

The Russians are going to lick us in this year's international competition, says a former champion, but here's how we can prevent it from happening again



In 1956 Olympics, Bob Richards vaulted record 14 feet, 11½ inches.

Can't We Even Win The OLYMPICS?

By **BOB RICHARDS**

THE RUSSIANS know the value of propaganda. They've proved it by the skillful exploitation of their space conquests.

But outer space isn't the only area where the Russians have formulated a long-range plan for supremacy over the United States. Years ago, they decided it would be of great value if they also could outdo us in sports, specifically in the Olympics, the accepted international yardstick of athletic prowess.

Their long-range planning is now beginning to pay dividends. My experience as a competitor in the past two Olympics [Richards won the pole-vault competition in both 1952 and 1956—Ed.] leads me to predict that we're going to be trounced in the 1960 Olympiad, both in the winter games beginning Feb. 18 in Squaw Valley, Calif., and in the summer games in Rome.

In 1952, the first year the Russians decided to compete in the Olympiad (they skipped the winter games in Norway), they won only 22 gold first-place medals while we walked off with 40. We won a total of 76 medals for first, second, and third places (including both men's and women's events); the Russians won 69.

By 1956, the pendulum had swung the other way, not completely, but enough to make it clear the Russians were taking giant strides while we were standing still. They copped 16 gold, silver, and bronze medals to our seven in the winter games, and 98 to our 74 in the summer events.

In 1960, their superiority probably will be even more pronounced, and Americans will ask: "Can't

we even win the Olympics?" Some will blame the athletes. But the simple answer is that we don't emphasize the Olympics as other nations do, the Russians in particular.

I spent some time in Russia, not enough to make a thorough study of its Olympic program but enough to form what I feel are valid opinions. One thing that struck me was that only Olympic sports are stressed. Russia even has a "fitness break" in its factories, where worker-athletes are given an hour off to train. As a result, it had more than 18 million athletes trying out for Olympic berths; I'd be surprised if our aspirants exceed 18,000.

THE RUSSIANS not only have a thousand times more Olympic hopefuls than we do, but they have balance, too. We emphasize track and field events and always have done well in them; we probably will again this year. But other events that count just as much in the scoring are almost totally ignored. You'll see this in the winter games when we are snowed under in skiing, bobsledding, and hockey, to name a few.

Women's events also count the same in the results. But how many of our girls participate in sports? If it weren't for the efforts of the coach at Tennessee A & I, we wouldn't even be able to field a team, inferior as it's likely to be.

It's not a question of not having the facilities to train a victorious Olympic squad. In most parts of the U. S., there are enough gymnasiums and stadiums—but just try to use them. More than likely, you'll find the doors securely bolted. We pay taxes for these facilities, yet we can't use them.

In Russia, I saw parks, playgrounds, gyms, and stadiums with wonderful equipment. And, believe me, the equipment was in constant use by those

enthusiastic youngsters, Russia's future Olympians.

Another big reason why we'll lose the Olympics is because our code of amateur athletics is hopelessly antiquated. In other countries, not only Russia, athletes are given an even break. Here we do our best to hinder them.

If our amateur athlete works by the hour and takes time off to compete, he doesn't get reimbursed. He receives a dollar a day for incidental expenses and seven dollars a day for meals. I'm not suggesting that we pay our amateur, but he should not have to suffer a financial loss to compete. Employers should be encouraged to make up the difference.

One way to compensate the athlete and make sure that we'll have fine future Olympic teams would be to set up a Junior Olympic Village every summer where youngsters could go for training by athletes who are themselves Olympic participants. If we could do this—and pay the athletes to instruct the kids—we'd be taking care of both present Olympic teams and those for the future.

There is little we can do to change the results of the 1960 Olympics, but there is much that we can do to see that it will never happen again.

The first thing is to increase interest in Olympic sports. This is a job for all of us. It has to be done on a community basis. We have already proved that it will work. Look at our Little League Baseball and the AAU Junior Swim Program. We could easily devise similar local programs for Olympic sports and have community champs compete until we progress to a regional champion, a state champion, and conceivably a national champion.

Potentially we're the greatest athletes in the world. Now that we've been challenged, it's up to us as individuals and as a nation to develop our raw talent. It's there. Let's use it.

COVER:

The little girl in the photo by Vivienne is cutting out hearts for Valentine's Day. Already a charmer, chances are she'll be many a heart's desire in just a few years.

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