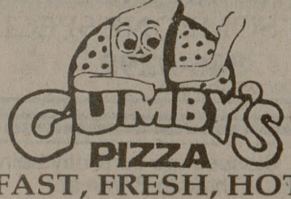


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U.S. figure skaters are under dog

From the Associated Press
 Brian Boitano and Debi Thomas are peaking at the right time. It might not be enough.

Although they won the U.S. Figure Skating Championships last month, they are Olympic underdogs.

Despite four consecutive national titles and the 1986 world crown, Boitano is rated second to current world champion Brian Orser of Canada. Thomas, who also won the U.S. and world championships in 1986, is ranked behind 1984 Olympic champ Katarina Witt of East Germany.

Although the United States is sending one of its strongest figure skating teams ever to the Winter Games, only Boitano and Thomas appear likely to challenge for a gold medal. Soviet couples are heavy favorites in pairs and dance, although Jill Watson and Peter Oppegard are a medal threat in pairs.

Boitano skated unimpressively in the freestyle at the U.S. championships, yet still won easily and wasn't particularly disturbed.

"After all the years I've been skat-

ing, whether in practice or competition, there have been ups and downs," the 24-year-old from Sunnysvale, Calif., said. "When I'm skating great, I know there will be a fall. When I'm in a valley, I know I'll peak again."

"It's part of the training procedure. I'm on schedule for Calgary."

So is Thomas, or at least she says she is.

"This year, I'm more ready than I've ever been. That was the plan," Thomas, 20, of San Jose, Calif., said. "I think I can be a lot better at the Olympics than I was at nationals. You wouldn't want your best to be there. You want to build up to it for the Olympics."

Boitano and Thomas are familiar with the Saddle Dome, where they performed in Skate Canada last fall. Thomas won, while Boitano was second to Orser.

"Skate Canada was a big step for me," Boitano said. "The acceptance I got from the people, the way I skated, the chance to get familiar with the rink... that competition was very important for me."

Orser, who won the 1987 World Championship after four straight runner-up finishes in the major international events (1984 Olympics and worlds, 1985 and '86 worlds) has more flash to his skating. Boitano is better technically.

The difference could come down to whether the judges view Orser the way they did Scott Hamilton in 1984. Hamilton, who won four straight world championships, was a lock for the gold medal at Sarajevo as long as he didn't fall. He didn't and won, even though Orser skated better in the short and long programs.

Boitano was fifth at the Sarajevo Games.

If the judges feel Orser deserves the same stature as Hamilton — and with the Olympics on his home ice — Boitano has little chance.

But Boitano's freestyle program, skated to music from TV's "Napoleon and Josephine," is as difficult as any skated at an Olympics. If Boitano peaks at Calgary, Orser will need a sparkling routine to beat him.

They figure to be 1-2, even though Alexander Fadeev of the So-

viet Union, the 1985 world champion, will be in Calgary, making the first time three men's champions will meet in an Olympic compulsory figures, the first in the competition, but he lacks freestyle skills of Orser and Boitano.

While Boitano has dropped freestyle, Fadeev is thinking about trying it. No quadruple has been landed in competition.

Other top U.S. men skaters include Christopher Bowman of Angeles and Paul Wylie of Denver.

Witt, a three-time world champion, skated magnificently in recent European championships, tends to finish behind the Soviet compulsories, then dominates the short and long programs.

Thomas isn't worrying though her freestyle, like Witt, be to music from "Carrie." Thomas' coach, Alex McGowan, minds everyone that Witt skated Katarina all the way to the worlds last year," McGowan said.

Nothing quite compares to Olympic Games

By Cray Pixley
Sports Writer

Sacrifices must be made. Sixteen days worth of sacrifices to be precise.

For over two weeks my textbooks will be virtually abandoned while I am glued to the television catching every minute of a sporting event. But this is not just any sporting event, this is the sporting event.

The 1988 Winter Olympics begin on Feb. 13 in Calgary, Canada, and for 16 days I become the ultimate armchair olympian.

From the lighting of the Olympic flame to the closing ceremonies, I can barely stand to miss a minute of the competition. Sometimes I think I should get a gold medal for downhill couch-sitting.

Watching the games makes me want to run out and take a trip down the slopes or a tour around the ice rink. However, this is hard to do when living in College Station because Mount Aggie isn't that challenging.

Ever since Dorothy Hamill won a gold medal at the 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria, I have been a fanatic about the winter games. When the U.S. hockey team won the gold at Lake Placid in 1980 I thought I would never get over the feeling of pride and patriotism for my country.

But my enthusiasm for the Olympics doesn't stop with the U.S. team. I cheer for other competitors as well.

This time my eyes are set on Swiss skier extraordinaire Pirmin Zurbriggen.

Zurbriggen has a solid chance of winning five medals in Calgary. This past Christmas I spent half my ski trip pretending I was as good a skier as Zurbriggen — what a fantasy.

I can't wait to experience the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.

Most of the advance sports reports say the U.S. Olympic team will be experiencing a full dose of that agony. Along with the excitement of the games are gloom and doom news of the United States failing to grab a load of medals.

The U.S. teams have always turned in good performances at the winter games but can hardly be expected to dominate over the European teams. Many of the European team sports are centered exclusively around Nordic events and for training the teams have the advantage of

snow-covered landscapes year-round.

The importance of the Olympics is in the winning of medals but also in the intense competition. The competition is what I'm citing about the games.

There are some bright spots in the seemingly dark Olympic cloud for the U.S. team.

Josh Thompson is the first American to shoot at a medal in the biathlon. The biathlon which combines marksmanship and cross-country skiing, has never had a strong American tender before.

A medal in the biathlon would be a tremendous feat for the United States.

The U.S. always has a strong Olympic skating team, and this team is running in good form.

U.S. figure skating champion Debi Thomas will battle it out for the gold with East German Katarina Witt, the current world champion. Team members Caryn Kadavy and Jill Terrier are also strong contenders.

Brian Boitano of the United States is in to win the men's figure skating gold medal. I also have another dream.

The dream is of a repeat performance of the U.S. hockey team's emotional Lake Placid victory. I hope this game has a chance of realizing it. Bring on the games — I'm ready.



Cray Pixley
Sports Writer

Two olympians lead skiers; another one cut

CRESTED BUTTE, Colo. (AP) — Three-time Olympian Tamara McKinney and 1984 giant slalom gold medalist Debbie Armstrong headline an 18-member U.S. Ski Team that will compete in the Winter Olympics at Calgary later this month.

Notable by his absence from the team announced Wednesday is Bill Johnson, who won the men's downhill gold medal in the 1984 Winter Games at Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

"We all feel sorry for Bill," U.S. Ski Team Alpine Director Harald Schoenhaar said, "but if you take results from this year or last, Bill is the sixth or seventh man on the team."

Olympic rules limit a team to four starters in any Olympic skiing event. "It would not be fair," Schoenhaar said, "to tell an A.J. Kitt or a Jeff Olson or a Bill Hudson that they cannot be on the team because we must put a person who has not finished higher than them all year on the team instead."

Schoenhaar said he thinks Johnson still has trouble with his back, which was operated on during the off-season.

Schoenhaar admitted the American team of nine men and nine women is not the best in the world, but "we are going up there to compete."

"We are not ashamed to send athletes up there who probably won't have chances to win medals," he said.

Schoenhaar said that Pam Fletcher, 25, of Acton, Mass., the top-ranked American in the downhill and super giant slalom events, has the best chance.

Felix McGrath, 24, of Norwich,

Vt., is the top contender on the men's side, Schoenhaar said. McGrath has had three top-10 finishes in slalom and ranks 11th in the World Cup slalom standings.

McKinney, 25, of Olympic Valley, Calif., who has been sidelined by an ankle injury since November, will be appearing in her third Olympics. She was the 1983 World Cup overall champion, the only American woman to win ski racing's most prestigious title, and also has won four World Cup discipline titles during her years on the U.S. Ski Team.

Armstrong, 24, of Seattle, won the gold medal in the giant slalom in the 1984 Winter Games.

She has been hampered by an early-season knee injury, but has been pronounced fit for Calgary.

Tiger Shaw, 26, of Stowe, Vt., is the only male team member with previous Olympic experience. Shaw, who competed in the 1984 Games, won the super-G and combined titles in the U.S. nationals last season.

Other members of the men's team are Bob Ormsby, 24, Tahoe City, Calif.; Jeff Olson, 22, Bozeman, Mont.; Bill Hudson, 21, Olympic Valley, Calif.; A.J. Kitt, 19, Rochester, N.Y.; Doug Lewis, 24, Burlington, Vt.; Alexander (Sandy) Williams, 24, Rochester, N.Y., and Jack Miller, 22, Steamboat Springs, Colo.

Also on the women's squad are Hilary Lindh, 18, Juneau, Alaska; Diann Roffe, 20, Williamson, N.Y.; Beth Madsen, 23, Aspen, Colo.; Edith Thys, 21, Squaw Valley, Calif.; Heidi Voelker, 18, Pittsfield, Mass., and Kristin Krone, 19, Truckee, Calif.

D.C., Reagan salute Redskins with parade

WASHINGTON (AP) — An estimated 600,000 people jammed Pennsylvania Avenue and cheered themselves hoarse Wednesday as the Super Bowl Champion Washington Redskins drove by in buses surrounded by marching bands and public officials.

It didn't rain on the parade, as weather forecasters had predicted, but afterward President Reagan showered the team with praise in a ceremony at the White House.

"The Redskins didn't simply enter the history books Sunday night — they rewrote them," Reagan said, referring to the 14 Super Bowl records Washington equaled or tied in its 42-10 victory over the Denver Broncos. "What else is there to say but Hail to the Redskins!"

The Redskins reciprocated by giving Reagan a jersey with his name and the number 1 on it and a Super Bowl football.

"Where's Ricky Sanders?" asked Reagan, referring to the wide receiver who had a record 193 receiving yards. Sanders immediately jumped from the makeshift stage, cut across the grass on the South Lawn, and then hauled in a Reagan pass from about 10 yards away.

The focus of the parade, meanwhile, was quarterback Doug Williams, who was voted the Most Valuable Player in the Super Bowl.

"Three years ago, that gave me an opportunity to play in that was the Washington Redskins," Williams said from behind the podium on the steps of City Hall at the rally following the parade. "That MVP award could have been given to anybody."

The festivities started about 8 a.m., but several rowdy fans began showing up six hours earlier to stake out their spot along the same route used for presidential inaugurations.

Williams, the first black quarterback ever to play in a Super Bowl, was the darling of the crowd. Picked up by the Redskins as a free agent in 1986, Williams relieved an ineffective Jay Roper, and went on to throw a Super Bowl record 340 yards and four touchdowns in the season finale.

"We want Doug! We want Doug!" thousands chanted as the parade ended its nine-block run. Williams, who had been picked up by the steps by District of Columbia Mayor Marion Barry Jr., "I'm just glad to be part of world champion Washington Redskins and part of the city," Williams said.

Reagan also cited Williams a job well done, saying his effort against the Broncos was "one of the most inspiring performances displayed by any quarterback in football history."

The team traveled the parade route in Tourmobiles that allowed marching bands, brass which played "Hail to Redskins."

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