

**SPORTS**

# Go for the gold

Start planning now if you want to attend the Gay Games next year in Sydney, Australia

BY RICHARD BRAY

**F**ifteen months from now might seem like the distant future, but for those planning on attending the Gay Games in Sydney, Australia, the organizing already has begun.

Scheduled for Nov. 2 to 9, 2002, the event promises to be even bigger than recent Games in New York City and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Planners expect about 20,000 people to attend, including 7,000 to 8,000 athletes, which actually surpasses the number of participants the 2000 Olympics attracted!

One of the most exciting aspects of the Gay Games is its openness to all people, regardless of athletic skill. The emphasis is on participation, not necessarily competition. Interestingly, though, any records set during the event are recognized by world sporting authorities.

The Games will have the luxury of using many of the same facilities recently erected for the not-so-gay 2000 Olympics. And Sydney should have no problem handling the scope of the Games—the city's Gay Mardi Gras is billed as the world's largest queer event.

The week before the Gay Games also will be full of activities. A cultural festival will feature events galore including poetry readings, bands and much more. And the gay interna-



Rip Rupinski (inset) hopes to fill Sydney stadiums with supportive Oregonians

tional bowling championships will be held in nearby New Zealand.

The Internet site [www.Sydney2002.org](http://www.Sydney2002.org) is up and running and includes a complete list of sporting events—all 31 of them! Most were featured during previous Gay Games, but 2002 will include a taste of Australia with new competitions like sailing, touch rugby, netball and field hockey.

In addition to backyard sports badminton and table tennis, figure skating is sure to be a big draw. With three styles, four age groups and six classes of experience, there will be lots of skating to watch.

Also fun for spectators will be the dance events. Competition is expected to attract 200 couples, ranging from beginners to professionals. Female and male couples will compete in separate events.

And don't miss the physique contest. The event will focus on natural bodybuilding, showcasing both women's and men's ultra-buff bods.

Also look for a chess and a bridge tournament. Just don't expect drag three-legged races—the Games really is about sports.

Rip Rupinski of Vacation Travel Planners, formerly of Downtown Travel Services, is spearheading much of the travel aspect of this upcoming event. He knows the territory, having taken groups to previous Gay Games.

Rupinski's specialty is queer travel to the South Pacific, so he's especially excited about Sydney. He says about 45 people from Oregon are expected to attend the Games.

"I got into this with a 10K race at the 1990 Games in Amsterdam, and I came in sixth in my age bracket," Rupinski says. "That would be ancient."

Last time, the 65- to 70-member Oregon Team brought home about 30 medals. Rupinski says the gender breakdown usually splits evenly—"half men, half women; half athletes, half spectators."

He adds that the Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, was "absolutely the most gay-positive

experience I've ever had. It's not often that this side of our lives gets much visibility. We literally took over the city and turned it into the Castro."

Rupinski is sponsoring an upcoming seminar to answer questions possible participants and attendees might have. The \$5 fee will go toward uniforms for Team Oregon.

The seminar should last about two hours, and Rupinski stresses it won't be just about the Games. Aussie specialist Jeff Adam will discuss travel options for those who want to linger Down Under and see the rest of the country.

According to Rupinski, it's not too soon to be making plans and reservations. He already has 30 rooms on hold for the Games and says things are starting to fill up.

Although prices and details are not yet set, he expects to have three levels of packages available. Priced out of Los Angeles, the cheapest one costs about \$2,200 and includes nine nights of lodging and, of course, airfare. A higher-priced package for about \$3,500 will include an additional five nights exploring the Northeast coast. Hmm....

The GAY GAMES VI seminar will start 9:30 a.m. Aug. 11 at the Northwest Cultural Center, 1819 N.W. Everett St. Those interested will have the opportunity to sign up with Team Oregon to participate in the Games. To preregister call Rip Rupinski at 503-223-1100. For more information visit the Internet site [www.iplanvacationtravel.com](http://www.iplanvacationtravel.com).

RICHARD BRAY is a Portland free-lance writer and an intrepid traveler who survived a trip down the Amazon but is waiting for the martini toss to become an event at the Gay Games.

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