

# Make sure to tone down the bravado, USA

By Ron C. Judd  
The Seattle Times (KRT)

NEW YORK — When Jennie Finch, softball pitcher and People-magazine-appointed beautiful person, showed off the U.S. Olympic team's new Roots shorts for Athens last week, it was hard to miss: The letters "USA" were brazenly stamped right across her backside.

No need to be shy about the home colors, officials in charge of the safety of Finch and 500 other American Olympic athletes said at a news conference the next day.

Yes, they know that America is "not the favorite kid in the world as a country," in the words of Bill Martin, acting U.S. Olympic Committee president.

They know that in an era of warfare, hostage-taking and general mayhem, even non-celebrity American travelers are leery about advertising their home address on various body parts, especially in mixed crowds in foreign cities.

And they know the Athens Games, which open in 87 days, are being looked upon with perhaps unprecedented trepidation for a worldwide sporting event.

They just don't act like they know. In spite of logic literally screaming otherwise, Martin and other top USOC officials this week said they won't ask American athletes to avoid mixing with the public in Athens. Nor will they advise them to hide their traditional red, white and blue.

"As of now, we are not asking the teams to not wear their U.S. uniforms around the city of Athens," said Jim Scherr, the USOC's chief executive. "We expect our teams to be proud to represent the USA. They know what to do and where to go. They're aware of the world situation and security concerns."

This bravado is echoed by Larry Buendorf, a former Secret Service agent who has been the chief security officer for U.S. Olympic athletes since 1992.

"There's over 10,000 athletes there," he said of the Aug. 13-29 Athens Games. "Everyone's going to be wearing their colors. We will be blending, perhaps, with all the other colors there. It will be difficult to pick out just the USA. We have no reason to have our athletes not wear their colors around."

What about the bombs that racked Athens in recent days? What about the group which, just this week, claimed responsibility for them, promising more mayhem when the world comes to Athens in August?

"Bombings in Athens are not unusual," Buendorf said, not exactly taking a page from the Greek Visitor's Bureau sales brochure. "The recent ones that have come up obviously go to the front page of the media. They're not really the destructive-type bombings. They're more disgruntled groups. They usually call ahead prior to the explosion, then allow the people to get out so no one gets hurt."

Welcome to Greece, where even the bombers are courteous. Pray for no busy signals.

Not that the U.S. is completely dismissive of security concerns. Athletes will be reminded that they are, even more so than ever, ambassadors for their nation, and reminded to be discreet about the kind of flag-waving and taunting that soured the stomachs of even the intensely U.S.-friendly track-and-field fans in Sydney.

And their country is, in fact, taking unprecedented security measures, sending some 100 federal agents along with the U.S. team. One or more agents will be on every bus America's finest board to any event.

But the agents won't be — can't be — with all the athletes, all the time. And even when they are, they will not be armed, at least according to current protocols, Buendorf said.

The point is clear as it can be: The United States is going to be there, waving the flag as usual, and the rest of the world better cope with it.

U.S. Olympic leaders are fully aware of the threat of terrorism.

"But I don't think, as a country or as an Olympic committee, that we want to bow before that threat," Scherr said.

The United States will not only show up, it plans to win 100 medals — way more than anyone else on the globe, another USOC official predicted.

Listening to this bravado, you hope these guys know what they're talking about, and to some degree, trust that they do. But you also get an uneasy, pending-train-wreck feeling: How much of this bluster might they regret ever uttering later, should the unthinkable turn to "we interrupt this broadcast?"

Especially when, like some of Buendorf's assurances, it runs so completely contrary to common sense?

Would he, if he were an Olympic athlete today, cavort through the streets of Athens, unescorted and decked out in the colors of Old Glory?

"I've been going to Athens for four years," he responds without hesitation. "Most of my attire is 'USA.'"

He has full confidence, he says, that the Greeks, who are spending \$1.2 billion and enlisting 70,000 people in the security effort, have all their ducks lined up. Yet he and other USOC honchos must know some of that trust might be misplaced.

Buendorf is a 22-year veteran of

the Secret Service, a group that would never allow a president or visiting dignitary into a building until it had been "locked down" — scanned for bombs and intruders and kept secure until the event.

Yet that might not even be possible in Athens, where the lock-down for all the athletic venues is scheduled for July 1 — even though some of them might not even be finished by then. Good security, many experts say, begins with good preparation. And in spite of their headlong thrust toward the Aug. 13 finish line, a lot of people fear the Greeks gave away too much security ground at the start.

But the USOC is trusting the Greeks. And American athletes are trusting the USOC.

What choice do they have?

"There's a little nervousness, a little concern" among athletes, says Kristine Lilly, U.S. women's soccer player, no stranger to hostile foreign crowds. "But we know they'll take good care of us."

Some skeptics have suggested the Games would be both safer and saner if the International Olympic Committee would step in, forthwith, admitting the obvious — Greece isn't ready — and delaying the Games for 12 months, or until Greece is ready.

Privately, some Olympic types will tell you it makes great sense. But they are just as quick to point out that the modern Rule of Olympism — Games broadcaster NBC has the gold and makes all the rules — dictates otherwise. And maybe luck will be on their side.

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## BRIEFS

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### Ganes, Chapdelaine invited to try out for Canadian team

Carolyn Ganes and Kaela Chapdelaine were invited to tryouts for the Canadian Senior National Team, Oregon announced Tuesday.

The team is coached by Oregon associate head coach Allison McNeill, who took over for current Duck head coach Bev Smith in 2001. The tryouts will run from May 19 to June 8 at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia.

McNeill's husband, Mike, an assistant with the Ducks, will serve on the Canadian team's staff in the same position, as will University of Saskatchewan coach Lisa Thomaidis.

"I am thrilled Carolyn and Kaela have an opportunity to train with the Canadian National Team this summer," McNeill said. "It is another incredible opportunity for them to learn and grow as basketball players."

Ganes, who will be a junior next season, averaged 5.8 points and 2.6 rebounds per game for Oregon in the 2003-04 season. She was on the Senior National Team last year during the Pan American Games in the Dominican Republic.

Chapdelaine is the youngest invitee to the camp. She will be a redshirt freshman for the Ducks during the 2004-05 season after sitting out last year.

Fourteen players ranging in age from 19 to 29 were invited. Seven of the invitees played Division I basketball last season; Utah and Oregon are the only schools to have more than one player invited.

— Hank Hager

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