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He was a champ for the U.S. in 1956, and she was a star from behind the

# They're the Sweethearts

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

IN DECEMBER, 1956, two Olympic champions—one from the United States, the other from behind the Iron Curtain—fell in love while competing at the summer Olympics in Melbourne, Australia.

But for Harold Vincent Connolly of Boston, Mass., who won the hammer-throw event, and for Olga Fikotova, who walked away with the honors in the discus competition, the future looked dark. She was denied permission to leave her native Czechoslovakia to marry him.

Harold followed Olga to Prague and for three weeks pleaded with officials to let him take her to his country. Finally, sympathetic world opinion on both sides of the Iron Curtain forced officials to change their stand.

Three weeks after Harold arrived in Prague and a day before his visa expired, their public wedding was witnessed with more enthusiasm by the local population than any similar event since early postwar days.

And then the young couple dropped out of sight. What has become of them?

I found the answers in an exclusive interview for FAMILY WEEKLY when I met them in Santa Monica, Calif., shortly before they left for Europe to participate in the Olympics again—this time as members of the same team. Olga, who

has just won her American citizenship, is now eligible to compete for the Stars and Stripes.

Two weeks after Harold and Olga arrived in the United States, he went back to teaching English and social studies at a Boston high school, while she tried to resume her medical training.

Unfortunately, there was one major problem: Olga couldn't understand a single word! "Her English was so poor," Harold recalls, "that when she came here, she could understand only me."

A few months after settling in Boston, Harold and Olga flew to Los Angeles to participate in a track meet at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Olga fell in love with California and kept after Harold to move West. He soon gave in.

A friend and fellow Olympic athlete, Parry O'Brien, who is the assistant manager of a Beverly Hills bank, got Harold a job as ninth-grade English teacher at John Adams Junior High School in Santa Monica, an apartment they could afford, and enough furniture to get by.

By this time, Olga had progressed sufficiently in English to accept a job as a laboratory technician at UCLA's medical school research department, attend citizenship classes at night, and take a course in biochemistry which, she hopes, will enable her to pass the National Medical Board Examinations and enroll at the UCLA medical school in the near

Iron Curtain; this year, they're soul mates and teammates

# of the Olympics

future. All this—plus rigorous training for the 1960 Olympics!

The American way of training for the Olympics is quite different from Czechoslovakia's, according to Olga. She has both praise and misgivings about the differences. Here athletes train on their own and, says Olga, have to be far more dedicated to keep up the furious pace. On the other hand, under the state-controlled system, training is done in groups, with teams supported by the government. The state provides special funds, training camps, medical care, time off from work, and other inducements. As an athlete, Olga likes that.

Also, she feels that sports are overemphasized in Iron Curtain countries to a point where an athlete who has outlived his usefulness often has no other skills to live by.

Financially, the Connollys have difficulties. They don't earn much, and their baby-sitter and training expenses have been considerable. They used their only "real savings"—a \$200 tax refund—to buy a TV set for Olga's parents in Prague.

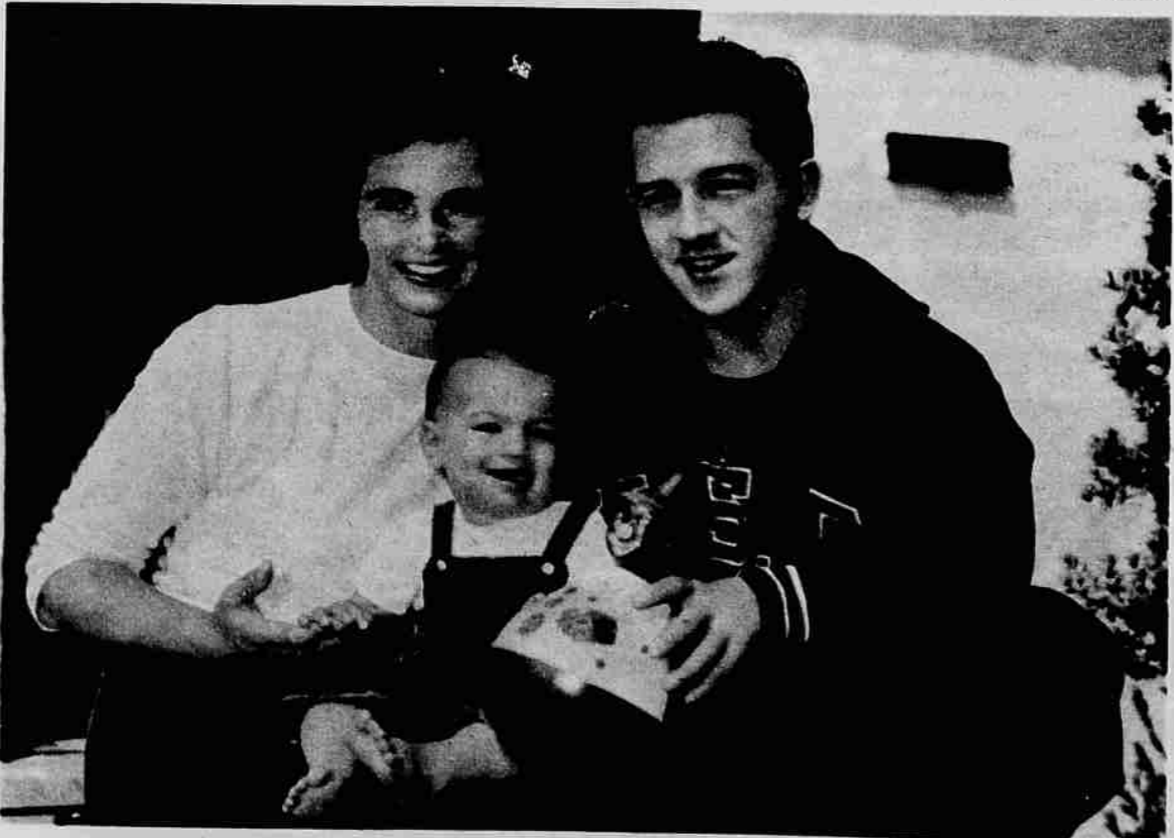
Having the Fikotovas come to the United States would make their happiness complete, Olga says. She is an only child, her father is on a small pension, and her mother, who suffers from chronic bronchitis, must work to help support him.

"We are terribly worried what will happen if she can't work any longer," Harold says. "For the past two years, we've appealed to just about every high government official in Czechoslovakia to bring them here. We were never turned down. We just didn't get any answer!"

He hesitated a moment before he continued gravely: "We've never talked about this for publication, but we can't put it off any longer. Maybe if our plight is told in FAMILY WEEKLY, it might start the ball rolling. After all, it was public opinion that got Olga and myself permission to get married."

Other than concern for her parents, Harold and Olga—who knew each other only three weeks before marrying—are as happy as any two young Americans you're likely to meet.

Harold and Olga Connolly, who married only three weeks after they met during the '56 Olympic Games, now have year-old son, Mark.



American Olga practices discus throw, hoping to better her Czech record.



Connolly family fun (above) consists of training for Olympic Games. Harold again will compete in hammer throw (left), looks like a cinch to win.



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