

Marathon record-holder gets American citizenship

■ The runner gained his U.S. citizenship, but it is still uncertain whether he can run for the United States

By Bert Rosenthal
The Associated Press

Khalid Khannouchi, the marathon world record-holder, was sworn in as a U.S. citizen Tuesday, but it was uncertain whether he could compete for the United States at the Olympics if he made the team.

Blocking the way could be the International Olympic Committee and the Moroccan Olympic Committee.

IOC rules state that an athlete must wait three years to compete for his new country. That period can be reduced or eliminated only if three parties agree: the previous national Olympic committee, track's international ruling body and the IOC.

The general secretary of the Moroccan federation, Abdellatif el Jazouli, suggested Morocco would not approve.

"We have not been contacted," he told The Associated Press. "Nobody has asked us anything. If there is an official request, we will put it to our federal council to decide."

"For us, the rules must be applied. It's not up to the IAAF. It's up to the national federation."

Giorgio Reineri, a spokesman for the ruling IAAF, said the three-year rule does not apply. He said an athlete must be a citizen

of the new country to compete for that country, unless he or she has competed for the former country in the past three years.

The last time the 28-year-old Khannouchi ran for Morocco was at the 1993 World University Games at Buffalo, N.Y.

Khannouchi, who had been hoping to obtain his U.S. citizenship since arriving in the United

States in 1993, set his sights on running in Sunday's U.S. Olympic marathon trials at Pittsburgh.

But he has an ankle injury, and his trainer has told him to not race for the next six weeks.

Khannouchi will discuss his plans Wednesday in New York. He could decide to run at Pittsburgh or wait until July and compete in the 10,000 meters in the U.S. Olympic track and field trials at Sacramento, Calif.

"Khalid has had injuries that could curtail his career," said Gerard Hartmann, who has been treating Khannouchi in Ireland. "There's no way he should run

the marathon trials, although as Sandra (Khannouchi's wife) says, he could run 2:12 in his sleep." A time of 2 hours, 12 minutes, might be good enough to earn Khannouchi a place on the three-man U.S. team.

Khannouchi would not discuss his intentions Tuesday at a City Hall ceremony in Houston, where he was made an honorary citizen of the city.

"This is a great day to finally happen," he said. "It's something we've been working on for over two years. I owe a great responsibility to the people who made this happen for me and gave me this chance. Now I have the ball, and it is my responsibility to prove that all of this was worth it."

"I have a lot of friends here now. I have a new home here. I want to give something back. I still love my country, but I have been treated so well and given so much support here that I want to run for America."

Khannouchi acknowledged the strain of all the developments. "I want to get with my trainer and talk things over," he said. "I feel good, but you want to make the right decision. You don't want to do something that might harm your career."

Khannouchi qualified for citizenship under a law that enables spouses of U.S. citizens working abroad for an American company to achieve citizenship regardless of the three-year residency requirement. Last month, his wife accepted a job overseas with a U.S. firm.

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Millions might miss the Derby

■ Unless Time Warner and ABC strike a deal, the Indy 500 and NHL playoff games could be blacked out

By Howard Fendrich
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Hockey and horse racing fans are rooting for ABC and Time Warner to come to an agreement by this weekend.

NHL playoff games and two of ABC's signature events, thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown series and the Indy 500, could be blacked out for about 3.5 million viewers around the country.

The Walt Disney Co., ABC's corporate parent, is fighting over how much money Time Warner must give Disney for the right to carry some of its cable channels.

The dispute over transmission rights left seven ABC stations off local cable systems, including ones in New York and Los Angeles, as of Monday.

Unless an agreement can be reached, Saturday's Kentucky Derby — the last of 26 straight shown by ABC — won't be available to cable subscribers in the affected areas.

"It's something we have no control over," said Karl Schmitt, senior VP of Churchill Downs Inc., which owns the track and the Derby itself. "We're hopeful it all will be resolved before Saturday at 4:30, when the show goes on the air."

Time Warner and ABC have tried for months to reach a new national deal. The old one expired Dec. 31.

"We're going ahead as planned. We don't know what's going to happen between Disney and

Time Warner," ABC Sports vice president Mark Mandel said today. "We're planning on showing the race as we always do."

The blackout comes during a sweeps period, when ratings are used to set local advertising rates. Sweeps began Thursday and end May 24.

"It could have a damaging effect on ABC Sports," said Neal Pilson, former president of CBS

Sports and now head of a consulting firm.

Advertisers could ask ABC to compensate them for lost viewers.

The network, in the first season of a five-year, \$600 million deal it and ESPN have with the NHL, is to air a second-round playoff game Sunday from either the Colorado-Detroit or Pittsburgh-Philadelphia series.



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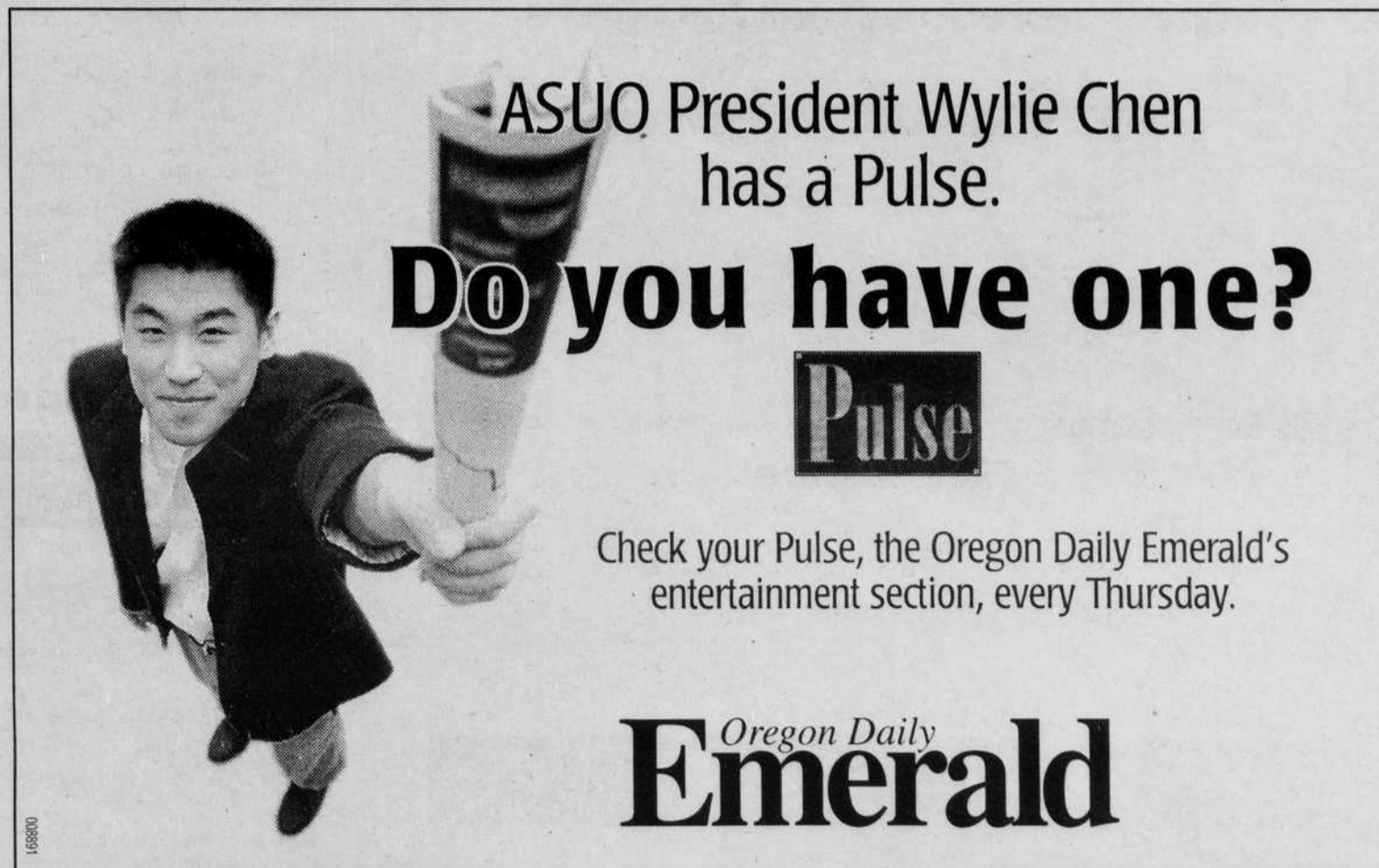
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