



john harris

Glory behind her, Strike looks ahead

Standing 6-2, Sheila Strike is a fairly tall young woman, but there was a moment in her life when she felt quite small in stature. As the starting center for the Canadian women's basketball team in the 1976 Olympics, Strike had to guard Uliana Semanova, the 7-2, 285-pound center from the Soviet Union. What was it like? "Beyond description," laughs Strike.

An attractive and articulate native of West Vancouver, British Columbia, Strike traveled to over 20 countries, including China and Russia, during four years as a member of the Canadian national team. The experience both broadened her horizons and brought her not a small amount of notoriety, but right now she's happy pursuing a master's degree at the University and assisting Edwin Heiny as a coach of the Oregon women's basketball team.

"I'm not Sheila Strike, center on the Canadian Olympic basketball team, but I'm Sheila

Strike, the student, and I like that," she says.

Strike became a member of Canada's national team in 1972 at the age of 17. She was one of the youngest members of the team, but what she lacked in experience, she made up in height. "I was tallest in camp," she says. "I had very little high school experience and I was by no means a super player." But when she put her mind to becoming a successful basketball player, she soon established herself as one of the best in Canada.

"Basketball was about eighth on my list of priorities in high school. I was a typical adolescent—into having a good time. But I reached a point when I decided that if I was going to play basketball I was going to shoot for something," she recalls.

In 1973, while playing college ball for Simon Fraser in the winter and internationally for the Canadian team in the summer she set as a goal for herself playing in the

1976 Olympics.

Along the way she traveled with the team for four summers, playing 30-40 games in such countries as Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Russia and China.

"We went to China in 1973, and from a cultural point of view that was the most interesting place we went," she says.

"We played in a gym not unlike this one (Mac Court), and after the game we went outside and there were 15,000 bikes lined up on the sidewalk.

"We tend to place value judgements on things and say that what we have is better, but it's just a different way of life."

Strike is amused if not irritated by the view Westerners have of foreign athletes, in particular women athletes of Eastern Europe and Russia, as being impersonal to the point of being robot-like. "I think that's a stereotype created by a communication barrier; perhaps it's a political ideology barrier as well. I

had some very positive experiences with some Russian women in particular, she tells.

A group of Russian women approached Strike's roommate during the Olympics because they were fond of her hair style and wanted to get a haircut to match it. Sheila and her roommate helped by taking them to the hairdresser. "They're just like any other people," explains Strike. "They brought us gifts the next day. It was really sweet."

Spiritually and intellectually the Russians were similar to Strike and her teammates, but on the basketball court it was another story. Women's basketball was played in the Olympics for the first time in 1976, and only six teams participated. Canada entered the competition automatically, because it was the host country, but the other five teams had to qualify. The Canadians opened with the Soviet Union, lost and never recovered, failing to win a game. "We played absolutely atrociously and finished sixth," remembers Strike.

Semanova posed obvious problems for Strike ("She posts low, they lob the ball into her and she just turns around and shoots"), but Strike feels she has played against tougher centers. "The thing that is really important to remember about her (Semanova) is that she is by no means the strength of their team. What makes them able to dom-

inate women's basketball are their 6-5 forwards who are incredible athletes.

"She (Semanova) must be the tallest woman basketball player, so that was a challenge, but it poses a different challenge to play the center from Italy who is 6-3 and is a tremendous offensive player."

Despite the media play given the United States' center Lucy Harris, Strike didn't feel the American was that extraordinary. "Lucy Harris was a challenge because she was so publicized," Strike says. "She was good, but I would say there are equally as good centers in the world."

Strike "retired" from the Canadian national team after the Olympics and probably would not return to play even if Canada was able to qualify for the 1980 Olympics.

"The most it did for me was really broaden my view of the world. I wouldn't have traded the opportunity for anything, and I think the Olympics, despite the entanglement of politics, has got to be the most exciting thing in the life of an amateur athlete. But something pretty drastic would have to happen for me to tryout again," she says.

"That was a really neat part of my life, but now I'm going to move on and meet some new challenges."

Like helping Edwin Heiny build a powerful basketball team at Oregon.

Heisman candidate Billy Sims may be Sooners' best back ever

NORMAN, Okla. (AP) — Billy Sims finally appears to have shaken off the injury jinx and, as a result, Oklahoma's opponents are feeling the pain.

When he came out of Hooks, Texas, in 1975 with more than 7,000 yards to his credit as a high school sensation, the projections were that Sims might turn out to be the greatest back ever to run wild for the University of Oklahoma.

Finally, after three years of nagging injuries, Coach Barry Switzer says that Sims is "playing up to our expectations... playing the way we always thought he could play."

What Sims is doing is leading the nation in rushing with an average of 155 yards per game, including a national record-tying three 200-yard-plus games in a row which ended when he was "held" to 153 in last week's loss

to Nebraska, with 1,550 yards in 10 games, he needs 116 against Oklahoma State on Saturday to break the school record of 1,665 set by Greg Pruitt in 1971.

Obviously, the time has come to mention Sims in the same breath with Joe Washington, Steve Owens and Pruitt, the three leading ground-gainers in Oklahoma history.

"Earl Campbell and Billy Sims are the two best running backs I've ever seen," says Switzer, linking Sims with last year's Heisman Trophy winner from the University of Texas.

"He has his own style of running. Joe Washington was probably more elusive but Billy snakes and slithers through there and he breaks so many tackles with his strength."

Monroe back in lineup and Knicks' fans love it

Earl Monroe is back where he belongs, working his magic for the New York Knicks.

After missing the first 15 games of the National Basketball Association season because of a contract dispute, the Pearl is once again wearing No. 15.

"It's great to be back," said Monroe, a four-time all-star and the 20th leading scorer in NBA history.

"I love New York. This is my city and I never wanted to leave. But it was frustrating not being able to play. Three weeks ago I had doubts about whether I'd be back. You never know if they'll let you sit out the season. But I thought that if I didn't play in New York, I wouldn't play anywhere else."

Knicks fans are lucky to have Monroe around, and they showed their appreciation upon his return

Tuesday night.

Chants of "Earl! Earl! Earl!" urged Coach Red Holzman to put Monroe into the game.

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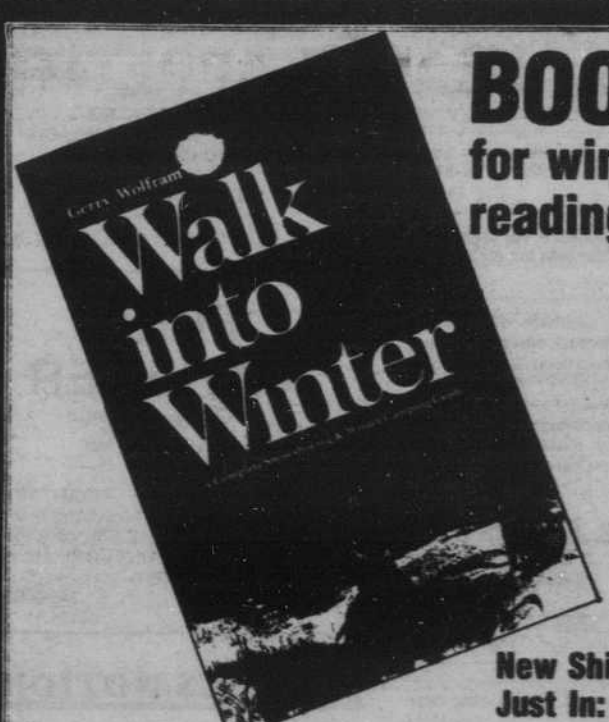
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