

Olympians Blair, Morales honored

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — They were supposed to be too old to be Olympians, let alone Olympic winners. But speedskater Bonnie Blair and swimmer Pablo Morales each won a pair of gold medals in 1992, and those feats earned them further honors Tuesday.

Blair and Morales, both 28, were named the U.S. Olympic Committee's Sports Woman and Sportsman of the Year.

Blair became the first American woman to win the same event at two consecutive Winter Games when she took the 500 meters at Albertville, then added the gold in the 1,000. She had won gold in the 500 and bronze in the 1,000 four years earlier, at Calgary.

Morales came out of retirement to win gold medals in the 100-meter butterfly and as part of the men's 400-meter medley relay team at the Summer Games in Barcelona.

Both athletes find themselves fending off ever-younger opponents as they ponder their competitive mortality. And both admit feeling the years add up.

"I can tell I'm getting a little older," Blair said. "I find little nagging things affecting me. I have to be more careful in my training, and physical therapy takes a little bit longer."

"I sprained both of my ankles last summer, which was kind of frustrating. I find I'm doing things to myself I haven't done in the past. I don't know if it's because of old age, but that's what I'm attributing it to."

Blair isn't ready to surrender to the aches and pains, however. She will compete in one more Olympics — the 1994 Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway.

Had the Olympic movement not switched to two-year intervals between the Winter and Summer Games, Blair might have been finished.

"Four years is a long way away," she said. "I would be almost 32 then."

But with the next Winter Olympics just two years after Albertville, Blair decided last June to take another shot.

Preparing for the world championships next month in Japan, Blair says her "longer distances have been going better than my shorter ones, which is kind of surprising because the 500 is my favorite race."

Morales says he's less likely to compete in another Olympics.

"I suppose there's a possibility — a very small possibility — that I'll be competing in Atlanta (in 1996)," he said. "I really see myself being a spectator there."

"My goal last year was to get to Barcelona and give the gold medal a shot. I have put law school on hold for a couple of years now. I'm eager to get back to that."

Morales, who has been making personal appearances around the country, will continue training until he returns to Cornell Law School next fall. "I've set some personal goals,

and I have a chance to build on last year's performance," Morales said. "I'm hoping to improve on the time I swam in Barcelona, try to come close to a life-best time, which would be close to the world record."

Morales said the reaction to his Olympic performance "made me realize what a longshot people considered me to be. I was that much of a longshot."

The Sportsman of the Year award, he said, "just boggled the mind. This is an award I'll treasure until I'm old and gray, or should I say older and grayer."

In balloting by a national panel of journalists and USOC officials, Morales, of Santa Clara, Calif., received 1,191 points to 1,060 for runnerup Kevin Young, who won the men's 400-meter hurdles in Barcelona. Bruce Baumgartner, gold medalist in 130-kilogram freestyle wrestling, was third with 981 points.

DITKA

Continued from Page 12

a 20-0 lead in the fourth quarter. Then Jim Harbaugh then threw an interception on an audible that was returned for a touchdown. Ditka exploded on the sidelines, and the Bears blew the lead and lost 21-20.

Two weeks later, when he was again questioned about "The Audible," Ditka went into a rage at his press conference and said, "399 plays I've been calm and one I've been excited. You think this is a damn soap opera."

That was the end of his week's Monday press conferences.

After a 20-17 loss at Tampa Bay, he had to be restrained from going into the stands for a fan who "called me a bad name."

And after a 16-3 loss at Detroit, Ditka was stung when McCaskey said he would evaluate

the team at the end of the season.

But then Ditka said he would make his own evaluation, and that the only way he would stay with the team "is if I can control it. We've hit bottom."

That might have sealed his fate.

Ditka ranks second among Bears coaches in both tenure and victories, trailing only the late George Halas, the team's founder. Halas coached Ditka from the beginning of his playing career in 1961 until he was traded in 1967 after a contract dispute.

But that didn't prevent Halas from selecting Ditka as the Bears' 10th coach on Jan. 20, 1982.

Ditka took over a team that had only two winning seasons in the previous 19. He revamped the team and the Bears were 11-14 his first two seasons.

BOBO

Continued from Page 12

Bobo said after speaking with Washington State coach Mike Price, WSU receivers coach Mike Levenseller and former WSU coach Dennis Erickson, who recruited Bobo before becoming Miami's coach, "it confused me a lot."

"They didn't like it very much, but they support my decision," Bobo said. "I just felt it's time for me to do something else. The opportunity is there. I just want to grab it while I can."

Bobo said if Bledsoe would have stayed in school, he might have stayed. But, Bobo added, "I don't lack confidence in Mike Pattinson at all. Mike's going to be real good. He has a lot of things that Drew doesn't have."

Pattinson, a redshirt junior, figures to be the Cougars' starting quarterback next season.

Bobo had 51 receptions for 759 yards and six touchdowns as a freshman in 1990, 54 receptions for 759 yards and six touchdowns in 1991, and 43 receptions for 665 yards and four touchdowns this season. He caught at least one pass in his last 29 games.

Bobo, a 5-foot-11, 185-pounder, attended Moreno Valley, Calif. High School. He sat out the 1989 season at WSU before playing the next three seasons.

"I'm going to help him find an agent," Ron Brown, a former player in the NFL with the Los Angeles Rams and Los Angeles Raiders, told the AP. "We're going to talk to a few agents."

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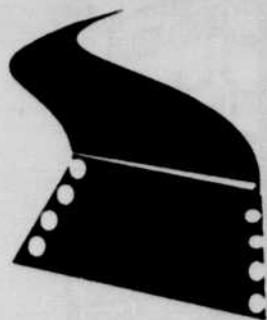
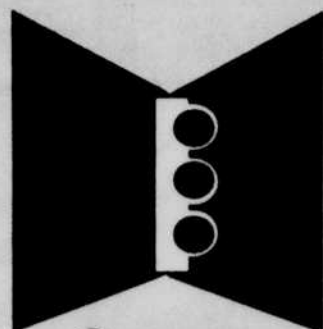
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