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Athens Olympics security presents concern for some

Security at the Olympic games is a worry for some organizers, but not for most of the athletes involved

By Tommy Hine
The Hartford Courant (KRT)

HARTFORD, Conn. — Athens Olympic organizers are certainly concerned about safety. They're spending nearly $1 billion on security.

The International Olympic Committee is also concerned. It has taken out a $170 million insurance policy for the first time in case the Summer Games are canceled or suspended.

But the U.S. athletes don't seem too worried about terrorism, earthquakes or flooding in Greece. They're more worried about just winning a berth on the team and the endless construction delays.

"My biggest concern is that they won't finish the pool on time," said Olympic swim hopeful Ben Michaelson of Seymour, Conn. "They've already decided not to build the roof. Fortunately for me, I set my first American record in a pool five feet deep in Wilton on a cold, rainy day. I won at the Pan-American Games in Santa Domingo when it was 110 degrees. They can throw anything they want at me.

"I'm more worried about making the team. That's my only concern and kicking butt at the Olympic trials. When it comes to terrorists, you have to put your trust in the security measures they use and put your faith in God."

Alan Hatch, husband and coach of West Haven, Conn., gymnast Annia Hatch, said he and his wife haven't lost sleep over security concerns.

"We haven't had two thoughts about it," Hatch said. "If the terrorists really want to get where they want, you're not going to stop them."

More than $800 million has been budgeted to make the Athens Games secure — more than three times the money spent four years ago in Sydney — and NATO has agreed to help with the security net.

"Thank God they are," said Alex Ottiano, a 2000 judo Olympian from Sterling, Conn. "There's no doubt Americans are the targets now, and I'm sure you have to be a little concerned about it.

"But competing at the Olympics supersedes everything else. I personally don't worry about it. I'm just concerned with making the team right now."

Ranked No. 1 in his weight class, Ottiano will get his opportunity June 5 at the one-day Olympic judo trials in San Jose, Calif.

IOC president Jacques Rogge told The Associated Press on Tuesday in London that insurance coverage for full or partial cancellation of the Athens Games Aug. 13-29 had been obtained through a syndicate of London-based companies.

The $170 million policy does not protect corporate sponsors or television networks, which have billions of dollars riding on the Games. It covers a "whole range of issues such as terrorism, earthquake, flooding, landslides, things like that," Rogge told the News Network by phone from Lausanne, Switzerland.

The insurance policy also covers most of the 28 international sports federations and the 202 national Olympic committees, many of whom rely on Games-related revenue for their existence.

The IOC will also negotiate cancellation policies for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, and 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

The IOC had no insurance coverage for the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, but concern for possible cancellation or interruption of the Athens Games increased after train bombings in Madrid killed 191 people on March 11.

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was striking the ball fairly well."

Freshman Matt Ma made the biggest move up the leaderboard. He started the day tied for 32th, but with his 1-under 71, the freshman finished in a tie for 21st at 7-over 223. Sophomore Kyle Johnson struggled to 6-over 78 and fell into 26th overall. Sophomore Gregg LaVoie, last year's top finisher for the Ducks at the event, fired a third round 4-over 76, leaving him in a tie for 31st at 227.

Senior Mike Sica struggled for the second straight round Tuesday. The co-captain dropped into 55th after recording a third-round 83. Freshman Dustin Pewarchuk fired a 77, leaving him alone in 49th at 20-over 236.

As a team, Arizona State recorded one of two rounds under par today, giving them a nine-stroke advantage over in-state rival Arizona. Defending champion and third-ranked UCLA carded the low round of the day to move into third with a 7-over 1087. Washington finished in fourth at 1106.

"After yesterday we expected more, but it's nice to see the other guys step up," Washington head coach Matt Thurmond said. "The six count five format is difficult. You have to have five guys play well, and it's usually the fifth or sixth guy that hurts you."

Individually, reigning NCAA individual champion Alejandro Canizares of Arizona State took over the top spot on the leaderboard at 7-under 209 with his 6-under 66. The leader after the first two rounds, Washington's Brock Mackenzie, fell into a tie for fifth after his third round 77.

The final round of the Pac-10 championships will tee off today at 7 a.m.

Brian Smith is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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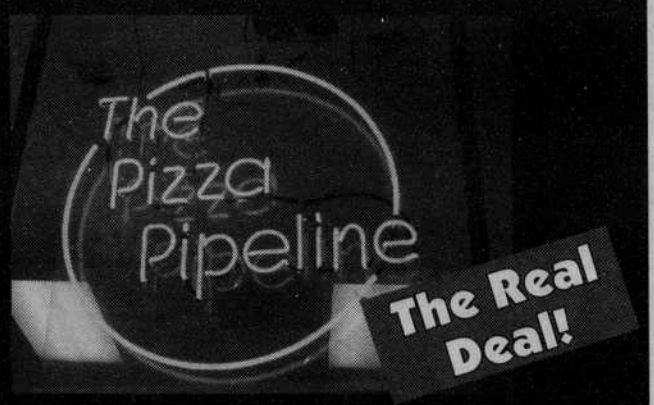

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