miller, executive director of the U.S. Olympic Committee, said the festival "won't reach full flower in the first year" because of


the short amount of preparation time and the fact that many of the national governing bodies already were committed to conflicting schedules for this summer.

"But we think it will be very good, and five years up the road, it has unlimited potential," he said.

Most of the events will be staged in Colorado Springs or at the nearby Air Force Academy, but the

baseball, synchronized swimming, cycling and men's and women's hockey are scheduled at the south of Colorado Springs.

Most of the athletes will be the Air Force Academy where security is available. Practice also will not be given to the athletes and the locations of practice will be kept confidential as the security arrangements.



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BU coach anticipates festival

United Press International
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — If the National Sports Festival, which opens Thursday, is such a good idea, why hasn't it been tried before?

"Nobody had the guts till now," Clyde Hart said Monday. "And now that they have the guts, this is going to be something."

"I can't believe what they have done on such short notice."

Hart is the head track and field coach at Baylor University and will coach the South track team this week in the monumental enterprise sponsored by the United States Olympic Committee.

"We first heard for sure that this thing was going to go in last January," Hart said. "That does not give you much time. And I did not know then the scope of the festival."

"In fact I did not know until I came here that all these other sports were going to be represented, too. There just has not been that much advance notice of it."

"I can't believe we have the quality of athletes in track and field that we have here. In future years we are going to have even better athletes because they are going to want to come here."

"It's going to be just like an American Olympics. Except for the Pan American Games, I doubt there has been a larger gathering of athletes in this country since they held the Olympics in Los Angeles (in 1932)."

Athletes participating in the festival were invited by the USOC and Hart said he and his track and field colleagues used performances in NCAA and AAU competition as a guideline.

"Some of the ones we wanted were competing in Europe and I can understand them wanting to do that," Hart said. "But as the word began to spread we began to get more and more inquiries from people who originally said they did not want to participate."

"In just the last few days we've added James Walker from Auburn who won the NCAA and AAU intermediate hurdles."

"He came back from Europe early because he found out it was going to be an exciting event. He gambled that we would have a place for him here and we do."

"And another case was Mike Novelli (distance runner from Rice University). We invited Mike in the first place and he turned us down, but we had one of our distance runners drop out and the next day Mike called and asked if he could reconsider."

Among the top track and field athletes competing will be sprinter Harvey Glance and Olympic long jump gold medal winner Arnie Robinson.