



“So many
gaymes, so
little time.”

via GayWire™

THE EVENT

Gay Games IV was held June 18 to 25 in stadiums, gyms, swimming pools, mountains and fields around the New York metropolitan area. In all, there were 31 sporting events, with participants ranging from international Olympic medalists to thousands of home-grown athletes. The choice of events was staggering, and no one person could attend them all—though one could try.

Some people consider gay-specific sporting events to be totally unnecessary or overly commercialized. Others believe the games help to open minds. Bruce Hayes, the 1984 Olympic gold medalist, said, “Hopefully, we’ll shatter some of those stereotypes that gay people aren’t athletes, because we are.”

Martina Navratilova commented, “Gay Games IV... is a powerful vehicle for attacking homophobia and for displaying our power and pride... [it] will change the way the world thinks of us.”

OPENING CEREMONIES

Saturday evening, June 18, the Gay Games officially opened at Wien Stadium, part of Columbia University’s sports complex on the northern tip of Manhattan. The night was hot and the crowd was wild. The 14,000-seat stadium was filled to near capacity with enthusiastic spectators who gathered to greet the 11,000 athletes who marched in from the soccer field next door.

In true Olympic tradition, the founding city of the Gay Games, San Francisco, led the procession, followed by Vancouver, British Columbia (the previous host city). The rest of the athletes marched in alphabetical order by country, by state and by province. New York, as the current host, was the final team to arrive on the field.

Each team had its own style. Team Dallas, for example, wore black jeans, white shirts and white straw cowboy hats; Team Hawaii wore double leis; Team Hamburg wore sailor hats; Team Australia wore khaki uniforms and straw hats. The Florida Team had beach balls, while Team Amsterdam carried umbrellas with a balloon on the tip. Team Portland wore Kelly green shorts, vests and hip packs.

Gaymen all agog as they await competition in the water polo event



PHOTO BY THOMAS BARRETO

The Urban Prairie Gods loosened up the crowd with the largest gay country line dance ever, filling up the entire field. Kate Clinton, “the Clinton who is not in the White House” emceed the event. The Rainbow Flag was unfurled, oaths were taken, the flame was lit, and fireworks painted the sky. A strong feeling of pride and unity brought tears to many eyes. As Judith Light said that night, “Seeking inclusion means not seeking special rights, but seeking human rights. We see each other for who we are.”

POWERLIFTING

The powerlifting competition began at 10 am Sunday, June 19. Although the temperature soared to 98 degrees, and the gym was not air conditioned, it was standing room only for the adoring and cheering spectators. The athletes grunted and grimaced their way through the competition, lifting seemingly impossibly heavy weights. Would you believe a 105-pound woman could lift 290 pounds?

In total there were 61 athletes—36 women and 25 men. Tom Tedesco, a double-medal veteran from Gay Games III, co-chairman of the event, and gold medal winner in the 100 kg category this year, stated that the majority of powerlifters were 30 to 40 years old. He said, “The average age is a little older than you might think, because it takes several years of training to reach this level of competition.” He expressed disappointment that there weren’t more men competing, but Linda Belsito, co-chairwoman of the event, said she believed that “it must mean that women are the stronger sex.”

BASKETBALL

Basketball preliminaries were played on Lehman College campus in the Bronx, where the enthusiasm from the crowd was overwhelming. Twenty-five squads participated in Sunday’s events. They came from France, Germany, the Netherlands and even from the United States. One of the highlights was when New York Gov. Mario Cuomo came on court dribbling a ball, warming up with the players. Although the visiting international press wondered if the governor was gay, the New York crew realized that it was simply an election year. And guess what—the governor scored.

WRESTLING

The wrestling finals, held Wednesday night, June 22, at New York University’s Coles Sports complex, were a feast for the eyes. Female and male wrestlers grappled on the mats, two matches at a time. Linda Avitabile, co-chairwoman of the event, gave an impassioned speech at the onset. “Once in everyone’s life,” she said, “it is wonderful to go into a stadium and hear everybody cheer.” Her team, The New York Knights, got their share of cheers. They grabbed the gold in the female division, winning four top places out of six, as well as two silver medals. Avitabile herself received the gold in the 180.5 pound weight class. No one team had a majority of the winners in the men’s division, but Ed Unger, co-chairman of the event, received a silver medal in the 180.5 pound weight class.

The crowd gave a tremendous ovation for Juanita Harvey, the 38-year-old grandmother in spandex, who was profiled in *Out* magazine. Her match was perhaps the most exciting, due to the especially fierce competition. Her gold medal win in the 198 pound weight class was all the more savored because at the last minute she moved up a weight class.

TABLE TENNIS

The table tennis competition was held at the Lost Battalion Hall in Rego Park, Queens, on Tuesday, June 21. There were four divisions: women, men, mixed and teams. Women’s and men’s were broken down into tournament, experienced and recreational subdivisions.

SWIMMING

Seven world records were set in swimming as of this writing. Records are over a short course metric pool and are pending approval from United States Masters Swimming, which can take several months.



PHOTO BY THOMAS BARRETO

Jennie Eisenbraun of Portland won the gold medal in the physique category

TRACK AND FIELD

The major news from track and field is about Phil Raschker, 47, of Atlanta, Ga., who set a world’s masters record in the 200 meter dash during the heptathlon competition on Monday.

PHYSIQUE

The Paramount Theater at Madison Square Garden, the scene of rock concerts and karate matches, has probably never had a show or an audience like the physique finals for Gay Games IV. The capacity crowd was sitting in the aisles for a glimpse of the tanned and oiled hard bodies that graced the stage. John Burke (the host of cable TV’s *Stonewall Place*) and Judy “I-look-like-a-piñata-for-the-Joffrey-Ballet” Tenuta were the feuding emcees.

The eight judges had their work cut out for them as each class of athletes—the men’s masters over age 60 and ages 50 to 60, the women’s elite over age 50, the bantamweights, the lightweights, the middleweights, the heavyweights and the mixed pairs—each took the stage to display their talents. At least 118 individuals were whittled down to 27 finalists. There were crowd-pleasers such as Duane O’Conner, who flexed to a Puccini aria, Lisa Schoenberg and Marta Selvi, who had the audience cheering, and the mixed pair who demonstrated their abilities to “Rhapsody in Blue.”

Drug tests are performed on all the winning athletes. The committee is using the same company that conducted drug tests for the Olympics in Los Angeles. Final results and medals are pending the results of these tests. A bit of controversy concerning the use of steroids by HIV-positive athletes erupted. Marlin Collingwood, director of communications for the games, stated that such use is permitted on an individual basis, but that all athletes had to sign a form indicating that this would be “a drug-tested event by urinalysis. Any athlete testing positive will forfeit medal.” Steroids are not a standard treatment in HIV-positive individuals.

VOLLEYBALL

The volleyball competition was hot and aggressive. The results of the events were as follows: Women’s Division A—Team Berkeley, Women’s Division B—Santa Cruz Quakes, Men’s Division AA—NYC Power Authority, Men’s Division A—After Shock Hamburger Mary, Men’s Division BB—Houston Gentry, Men’s Division B—NYC Godivas, Men’s Division C—Germany Puabaspitzla.