

Commentary

The fans made it the best meet ever

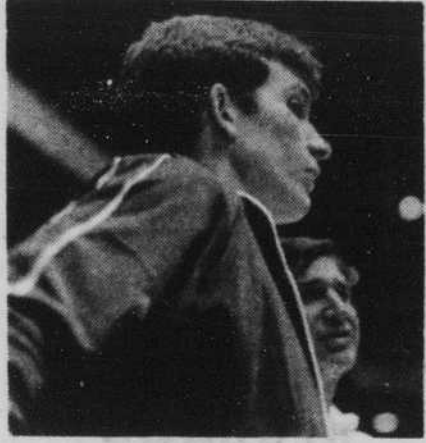
Mike Marino

All Gene Bartows aside, Mac Court fans are a pretty special bunch. And no, I don't mean just for basketball.

Last Friday night, the Deranged Idiots showed their other sides. They made the U.S.-Japan gymnastics meet one of the best sporting events I've ever seen.

The place was still cheering the U.S. victory over the Japanese, and Yank captain Kurt Thomas was taking in the scene. "This is without a doubt the best crowd I've ever seen," Thomas said of the 7,825 folks who filled the Pit. But Kurt, you've been in the Olympics, so don't you mean one of the best?

"That includes the Olympics," he beamed. "They really kept our spirit up."



Kelch and Ballester
"don't realize it yet."

So if you were there, pat yourselves on the back. If you weren't you missed a great show. From the meet's outset, you knew it was something special. Both teams — men and women — marched in, led by the undergrads at the Eugene Gymnastics Academy. These were the little seven, eight, and nine-year-olds waiting in the wings behind veterans Karen Kelsall (14), Leslie Pfiefer (15), and Tracy Talavera (11). It was a real treat to see these little ones bring in the Olympic flag — it wasn't the Olympics, but close.

The real fun, though, came when the action started. Mike Carter, LSU grad and former Olympian, had a strong, powerful floor exercise routine as the evening's second competitor, but was awarded only a 8.9. You'd have thought Mel Ross was in town.

"Aw, C'mon, you remind me of a basketball ref," one man stood and yelled. The rest of the house expressed similar opinions. But to prove their good manners as well as good taste, they went crazy when Japan's Junichi Shimuzu nailed a 9.55 on the floor, a set that included some impossible, body-controlling flips.

But the evening's best came later. Talavera, the little sprite from California, pulled a "Nadia" on the mat, turning on the crowd with a cutesy routine to the tune of "Games People Play."

"When they're young, they can do stuff like that," said her coach, Dick Mulvihill. "It was especially good for Tracy because it was her first big competition."

The crowd responded in style. As they did when Thomas, admittedly feeling the effects of extended jetlag, did nearly everything right for a 9.8 on the high bar to end the meet and clinch it for the U.S. The final score — 279.35 to 277.8 — was lost in the fact that the meet had become a little niche in history.

"I can't remember a U.S. team ever beating the Japanese," smiled happy coach Bill Ballester. "I've been in this now 20 years, and the Japanese only started competing internationally in the '50s, so I don't know."

Jim Kelch didn't care about the past — at least not too much. He'd just finished his first international competition, and more importantly, each of his scores counted for the team. "I'm glad I was a part of this," he said. "It feels really great to be through the first one. I was a little shaky but I made it though. And the fans were great. They saw a great meet."

In fact, they saw the greatest meet in U.S. gymnastics history. But they, like myself, probably don't even realize it yet. "I haven't even had time to figure it out," Ballester said in the locker room. "There are so many ramifications of what happened. It'll hit me sometime next week."

One thing's for sure; the fans are interested. "I stuck my neck out six years ago and said we could fill this place for gymnastics," Ballester said. "We finally did it."

And April brings the NCAA gymnastics championships to Mac Court. All of a sudden Friday's attendance mark looks easy to break.

Women travel to Corvallis for gym meet with Beavers

Oregon's women gymnasts will be heading into their Wednesday night meet with Oregon State in Corvallis with no chance to win. That's not pessimism, just realism, according to coach Henrietta Heiny.

"We don't have a chance to win. The meet here (a four way with OSU competing a couple weeks ago) we hit as well as we could," said Heiny.

In that meet, the Beavers took home first prize, outscoring the second place Ducks by over 10 points.

Oregon State is led by all-arounders Linda Parker, a 20-year-old mother of two and Donna Southwick. Another good performer for the Beavers is Ann Gianotti. However, OSU's strength is not necessarily in their individuals, said Heiny, but in their team depth.

OSU "is not weak anywhere. They've got lots of people doing well," stated Heiny. The coach pointed out the Beavers beat Washington, the perennial power of Northwest women's gymnastics. That, said Heiny, is pretty tough company to keep.

Oregon will be coming off a poor

though winning performance from last weekend. The Ducks won a three-way meet at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

"I wasn't pleased with the performance," Heiny said. "I think we can pick it up. Many things were against us—we had a bad night. It was not a good meet in general."

Though Oregon's score was about the same last weekend at Pacific as earlier against the Beavers, Heiny said the judges scored the meet very high, inconsistent with the performances.

Since the Oregon State quad-rangular meet, the Ducks have been working very hard in practice.

"From that time on, the kids have been working on skills. If my best people can do as well as they

do in practice," said Heiny, "we can get some good scores."

Performing impressively lately for the Ducks, according to Heiny, have been Wendy Halberg, Oregon's number one all-around performer and Sue Wilson, a parallel bars and beam specialist. Both have scored well for the Ducks. "Others have hit well here and there," said Heiny.

Though Heiny feels the team score is pretty much settled, she feels the Ducks can win one of the four events.

"We have always been strong on the bars," Heiny stated. "If there is anywhere we can beat OSU, it's in the bars. But only if we are hitting exactly."

"Other than that, we'll have to be lucky."

Seattle tourney starts as Yank loses in opener

SEATTLE (AP) — Brigitte Cuypers of South Africa defeated Kathy Harter of Culver City, Calif., 7-6, 7-6 in the opening match Monday of a \$100,000, week-long women's professional tennis tournament at Center Arena.

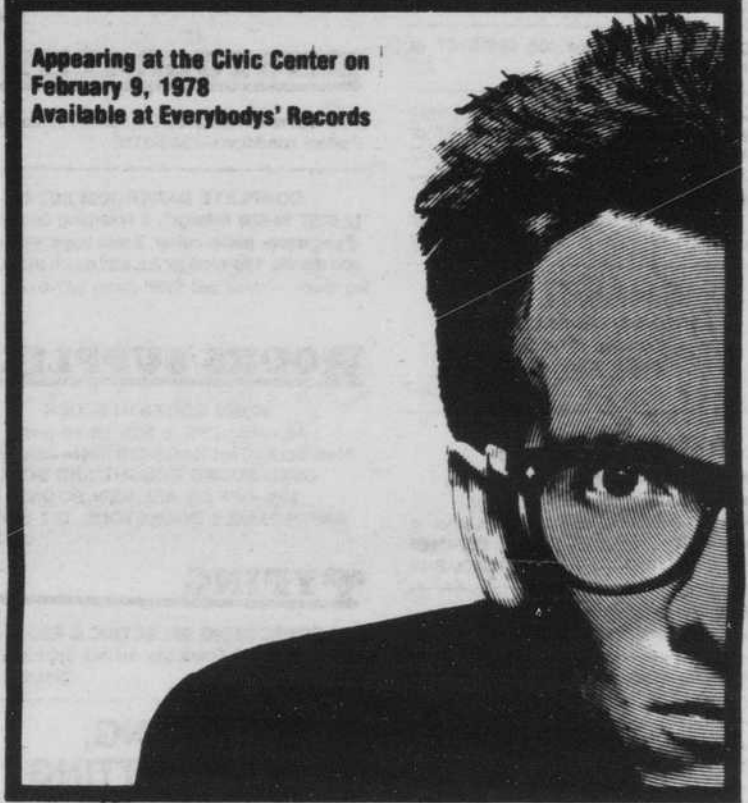
In another first-round match, Michele Tyler of England downed Regina Marsikova of Czechoslovakia 6-2, 4-6, 6-4. Top-seeded Martina Navratilova, who Sunday in Chicago won her third straight tour tournament, is the favorite here. The 21-year-old native of Czechoslovakia, who now lives in Dallas, will meet unseeded Kate Latham of Palo Alto, Calif., in her opening match Tuesday night.

Other seeds are No. 2 Evonne Goolagong, who lost the Chicago final to Navratilova Sunday, 6-7, 6-2; No. 3 Betty Stove, No. 4 Rosie Casals, No. 5 Wendy Turnbull, No. 6 Kerry Reid, No. 7 Kathy May and No. 8 Marise Kruger.

Top prize in the event is \$20,000.

The tournament is sponsored by Virginia Slims.

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