

SPORTS

Until now, athletes from Oregon met up at the Gay Games virtually unfamiliar with other competitors from around the state.

This year's competitors will walk into Sydney's Aussie Stadium for the Gay Games VI Sport & Cultural Festival a solid unit thanks to Team Oregon—an organization made up of a colorful potpourri of athletes from around the state who have come together bonded by a fierce love of fraternity and competition.

"In the past there has been some jealousy or animosity between some of the city teams," says Portland swimmer and team leader Jon Palanuk. "We really focused this year on having a state team." He and Chris Gaarder, also a Portland swimmer, stepped up this year to organize and lead the group.

Team Oregon has 67 athletes going to Sydney, competing in more than a dozen separate events, including basketball, bowling, bridge, golf, marathon, swimming, tennis, triathlon, volleyball and weightlifting. More than 11,000 athletes from around the world will compete in 31 events during the sports part of the festival Nov. 2 to 9.

Team Oregon debuted in 1982 at the first-ever Gay Games in San Francisco. Then state Rep. Vera Katz gave the group the state flag right from her office to carry during the opening ceremonies. That same flag has traveled to every Gay Games with Team Oregon ever since.

But this year Team Oregon will sport more chic attire. Palanuk grins: "We've got really stylish PUMA clothes [thanks to a generous discount from the corporation]. We'll go in and look like a wonderful, unified body."

The sum of its parts

Before hooking up with Team Oregon, Palanuk had not swum in a pool in 25 years. Now he's headed to perhaps the most prestigious pool on the planet. He started swimming and competing again and at his first Gay Games came away with gold and silver.

"The Gay Games has really created for me a new family," Palanuk says. "You know you have your work family, friends family and blood family, and now I have a swim family. The people I swim with in Portland, they're mostly straight, but they're so supportive and now pea-green with envy that I'll be swimming in the fastest pool in the world."



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

All for one

Team Oregon is chic, unified and ready to roll

BY COURTNEY PERKINS

Perhaps more blissful than the thrill of victory is the atmosphere of the Games. "If you've ever considered participating in a Games, do it," Palanuk exhorts. "Many of the events, I have just been turned to tears.... Either as part of the Games or as a spectator, you just feel tremendous joy to be part of such a special event."

Portlander Tom Barreto is a perfect example of a true athlete.

Having played competitively for most of his life, the Eyes on Broadway optometrist can be found two or three times a week punishing tennis balls at the Irvington Tennis Club. However, in a sport where most players start in country clubs, Barreto's beginnings were a little less lavish.

"We were thrilled when my dad built a huge slab of concrete...in our back yard near our barn," he laughs. He was 11 years old on a farm in Lebanon, Oregon. "We measured out the parameters for a tennis court, put up a net made of twine, and my eight brothers and sisters fought over who would get to play with the two rackets we had."

After playing competitively in high school, Barreto went on to play in college at Pacific University. Hungry for more, he kept up his skills and connected with Team Oregon at the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver, British Columbia.

"Team Oregon is [a chance to] show the world a unified impression of Oregon. The group

this year is very active [and] vibrant...with plenty of enthusiasm and leadership."

Barreto will compete in Sydney in the Open Division of both singles and doubles. He'll be playing doubles with his partner (tennis and life), Brian Sinclair, who returns for his third Gay Games this year.

"Walking into the stadiums and hearing 50,000 fans screaming and cheering on the athletes from all of the countries that are competing," Barreto says, "it's an incredible feeling."

For Bend partners Jill Richter and Sara Wiener, who will be competing in cycling, triathlon and marathon events, this year's Games will be a full family affair.

"Sydney will be my fourth games, and I've never before been affiliated with a team," Richter says. "When Sara and I were in Amsterdam, we ran across members of Team Oregon...ever since then we knew we wanted to be part of Team Oregon for the Sydney games."

Richter started doing triathlons 18 years ago in Anchorage, Alaska, because she loved cross-training and doing multisport endurance-type events.

"We've both been athletic all our lives, though Sara excelled early as a national champion moguls skier when she was in high school!" Richter exclaims.

Together they began competing in the Games and were overjoyed to add another little athlete to their travels during the last one in 1998—their daughter, Bella, who was just 1 1/2 at the time.

"I have a wonderful memory of the Amsterdam Games, where Sara got a silver medal in the sprint triathlon and I got a bronze medal in the Olympic distance tri," Richter recalls. "We have a picture of the two of us with our medals holding our daughter...and [it] ended up being included in the commemorative book of the Games! What a thrill to see our family there."

Having experienced great success at past Games, Richter expects she and Wiener have a good shot at medaling again this year. "I'm a very strong cyclist," says the athlete, who will also compete in the Olympic distance triathlon.


Wiener will again compete in the sprint triathlon and the half marathon in Sydney. "Her training's going really well," Richter says.

The GAY GAMES VI SPORT & CULTURAL FESTIVAL is Oct. 25 to Nov. 9. For more information visit [www.sydney2002.org.au](http://www.sydney2002.org.au) or [www.teamoregonusa.com](http://www.teamoregonusa.com).

COURTNEY PERKINS is a Portland free-lance writer.



Joanne Richter enters her fourth Gay Games to run and bike for Oregon



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