

Without much fanfare it was announced last week that Mac Court would be the site of an internationally-sanctioned meet between the men's national teams of Japan and the United States on Feb. 3.

You might say that it's nothing new. You might add that the meet will probably be another one of those boring "all-star" affairs with two supposedly "national" teams.

First off, this really is an international meet. Four world-class judges will send the scores of the meet to the Federation of International Gymnastics as part of a series of qualifying scores for the World Games to be held in France later this year.

In addition, both the men's teams from the U.S. and Japan will be representative of the teams the two will field in the Moscow Olympics. This meet, like others that will take place between now and 1980, will be pivotal in the drive for American acceptance among the gymnastics elite of the world.

"Everybody in the world will agree that we have some of the best coaches, facilities, and athletes in the world for gymnastics," said Oregon gymnastics coach Bill Ballester. Ballester was named to coach the men's team that faces Japan Feb. 3.

"But the problem is that they don't get together. We've got some fine gymnasts on the West Coast, others in the South, and more in the East. But all that talent has never been brought together to train as they do in Japan and the Iron Curtain countries."

A meet such as the one to be held in

Commentary

A meet that marks a start in a favorable direction

Mike Marino

Eugene is nevertheless a step, although small, in the right direction. Olympian Curt Thomas, who currently redshirts at Indiana State, will lead the team that also includes Oregon's Jim Kelch. Add Gene Whelan, an alternate on the 1976 Montreal team, Mike Carter, a fine Olympian from LSU, and the top two high school gymnasts in the U.S., Jim Hartung and Mike Cahoy, and you have the makings of more than just a good team.

And the women aren't forgotten. Dick Mulvihill, who directs the Oregon Academy of Artistic Gymnastics in Eugene, will field a team that will compete with the Japanese in exhibition.

But the real importance of this meet lies not with the individual competitors or coaches. Certainly the meet couldn't take place without them, but the emphasis lies on its effect on this country's program. In nearly every major international sport, the United States is in a position of relative strength, and has been for many years.

Not so with gymnastics. The sport has

been dominated in the men's category by the Japanese, and with the women it's been mostly Eastern European countries.

"Those countries take their best gymnasts and train them all year 'round," Ballester said. "There's the debate of whether or not they're professionals, but the important thing is that they've been brought together and they train together."

Which is something that the U.S. women's program is starting to do. "They're much farther along than the men are," Ballester said. "They have age-group programs where aspiring young gymnasts are chosen by the USGF and taken to camps (like Eugene's Academy) to work on their gymnastics. And right now the women's program in the U.S. compares favorably to the programs in Japan and the Iron Curtain countries."

But the men, they're a little farther back. For one thing, you have an advanced collegiate program with nation-wide competition that can detract from the national effort.

And of course, there's the matter of bringing the talent under one roof.

Right now at least, that's where Ballester comes in. "My job is to bring the competitors together and let them function as a team," he said. "Some coaches will have guys changing their routines as soon as they hit camp, but you don't go making changes such as that. My responsibility is to get them together and make them comfortable."

No doubt the Japanese coaches will be doing the same. Theirs is a young team, with none of the big names from Montreal. "But I think they're grooming this team for Moscow," Ballester offered. "And this meet will give them some idea of where they are."

In Thomas they'll have a good stick to measure up to. "He is no doubt the finest gymnast ever to come out of this country," Ballester said. "he's really matured and is probably one of the top ten in the world."

And Kelch, Oregon's Japanese-trained grad of Churchill High will be worth watching, too. "He's not ready for the Olympics now," Ballester said. "But he falls in the category of all the other guys on the team. He's capable of competing with the best."

But for the \$5 admission price, (\$3.50 general, \$2.50 student) fans will see more than the finest in gymnastics come next Friday. "It's a sporting event," Ballester concluded. "And it's the exchange of ideas between young athletes of two different countries. That makes it exciting."

And worthwhile seeing.

Watson wins Clam Bake for second year in a row

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. (AP) — Tom Watson holed a four-foot putt on the second playoff hole to beat Ben Crenshaw in sudden death and scored his second victory of the season Monday in the rain-delayed Bing Crosby National Pro-Am Golf Tournament.

Watson, who used a victory in this tournament a year ago as a springboard to 1977 Player of the Year honors, blew a three-stroke lead late in the day. He had a chance to win it outright on the 72nd hole and missed, then finally

nailed it down when Crenshaw bogeyed the second playoff hole. It was the first bogey of the day for the dynamic Texas blond.

They finished regulation play with matching scores of 280, eight under par. Crenshaw had an almost-errorless 67 in the final round.

Watson, now the first man to make a successful defense of a tour title since Johnny Miller won his second Bob Hope Desert Classic in 1976, threatened to run away from the field with a front-nine 30, but cooled off to a 69. He had a 12-foot birdie putt that would have won it on the last hole, but saw it lip out.

Both parred the first playoff hole. On the 218-yard 17th that juts into the pounding surf of Carmel Bay, Watson put his tee shot on the front of the green. Crenshaw was bunkered and came out 10 feet long. Watson putted some three feet past and Crenshaw came out 10 feet long, then missed his 10-footer. Watson then made the winning putt.

Walsh to remain at Stanford helm

From The Associated Press

PALO ALTO, Calif. — Stanford Cardinal head football coach Bill Walsh announced yesterday that he intends to remain at Stanford, thus ending speculation he would take over the helm of the professional Los Angeles Rams.

Walsh led Stanford to a 9-3 season, capping his successful first year with a victory over Louisiana State in the Sun Bowl.

In making the announcement, Walsh said he wished to remove any doubt about his future in coaching.

"I appreciated the Rams' interest in me," he said.

"However, I want to set the record straight and remove any uncertainty about my future at this time ... I will not be leaving Stanford."

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