

Olympic Films 1964–1984: Troubled Times and Troubled Films

Part 3

By David Wallechinsky



The achievements of the Austrian army were worthy of medals in their own right. Since 1960 they had helped to build the competition facilities. Particularly bad snow conditions dogged the Olympic winter of 1963/64 and up to 2,700 soldiers helped to ensure that the tracks and slopes were ready for competition every day.

Photos: IOC Film Department

1964 – Innsbruck

Although the official film of the 1964 Innsbruck Olympics, *IX Olympic Winter Games, Innsbruck 1964*, presents ample footage of the competitions, what is most impressive is its portrayal of many of the non-athletes who make the Olympics possible. As the Games approached, it became clear that Innsbruck might not have enough snow to hold many of the events. The Austrian army was called into action, hauling snow down from the mountains and spreading it with spray devices, and carving ice blocks for the bobsleigh and luge runs (luge having been included in the Olympic programme for the first time). When rain disrupted their hand work, the soldiers packed down the snow by foot. These operations are shown in detail. We are also introduced to the IBM data center, as workers compile results and share them with the media and with spectators at the venues. We even witness the gathering of team officials when the draw is done for the skiing start placements.

One nice touch is the superimposition of the perfect line on the most difficult curve of the bobsleigh run as we watch various teams take the turn.

The narrator refers to slalom skiing as “a dance on an inclined plane”. Other literary flourishes do not come off quite so well. What did Terry McDermott of the United States, winner of the 500-metre speed skating event, do to deserve to have the filmmakers evoke *The Barber of Seville* and call him “a speedy Figaro?”

Naturally we are treated to beauty shots of the Tyrol mountains and one local yodeling song. At the Olympic Village, some of the athletes dance the twist, while others play football.

Special credit is given to two stars of the Games, Lidiya Skoblikova of the Soviet Union, who won all four women’s speed skating events, and another Soviet athlete, Klavdiya Boyarskikh, who won all three women’s cross-country skiing events.

The dark side of the Innsbruck Games is left out of the story. During the week before the Opening Ceremony, two athletes were killed while training: Kazimierz Kay-Skrzypecki, a luger from Great Britain and Australian downhill skier Ross Milne.

1964 – Tokyo

There are two official films of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the first to be held in Asia. The Tokyo Organising Committee chose noted filmmaker Kon Ichikawa to direct *Tokyo Olympiad*. Ichikawa had been making feature films for more than 25 years and was best known for two films about the plight of individual Japanese soldiers after the collapse of the Japanese army: *The Burmese Harp* and *Fire on the Plains*. *Tokyo Olympiad* is one of the only Olympic films to achieve “crossover” status, praised by critics who were not particularly interested in sports. The Organising Committee, on the other hand, was not so impressed, considering it too artistic, with too little coverage of the range of sports. To a certain extent, this criticism is justified. For example, Ichikawa dispenses with five of the six team sports in a matter of seconds. The field hockey final, between India and Pakistan, referred to as “The Fated Match”, is given some attention because a fight nearly breaks out.

There is extended coverage of the final victory of the Japanese women’s volleyball team over the Soviet Union. In addition to seeing the players in tears, Ichikawa shows

us the Japanese coach, Hirofumi Daimatsu, sitting alone on the bench, with a relieved mission-accomplished look on his face. To foreign observers, this presentation might appear heartwarming. To Japanese, at the time, it was a major event, with 80% of Japanese TVs tuned to the final match. By today's standards, Daimatsu would be considered a villain. He was physically abusive to his players, hitting them in the head and kicking them.

The motto of the Tokyo Games was "Peace, Love and Courage". After showing the Olympic Flame run through Hiroshima 19 years after the city was destroyed by a US atomic bomb, we see a Pan Am airplane land in Tokyo and young American athletes descend onto the tarmac to be greeted by the Japanese. Coverage of the Torch Relay and the Opening Ceremony culminates in the final runner entering the stadium, climbing a long flight of stairs and, after smiling to the crowd, lighting the cauldron. What the film does not mention, although it would have been well-known to Japanese, is that this runner, Yoshinori Sakai, was born in Hiroshima on the day of the bombing.

Twenty-six minutes into this 170-minute film, we see an athletic event for the first time: the men's 100 metres final, won by Bob Hayes of the United States. The narrator observes that the eight runners look so intense that "they almost look sad". This sets the stage for 50 minutes of track and field – mostly field – coverage, highlighted by engaging use of close-ups, slow motion, and sound effects. Special emphasis is given to two come-from-behind victories, those of American Billy Mills in the 10,000 metres and Ann Packer of Great Britain in the 800 metres.

It isn't until 76 minutes into the film that we are shown athletes from another sport: gymnasts in a montage that includes both women and men.

After an intermission, Ichikawa focuses on a single athlete, 800-metre runner Ahmed Issa of Chad, which was taking part in the Olympics for the first time. Unlike the racist coverage of Liberian athletes in the French-

made 1956 Melbourne film, Issa is treated with respect and praised for making it into the semifinals.

Twice, we are told that Japanese women, Ikuko Yoda in the 80-metre hurdles and Satoko Tanaka in the 100-metre backstroke, finished out of the medals, but "She did her best". There are two omissions which are probably due to poor subtitling. After Australian Dawn Fraser wins the 100-metre freestyle, we are told that she has done something no one has done before in Olympic history ... without telling us what that is. (She was the first swimmer to win the same event three times.)

The extremely brief coverage of modern pentathlon, which consists of a montage of black-and-white stills, concludes that the real story was all about the athlete who placed 37th (and last) and used the breaststroke in the swimming portion of the event because a shoulder injury prevented him from using the crawl stroke that everyone else used. But his name is not mentioned. For the record, it was Choi Gwi-seung of South Korea.

The final competition sequence of *Tokyo Olympiad* is a 34-minute visual essay on the marathon. The focus of attention is Abebe Bikila, the first person to win the marathon twice. However, we are also shown the struggles of many other runners, including Jim Hogan of Ireland, who was well-placed for a medal until he became dehydrated. He is shown sitting on the ground in front of a crowd of spectators, desperately gesturing for water.

The film concludes with the message: "The peace that we have created – are we going to let it go just like a dream that fades away?"

The second film, *Sensation of the Century* (or *Passion of the Century*) is aimed at the domestic audience and gives much more attention to Japanese athletes. For example, the first footage of athletes competing (37 minutes into the film) shows a Japanese weightlifter, Yoshinobu Miyake, winning Japan's first gold medal of the Games. Next up is freestyle wrestling, in which local wrestlers won all three of the lower weight divisions,



In 1964, weightlifter Yoshinobu Miyake won the first gold medal for Japan. Four years later, he repeated his victory in Mexico City. Bronze went to Yoshiyaki Miyake, his younger brother by five years.

Tokyo 1964 saw another continent begin to wake. Chad sent two athletes for the first time. Ahmed Issa (photo) reached the men's 800 m semifinal; high jumper Mahamat Idriss, who had competed in France at the 1960 Games, finished ninth.



making up for their nation's "humiliating defeat" at the 1960 Rome Olympics. We are also shown two Japanese earning gold medals in Graeco-Roman wrestling, thanks to help from a Turkish coach.

Sensation of the Century goes into even greater detail than Ichikawa's version of the Torch Relay and the Parade of Nations at the Opening Ceremony. The flame is run through several Asian cities on its way to Japan. In Tehran, the runners are accompanied by Iranian polo players on horseback carrying polo mallets. During the Parade of Nations, we learn that 11 African nations are taking part for the first time. The Cubans enter carrying small Japanese flags. The American athletes, wearing cowboy hats, are described as "flamboyant". As the Vietnamese athletes march into the stadium, their nation is described as "war-torn". The Olympic Flag is raised on a pole 15.21 metres high to commemorate the triple jump world record set by Japan's first Olympic champion, Mikio Oda, in 1928.

Coverage of athletics is foreshortened to allow more time to cover other sports. We are told so often that this or that final was "intense" that one wonders if non-intense Olympic finals are even possible. There is a helpful explanation of modern pentathlon, both its origins and its rules. We are treated to some of the action in the team sport finals, including football, field hockey, and basketball. The brief coverage of sailing is highlighted by mention of one incident. On a windy day during the Flying Dutchman event, the Australian pair of John Dawe and Ian Winter capsizes. The Swedish sailors, brothers Lars and Stig Käll, double back to help them.

In this version, using the same footage as Ichikawa's film, we watch the final of women's foil fencing, but this time we are informed that the winner, Ildikó Rejtő-Újlaky of Hungary, is deaf.

The final portion of the film focuses on Japanese successes, including men's gymnasts and Takao Sakurai, Japan's first Olympic boxing champion. In fact, there has yet to be a second one.

Judo was included in the Olympic programme for the first time, and winning for the Japanese was a matter of national pride. Their judokas did earn gold medals in three of the four divisions, but in the final, open class, Japanese veteran Akio Kaminaga gambles with a risky takedown move (tai-otoshi), only to have Dutch giant Anton Geesink counterattack and win the match. The film's narrator asks if the era of skill over strength is over.

Using mostly the same footage as Ichikawa, *Sensation of the Century* concludes its competition coverage with the women's volleyball final.

The Closing Ceremony is presented as a joyous affair, as the foreign athletes run into the stadium and even hoist the gentleman bearing the Japanese flag onto their shoulders and carry him around the track. The Japanese athletes are the only ones to enter as a team, with their many medallists leading the way.

1968 – Grenoble

There are two films of the 1968 Winter Games. The first, *13 Days in France*, was co-directed by Claude Lelouch (with François Reichenbach), who, the previous year, had been awarded the Best Screenplay Academy Award for *A Man and a Woman*. Lelouch opens his Olympic film with a disclaimer that this is not an "official" film, and then he lists 29 cameramen who just happened to be around when the Grenoble Games took place. Of course it is an officially sanctioned film. However, it is true that if you want to know about the athletes and the competitions, this is not the film for you. To Lelouch, the athletes are just props to aid him in presenting his artistic vision. Unfortunately, what must have appeared cool or New Wave in 1968 often comes off as self-indulgent or inappropriate 50 years later. Do we really need to see drunken men in a Bavarian bar grabbing the breasts of a middle-aged woman? Or multiple sequences of pet dogs and of tourists taking photographs? Or crazed female fans screaming for French singing celebrity Johnny Hallyday?

At the Opening Ceremony, Lelouch repeatedly shows us the President of France, Charles de Gaulle, as if he were Sweden's King Gustaf V back in 1912. The Grenoble Games were staged in February 1968. By the time *13 Days in France* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival four months later, de Gaulle's government, although it survived, had been rocked by massive demonstrations led by workers and students.

Like so many other Winter Olympics films, this one shows us montages of skiers going downhill, figure skaters dancing and flying through the air, and spectators gambling in the snow. As usual, there are numerous shots of skiers and other athletes and even spectators being injured, although Lelouch seems to have a morbid fascination with close-ups of athletes suffering. Borrowing from the 1964 Innsbruck film, we are shown the IBM data centre at work.

Amid this mélange of images, one sequence stands out: an exciting ice hockey match between Czechoslovakia and the USSR, although the viewer would only know they were the two teams if he or she recognised the symbols on their uniforms. For the record, Czechoslovakia won 5–4, but the Soviet team ended up with the gold medals anyway.

Twice we are shown cameramen on skis following a skier down an Alpine course, with the sound and visuals edited to make it seem that this was done during the actual competitions.

There is charming footage of Soviet ski jumper Vladimir Belousov winning an upset victory in the large hill event and collapsing in disbelief, although the film does not identify him by name.

The film does not include any narration, but it does feature some original songs with pointed messages.

Prolonged coverage of French hero Jean-Claude Killy, who won all three Alpine skiing events, is accompanied by a somewhat corny song about time, which does however, ask, "Do you know that for a few hundredths, others envy you or love you?" Killy won the downhill by eight one-hundredths of a second.

Another song is dedicated to US figure skater Peggy Fleming. We are told that she comes "from a country that counts its friends as hard currency." But the song apologizes to "Peggy" since it's not her fault.

The second film, *Snows of Grenoble*, is more interesting. Without giving up the need to philosophize, directors Jacques Ertaud and Jean-Jacques Languepin portray and explain many of the events. The emphasis is on Alpine skiing, what with France winning four of the six events. But the narrator does a good job of describing the downhill course with the aid of aerial photography. In addition to the almost obligatory sequence of the skiers and their team preparing their skis, we see and listen to the skiers practice their descents in their heads. Naturally, we are treated to a series of brutal falls during training runs. In fact, we witness a cameraman and a pilot emerge relatively unscathed from a helicopter crash.

The narrator tells us that because the leading skiers are placed in the first group of 15, the 15th skier has a chance for the gold medal, but the 16th doesn't. Anyone who followed the 2018 Winter Olympics knows that this is not necessarily the case, as Ester Ledecká won the women's giant slalom from the 26th starting spot.

When Jean-Claude Killy edges out his French compatriot Guy Périllat to win the men's downhill, we are told that Périllat "dissolves in speed" whereas Killy "fights it". Okay.



Jean-Claude Killy (right) won the 1968 Olympic men's downhill in 1968 ahead of his compatriot Guy Périllat. This was followed by victories in the giant slalom and slalom, which made Killy a French national hero. The mountain in Chamrousse, where the races took place, was renamed "Killymanjaro".

Figure skater Peggy Fleming at the fulfilment of her dreams: after two world champion titles from 1966 and 1967, she became an Olympic champion in 1968. After a third world champion-ship, she turned professional.



For figure skating, we are shown the artistry of Peggy Fleming and the repeat pairs champions, the married couple of Lyudmila Belousova and Oleg Protopopov, both of whom perform before a packed house. The film does point out that the compulsory figures stage of figure skating takes place before an almost empty venue, even though it accounts for 60% of the final score.

Cross-country skiing earns a few minutes of coverage, with Italian Franco Nones winning the 30-kilometre race to break the Scandinavian domination of the sport. Not mentioned is that Nones trained in Sweden with a Swedish coach. Credit is also given to Finnish-born Swede Toini Gustafsson, who won both individual events and added a silver in the relay. In the film, she is misidentified as being 39 years old. She was 30. At the end of the men's 50-kilometre race, the narrator tells us that "at the finish line, their faces look ten years older."

Back to Alpine skiing, we learn the story behind that footage taken by a skier with a helmet camera as he follows another skier down the slope. It's François Bonlieu, the 1964 giant slalom champion, following one of the forerunners before the start of the competition.

There is a section called "Forgotten Sports", which introduces us to biathlon and luge. "Luge champion' doesn't sound very serious" says the narrator. Both this film and the one by Claude Lelouch leave out one of the scandals of the Grenoble Games: after placing first, second, and fourth in the women's luge, the three East German athletes were disqualified for illegally heating the runners on their toboggans.

Snows of Grenoble does deal with the other major controversy of the 1968 Winter Olympics. After winning two of three men's Alpine events, Jean-Claude Killy went for a clean sweep in the slalom. He led after the first round. The second round was held in densely foggy conditions. At first it appeared that Norway's Håkon Mjølten had beaten Killy, but he had missed two gates. Then came Austria's star, Karl Schranz. Schranz did not make it to the finish line, claiming that a mysterious figure in black crossed his path, distracting him. He was given a second chance and beat Killy's time. But then he was disqualified for missing a gate before the alleged interference, and Killy was awarded his third gold medal after all. The film, not surprisingly, takes the French point of view and does not mention the Austrian protests.

Like so many Winter Olympics films, *Snows of Grenoble* ends with a ski jump montage. The Closing Ceremony is not included.

1968 – Mexico City

The Olympics in Mexico was the first Olympic film to be directed by an Olympian. Alberto Isaac represented Mexico in freestyle swimming at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics, and swam the anchor leg for his country in the final of the 1948 4x200-metre relay. Like the Rome 1960 film, *The Grand Olympiad*, *The Olympics in Mexico* was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Documentary Feature category. Indeed, the film is a model of how to make a movie about the Olympics. It is beautifully shot and edited, and yet it manages to show

Mexico City 1968: 24 hours after her competition had finished, Czechoslovakia's four-time Olympic gold medallist Vera Čáslavská married Josef Odložil, 1500 m silver medallist at the 1964 Games.





In 1968, John Stephen Akhwari from Tanzania was injured during the marathon. With a heavily bandaged leg, he limped into the stadium. He was the last to finish, more than an hour behind the winner. Even so, it never crossed his mind to give up.

every sport except field hockey, modern pentathlon, and wrestling. The narration is restrained. However, athletes, while competing, are identified by superimposed titles (e.g. T. Smith, USA).

As befits a film with artistic pretensions, *The Olympics in Mexico* opens with two-and-a-half minutes of music accompanied by a black screen. For the first time, the Cauldron in the Olympic Stadium is lit by a woman, 20-year-old Enriqueta Basilio. Strangely, the first event we are shown is the men's 4x400-metre relay, won by the United States in world record time ... on Day 8 of the Games. Naturally, the performances of Mexican athletes are highlighted, particularly the come-from-behind upset victory by 17-year-old Felipe Muñoz in the 200-metre breaststroke. Coming on Day 10, it was Mexico's first gold medal of the Games. Mexican athletes would win two more, in boxing.

However, there is ample coverage of the athletes of the world. Among the athletes given special attention are US swimmer Debbie Meyer, who earned three gold medals, American discus thrower Al Oerter, who earned his fourth gold medal, and the East German victor of the women's shot put, Margitta Gummel, who, as it was later revealed, had been taking steroids for the previous three months.

There is excellent footage of American high jumper Dick Fosbury. His revolutionary jumping technique is highlighted, of course, but so is his fist-clenching, somewhat nerve-wracking preparations before each jump.

Bob Beamon's famous long jump of 8.90 metres is shown in stop-action slow motion. We also see him overcome by emotion and collapsing. And, in a nice touch, shaking hands with each official as he leaves the field.

By the way, if one listens carefully, the venue announcers refer to the USA as "The United States of North America". Among the tidbits that are mentioned are that the eight finalists in the men's 100 metres are

all black, and that in the cycling road race, of the 144 starters, only 64 finished the race.

Although we are told over and over again that world records are set, no mention is made of the effects of Mexico City's high altitude, which aided records in shorter events, and made endurance events (like the road race) unusually difficult.

Coverage of the water polo final between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union centres on the referee, who has a challenging time keeping up with the numerous fouls and brutal play. The Yugoslavs won 13-11.

Once again, the equestrian three-day event is shown with beautiful scenery ... and lots of falls. Not mentioned is that, as in 1936 and 1960, two horses lost their lives as a result of the competition.

The 1968 Mexico City Olympics are known for three major controversies, only one of which is covered in the film. Ten days before the Opening Ceremony, Mexican forces opened fire on a gathering of unarmed students, killing an unknown number, usually thought to be about 200. This is not included in the film. Also not included is the silent protest by gymnast Věra Čáslavská of Czechoslovakia. At the previous Olympics, Čáslavská had earned three gold medals, including the all-around title. Soviet forces invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia less than two months before the Mexico City Olympics. In 1968, she gained another four gold medals. But one of those, in the floor exercises event, was shared with Larisa Petrik of the Soviet Union, and in another, the balance beam, she placed second behind Soviet gymnast Nataliya Kuchinskaya. Both times, when the Soviet national anthem was played, Čáslavská bowed her head and turned away. Alberto Isaac does include footage of Čáslavská's performances, as well as her Mexico City wedding with fellow Czech Olympian Josef Odložil.

Isaac does cover the famous Black Power protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos after they finished first

and third in the 200 metres. However, he emphasizes the race itself, showing it twice, including once in slow motion, and Smith's joy after his victory. At the medal ceremony, we see the two American athletes climb the podium and receive their medals. When they stage their non-violent protest, the camera focuses on Smith's raised gloved fist, and then the film moves on.

There is nice coverage of the cultural activities that accompanied the Olympics, with participants from 97 nations and opportunities for children to take part. We are also told that guided tours of the Athletes' Village were allowed, although it is not made clear.

Before the joyful mood of the Closing Ceremony, Isaac presents a 25-minute segment on the marathon. Winner Mamo Wolde of Ethiopia celebrates by donning a local hat and doing a victory lap.

Olympic Movement fans know the story of Tanzania's John Stephan Akhwari, who injured his knee in a fall and completed the marathon bandaged, bloody, and limping, and finished the race in last place, 19 minutes after the next-to-last runner. Isaac includes dramatic shots of Akhwari stopping and restarting and then, filmed from behind, his entry into the stadium. For the record, Akhwari would later explain why he didn't drop out: "My country did not send me 7,000 miles away to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it."

1972 – Sapporo

The director of *Sapporo Winter Olympics*, Masahiro Shinoda, was already known for such films as *Pale Flower* and *Double Suicide*. Three months after the Sapporo Games, his film *Silence* was shown in competition at the Cannes Film Festival. *Sapporo Winter Olympics* earned a Golden Globe nomination in the Best Documentary category. Accompanied by the musical theme of "Born Free", it is another example of a film that successfully combines artistic accomplishment with understandable coverage of the competitions in various sports.

That said, as the athletes of the world arrive, they are confronted by Japanese reporters who ask them a series of stupid questions, such as "What do you think of Sapporo?" and "What gifts will you bring back to your parents?" – even though they had only just landed.

On the other hand, the film plunges right into the major controversy of the 1972 Winter Games. IOC President Avery Brundage arrives and holds a press conference at which he announces the expulsion of Austrian Alpine skiing hero Karl Schranz, accusing him of being a professional. Although it is not mentioned in *Sapporo Winter Olympics*, Brundage was angry at Schranz for being outspoken. His decision to only punish Schranz was hypocritical considering that the winner of the downhill at the Sapporo Games, Bernhard Russi of Switzerland, had allowed his name and photograph

to be used as part of a major pre-Olympic publicity campaign by a Swiss insurance company.

Brundage had been president of the International Olympic Committee since 1952 and had announced that he would retire after the end of the 1972 Summer Olympics. As the IOC President, Brundage, using the language of the host country, had spoken at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of every Olympic Games since 1956. Unless he was speaking English, his accent was so bad that one wonders if the staff who worked for him were afraid to offer to help him.

Sapporo is a large city on Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. As the Torch Relay makes its way to the Opening Ceremony, we are shown beautiful scenes of Hokkaido, with narration that implies that the island is considered remote and exotic even to most Japanese. The Parade of Nations includes some national stereotypes. Italians are described as "cheerful and jolly". When the French team enters, we are told that "The world is watching the Sapporo Olympics fashion, and the French team is a feast for the eyes."

The first event presented in the film is the men's downhill, and it is done so in detail. The narrator also points out that as soon as a skier crosses the finish line, he must remove his skis and hand them to an official so that commercial logos cannot be shown.

Before the 1972 Games, no Japanese athlete had ever earned a gold medal at a Winter Olympics. So there was great pressure, three days after the Opening Ceremony, on the strong team of Japanese ski jumpers in the 70-metre event. As a huge crowd watches, three Japanese, Yukio Kasaya, Akitsugu Konno, and Seiji Aochi, sweep the medals. It is such a pleasing development that Ingolf Mork of Norway, who placed fourth, lifts Kasaya onto his shoulders.

Throughout the film, there are intercut audio interviews with various Japanese male athletes, including Kasaya, but most notably with speed skater Keiichi Suzuki, who took the Athletes' Oath at the Opening Ceremony and was competing in his third Olympics. He announces his retirement – at age 29 – after placing 19th.

The man who sets the gates for the slalom is compared to a musical composer who creates the movements that the skiers will follow.

Great attention and praise is given to Dutch speed skater Ard Schenk, who won three gold medals. However, Galina Kulakova of the Soviet Union, who won all three women's cross-country skiing events, is not covered at all.

There is one particularly noteworthy artistic segment. American figure skater Janet Lynn was weak at compulsory figures, but her free skate routine was so captivating that figure skating officials decreased the scoring value of compulsory figures and then eliminated



Sapporo 1972:
Janet Lynn and the
Hokkaido Swans.
The film director
Masahiro Shinoda
created a fascinating
montage of images.

them entirely beginning with the 1990–1991 season. In *Sapporo Winter Olympics*, director Shinoda shows us Lynn's entire free skate performance, during much of which he superimposes Hokkaido swans flying through the air and gliding across the water. But there is a third element to this montage, perhaps unintended. The figure skating events are held in the same rink as the ice hockey tournament, and the hockey markings, such as face off circles, goal creases and blue lines were not removed for the figure skating contests. Consequently, we see the gracefulness of Janet Lynn and the lake birds on a background where, on different days, hockey players are pummeling each other.

1972 – Munich

The idea for *Visions of Eight*, the unconventional official film of the 1972 Munich Olympics, was hatched by US producer David Wolper. Wolper obtained permission from the Munich Organising Committee to hire several famous directors from different countries and allow them each to produce their vision of one aspect of the Games. Originally there were supposed to be ten directors, but Franco Zeffirelli withdrew to protest the IOC's exclusion of Rhodesia from the Olympics, and Ousmane Sembène's segment about the Senegalese basketball team did not make the final cut, although the reasons are unclear. So, instead of *Visions of Ten*, we have *Visions of Eight*.

Visions of Eight won the Golden Globe award for Best Documentary. However, from the point-of-view of Olympic history, it has two major flaws. First, as is the case with so many anthology films, it is uneven. Some segments are fascinating, while others are boring. Second, it leaves out most of the important stories from the Munich Games.

The film begins with Juri Ozerov's brief visual essay, "The Beginning", about athletes getting ready to

compete. This is lightweight material better conveyed in other Olympic films.

Mai Zetterling's segment about weightlifters, "The Strongest", is more interesting. Zetterling explains that she chose weightlifting because she knew nothing about it, and because weightlifters are obsessed. "I am not interested in sports", she says, "but I am interested in obsession." She shows us athletes training, each in his own world. There is also a section on food preparation and data processing, but eventually, Zetterling zeroes in on the super-heavyweight lifters. Although the lifters are not identified by name, we do see Vasily Alekseyev of the USSR fall over backwards during one attempt before earning the gold medal.

Zetterling includes several memorable shots. We are shown one lifter having his hair combed before he performs, and then he makes a successful lift while his boyfriend watches from the wings. As they clear the arena after the competition concludes, five soldiers struggle to move a weight which a lifter, presumably Alekseyev, hoisted by himself. Zetterling concludes with two lifters, one a super-heavyweight and the other a flyweight, leaving the training room together, chatting as friends.

The third segment, "The Highest", is directed by Arthur Penn and deals with the pole vault. Penn was already well-known for such films as *The Miracle Worker*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Little Big Man*. Penn opens with slow-motion fuzzy images of vaulters, which, unfortunately, is symbolic of his failure to grasp what he is seeing. The contest evolves into a nighttime duel between two unnamed vaulters, with one finally winning the gold medal. After the competition, the loser walks over to an official and forces him to take his pole, while the crowd whistles and boos. I'm guessing that this audio disapproval is an unrelated sound bite added by Penn, because the actual crowd could hardly see what was happening.

Cold War in the pole vault: after the American Bob Seagren had lost against East German Wolfgang Nordwig, he pointedly thrust his pole into the arms of IAAF Technical Delegate Adriaan Paulen. Seagren blamed him for his defeat.



This story begs for clarification. The gold medal winner is Wolfgang Nordwig of East Germany, who won the bronze medal at the previous Olympics. The silver medal winner is the defending Olympic champion, Bob Seagren of the United States. The official is Adriaan Paulen, an official of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF). Before the Munich Games, American athletes had won every Olympic pole vault competition since the modern Olympics were inaugurated in 1896 – 16 in a row, the longest national winning streak in a single event in the history of the Olympics. Seagren, along with most of the other leading vaulters, used a pole called the Cata-Pole. Nordwig was the only medal favourite who did not use a Cata-Pole. The East Germans filed a protest against the Cata-Pole, claiming that it used carbon fibre. On 25 July, one month before the opening of the Munich Games, the Technical Committee of the IAAF banned the Cata-Pole. When it was pointed out that the Cata-Pole did not, in fact, contain carbon fibre, and that IAAF rules stated poles could be made of any material, the IAAF leadership switched its reasoning, claiming that the Cata-Pole “had not been available through normal supply channels” for at least 12 months prior to the Olympics. Once again, it was pointed out that the IAAF rule book did not include such a prohibition.

On 27 August, five days before the competition was to begin, the IAAF reversed itself and lifted the ban. Relieved vaulters returned to practicing with their usual poles. But then, on 30 August, two days before the qualifying round, the IAAF reimposed the ban. IAAF officials went to the athletes’ rooms and confiscated their Cata-Poles. It was Adriaan Paulen who had taken responsibility for the ban. That was why Seagren, who graciously congratulated Nordwig, thrust his own pole at Paulen.

“The Women”, directed by Michael Pflieger, is not of interest, the performance of women in the Olympics having already been better portrayed in previous Olympic films. The same can be said for “The Fastest”, Kon Ichikawa’s presentation of the men’s 100 metres final, Ichikawa himself having covered this same cinematic and athletic ground in his own 1964 film.

Miloš Forman’s coverage of “The Decathlon” is classic pre-Hollywood Forman whimsy, matching the various events with Bavarian folk music, bell-ringing, and Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.

Claude Lelouch, who directed one of the 1968 Winter Olympics films, contributes “The Losers”. As usual with Lelouch, the athletes are not identified. Some of them are merely frustrated with themselves, some look more tired than defeated, and some are injured. There is one “loser” whose story merited explanation.

Lelouch shows us a boxer outraged at his disqualification and refusing to leave the ring, while, as with Arthur Penn and the pole vault, the spectators boo and hiss. In fact, this is Juan Francisco Rodríguez of Spain, one of the medal favourites, in his quarter-final match against Alfonso Zamora of Mexico. In the final round, Rodríguez was knocked down, but was back up by the count of eight. However, he noticed that his gum shield had been knocked out and reached down to retrieve it. The referee thought Rodríguez was falling down again, continued counting to ten and ruled that he had been knocked out. No wonder Rodríguez was upset.

Lelouch includes one nice sequence from the super-heavyweight division of freestyle wrestling. While facing defending champion Aleksandr Medved of the Soviet Union, Moslem Eskandar-Filabi of Iran sustains an injury. He keeps getting up and trying to continue the match, but eventually he can’t continue. Medved, who

went on to earn another gold medal, shakes hands with Eskandar- Filabi and then helps him off the mat.

The final sequence of *Visions of Eight*, "The Longest", is directed by John Schlesinger, who had won two of the last three Best Director Academy Awards for *Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*. Schlesinger chose to cover the marathon from the point-of-view of one athlete: Ron Hill, who ultimately places sixth. We see Hill training at home (running 135 miles a week) and leaving for the Olympics. While he is in Munich, at the Athletes' Village, Palestinian terrorists invaded the Village, eventually causing the deaths of 11 Israelis. Hill tells one of Schlesinger's interviewers, "It's affected me in that the tragedy has put off my race for a day. If I allowed myself to think about what had happened, I would have become emotionally involved and thus not able to run ... I don't want to know about it." Schlesinger intercuts the marathon race with coverage of the attack and its aftermath. He shows a terrorist, the shot-up helicopter containing athletes and terrorists, makeshift memorials to the victims and the Olympic Flag flying at half-mast. When the Olympic Flame is extinguished it takes on more meaning than just the conclusion of the Games.

By choosing such an unconventional approach to the official film, a lot is missing. Here are a few of the highlights from the 1972 Summer Olympics that are not included in *Visions of Eight*:

- Swimmer Mark Spitz of the United States won seven gold medals.
- Lasse Virén of Finland fell midway through the final of the 10,000 metres, got up, caught up and won the race, setting a world record.
- Russian freestyle wrestler Ivan Yarygin pinned all seven of his opponents to win the heavyweight division.
- West German rider Liselott Linsenhoff, competing in the dressage event, became the first woman to win a gold medal in an individual equestrian event.

- Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut bridged the Iron Curtain to win the hearts of westerners.
- The basketball final ended in controversy with the US appearing to have won, only to have the clock reset twice, leading to a victory for the Soviet Union. Prior to this game, the US had won 62 consecutive Olympic games and every Olympic championship since basketball was included in the programme in 1936.
- Russian diver Vladimir Vasin won the men's spring-board event to end a US streak of 11 gold medals.
- Archery returned to the Olympics after a 52-year absence, and whitewater canoeing (canoe slalom) made its first appearance.

1976 – Innsbruck

Directed by Tony Maylam, *White Rock*, the official film of the 1976 Innsbruck Winter Olympics, is hosted by American actor James Coburn. Coburn, who had starred in such films as *Our Man Flint* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, had a reputation as an amiable, accessible action hero.

Coburn tries out several Winter Olympics roles, riding down a bobsleigh run ("a fast, rough, scary ride", practicing as a goalkeeper with the Austrian ice hockey team, skiing and shooting on the biathlon course, and waxing a ski. He also explains the rules of some events or allows others to explain them to him.

Helmet and body cameras allow us to vicariously experience ski jumping, bobsleigh, luge, and downhill skiing. For the downhill sequence, the skier is none other than Karl Schranz, the Austrian hero who was involved in the major controversies of the 1968 and 1972 Winter Games.

Significant coverage of the actual competitions is limited to just five of the 37 events: the 90-metre ski jump, the ice hockey final between the USSR and Czechoslovakia, the biathlon relay, the pairs figure



The American film star James Coburn was the presenter of the 1976 Winter Olympic film *White Rock*. Known for his all action roles, Coburn also insisted on trying out the bobsleigh track, the trails, slopes, and ice rinks in Innsbruck.

Montreal 1976: when the Russian super-heavyweight weightlifter Vasily Alekseyev awoke from his trance, he set a new world record in clean and jerk (255 kg).

skating performance of Irina Rodnina and Aleksandr Zaytsev, and the men's downhill. Coburn tells the camera that the winner of the men's downhill "will receive more adulation and publicity than all other medallists combined." When Austrian skier Franz Klammer wins the race, Coburn calls him the perfect Olympic champion, "tall, dashing, and fearless". *White Rock* is marred by two factual blunders. Coburn praises East Germany for winning all five sled events, luge and bobsleigh, while competing in these sports for the first time. Actually, East Germans had been competing in luge events since the sport was introduced into the Olympic programme in 1964.

Late in the film, Coburn tells us that during the ancient games in Delphi, all wars were halted. In reality, wars were not halted, and the ancient Olympics took place not in Delphi, but in Olympia, which is why they're called the Olympics. The filmmakers seem to have muddled the legend that Iphitos created the Olympic Games after consulting the Oracle of Delphi.

1976 – Montréal

By 1976, more and more people in North America were following the Olympics on television. This created a challenge for the makers of official films. So, for *Jeux de la XXI^e Olympiade*, the four Canadian directors decided to concentrate on four athletes, although they do weave in many other events. During the Parade of Nations, we are shown close-ups of the athletes of many countries, including several Africans. Then we see African athletes being told that they can no longer eat in the Olympic Village or use the city's metro system. Although the film does not explain why, it would have been clear to all Canadians and foreign Olympic fans that this was because the leaders of 22 African nations (and Guyana) chose to boycott the Montréal Games to protest the fact that New Zealand's rugby team had toured South Africa. Rugby was not affiliated with the Olympic Movement, and the IOC had banned South Africa from the Olympics for the past 12 years.

The first in-depth coverage is of Hungarian modern pentathlete Tibor Maracskó and his two teammates. Hungary and the USSR were leading nations in the sport, but Hungary was fielding an unusually young team of competitors. The Hungarians blow the very first of five sports, riding, placing 13th in a field of 14. Fortunately for them, the Soviets are disqualified after the fencing competition, although the film does not explain the reason. In fact, it was determined that one of the Soviet pentathletes, Boris Onyshchenko, was using an illegally modified épée that allowed him to record a hit without touching his opponent. The Hungarians gradually move up in the standings, but clearly find their third place finish a disappointment. Intimate coverage of team



member Szvetiszláv Sasics gasping for breath after the final cross-country race is painful to watch, as he pushes away an oxygen mask and then finally accepts it.

The second highlighted athlete is Cuban sprinter Silvio Leonard. We are told that Leonard was injured before the competition. His coach and Leonard himself express optimism, but, alas, Leonard is eliminated in the first round. Left out of the film is the story of Leonard's injury: ten days before the Games, he stepped on a cologne bottle during a bit of horseplay and cut his foot.

Athlete number three is Soviet gymnast Nelli Kim. Kim earns three gold medals and one silver medal. However, the filmmakers fail to cover the bigger stories in women's gymnastics: the farewell performance of Kim's teammate, Lyudmila Turishcheva, and her emotions as she collects her ninth and final Olympic medal, and the end of the reign of Olga Korbut and the rise of Romanian Nadia Comăneci.

The last highlighted athlete is US decathlete Bruce Jenner. The competition is given detailed coverage, including his wife, Chrystie, yelling at him from the stands during the 1,500 m run, urging him to "Step it up, Jenner." After securing the gold medal, Jenner turns to the camera and says, "I'm glad you guys got all this on film."

There are some nice touches in the coverage of other athletes and events. For example, when Guy Drut of France wins the 110-metre hurdles, he asks, "Me? First? Sure?"

There is also a wonderful sequence showing Soviet super-heavyweight weightlifter Vasily Alekseyev, earning his second Olympic championship by making a world record-setting clean and jerk lift. Alekseyev meditates himself into an almost trance-like state before approaching the bar.

One aspect of *Jeux de la XXI^e Olympiade* that is disturbing in retrospect is the glorification of sprinter Bärbel Wöckel, swimmer Kornelia Ender, and other East German gold medal winners, all of whom were taking prohibited steroids at the time.



1980 – Lake Placid

For the fourth time in the cinema era, the United States hosted the Olympics, but failed to produce an official film. Instead, the Lake Placid Organizing Committee met the IOC contractual requirement of an official film by submitting video tapes of ABC-TV's coverage of the Games. So, in lieu of an actual official film, what we have is *Olympic Spirit*, a 25-minute short funded by Coca-Cola. There is no narration, and athletes are not identified by name. Olympic history aficionados will recognise gold medal winners Eric Heiden, Leonhard Stock, Ingemar Stenmark, and Robin Cousins, as well as US figure skater Linda Fratianne. There are the usual athlete point-of-view shots demonstrating bobsleigh, luge, ski jump, and downhill, as well as falls in ski jump and Alpine skiing.

During coverage of the US ice hockey team's dramatic victory over the team from the USSR, when a US player smashes into a Soviet player, the soundtrack includes chants of "USA, USA". But when a Soviet player crashes into an American, the soundtrack is booing.

Yes, there is a shot of a Coca-Cola vending machine. When the end credits conclude with a frame of the Coca-Cola logo, the soundtrack is a singer wailing, "Please don't change."

1980 – Moscow

The official film of the 1980 Summer Olympics, *O Sport, You Are Peace!*, is directed by Yuri Ozerov, who contributed a short segment to 1972's *Visions of Eight*. The film features excellent cinematography and editing, but the narration frequently descends into silliness. The Soviet hosts were the first to stage spectacular Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The Opening Ceremony, in particular, is shown in great detail. This includes parachutists forming the Olympic rings, actors in the costumes of ancient Greece, and a wide variety of dance and music. Special attention is also given in the film to the cultural programme, with specific coverage of folk dancing from

Georgia and Ukraine. Among the members of Abkhazia's Ensemble of Centenarians is Timur Vanacha, who is alleged to be 114 years old. Medical researchers at the time found him to be quite a bit younger.

This loose adherence to the facts is on greater display in the film's description of the ancient Olympics, which is presented in various animated sequences. For example, *O Sport, You Are Peace!* tells us that the Greek statesman Demosthenes was an Olympic champion, confusing him with a different Demosthenes who lived after his famous namesake. Likewise, the boxer Pythagoras is confused with the philosopher of the same name who was born later. And, for reasons unknown, the film claims that the famous wrestler of ancient times, Milo of Croton, was also a scholar who wrote scientific papers.

To its credit, the film deals with the US-led boycott that prevented many leading athletes from coming to Moscow. There are even interviews with Olympics fans from boycotting nations who decry the decisions of their governments, and two young men are shown (twice) waving an American flag.

Coverage of the competitions emphasizes Soviet achievements, including swimmer Vladimir Salnikov breaking the 15-minute barrier in the 1,500 metres; the Beloglazov twins, Anatoly and Sergey, who both won gold medals in freestyle wrestling; and gymnasts Aleksandr Dityatin and Yelena Davydova.

Foreign athletes are highlighted when there is a Soviet connection or when they have a special story. Cuban boxer Teófilo Stevenson wins his third consecutive gold medal and immediately thanks his Soviet coach, Andrei Chervorenko. Elisabeth Theurer of Austria wins the equestrian dressage competition. We are told that

Golden: US speed skater Eric Heiden, who wore a gold-coloured skating suit, went to the start line in Lake Placid five times in 1980 and returned with five Olympic gold medals.

Moscow 1980: Cuban boxer Teófilo Stevenson won heavyweight boxing gold for the third successive Games, thanks also to his Soviet coach Andrei Chervorenko.



when the Austrian Equestrian Federation refused to send her to Moscow, Austrian Formula One racer Niki Lauda donated his private airplane to fly Theurer and her horse to Moscow.

There is an intriguing few seconds during which Miruts Yifter, having won the 5,000 metres to go with his victory in the 10,000, tries to shake hands with Ethiopian teammate Yohannes Mohammed, who had helped pace Yifter, but a distraught Mohammed refuses.

One memorable sequence shows a montage of weightlifters failing to lift the bar, followed by a montage of lifters straining to bring the bar above their heads and, finally, a montage of overjoyed weightlifters completing successful lifts.

Probably the most annoying aspect of the film is its coverage of the marathon, which focuses on Richard Hooper of Ireland, following him closely and imagining, in a ridiculous manner, what he might be thinking. At one point, Hooper stares at the camera with a dirty look as if he wishes the film crew would go away.

The Moscow Olympics made much use of its official mascot, Misha the Bear. Misha is introduced at the Opening Ceremony. During the film we are shown disturbing footage of trained bears performing on gymnastics apparatuses. This segues into coverage of human gymnasts. At the Closing Ceremony, an enormous Misha is brought into the stadium. Card stunts show Misha with a tear running down his cheek. The film closes with the large Misha, attached to balloons, being freed to float away into the night.

Sarajevo 1984:
Slovenian Jure Franko's silver in giant slalom was Yugoslavia's first Olympic winter medal.

1984 – Sarajevo

The official film of the 1984 Winter Olympics, directed by Kim Takal and produced by Joe Jay Jalbert, bears the hopeful, but sadly non-prophetic, title of *A Turning*

Point. "The Olympics", it begins, "is capable of touching some greatness in anyone" and, at the very least, can serve as a turning point for individuals.

Unlike previous Olympic films, *A Turning Point* is presented in precise chronological order, recounting what took place each day. For each event, we are introduced to the leading contenders and the ultimate medal winners. This may not satisfy those who prefer a more artistic film, but the viewer comes away with a good feeling for the participants and the competitions.

Highlights include Jure Franko winning Yugoslavia's first-ever Winter Olympics medal, a silver in the men's giant slalom. An American describes luge as "like riding on a bar of soap". Sweden's Gunde Svan, who earned four medals, including two gold, is shown to be the epitome of a cross-country skier, as we see him collapse at the finish line twice, having clearly given it his all. The film concludes with a montage of happy winners.

Mitsubishi must have paid good money for product placement in the film, as the filmmakers show us Mitsubishi Avenue, a Mitsubishi building, and volunteers wearing Mitsubishi jackets.

During the Opening Ceremony, we are told that the spectators and athletes gather "in peace". Unfortunately, less than ten years later, the bobsleigh and luge track was turned into a Bosnian-Serb artillery position, as was the ski jump venue. ZETRA Olympic Hall, where British ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean and other figure skaters performed their magic in 1984, was reduced to rubble by Serb bombing. It was rebuilt in 1999 with financial help from the IOC.

1984 – Los Angeles

If the Americans failed to produce official films during their previous experiences hosting the Olympics, they made up for it in 1984. Bud Greenspan, who would go on to produce and direct ten official Olympic films, presents the Los Angeles Games in *16 Days of Glory*, which lasts 4 hours and 44 minutes. Greenspan's first Olympics-related documentary was a 1953 15-minute short, *The Strongest Man in the World*, about US weightlifter John Davis. By the time of the 1984 Los Angeles Games, Greenspan had already established himself as the leading producer of films about the Olympics, most notably as a result of his 22-hour series of films, released in 1976, entitled *The Olympiad*. Greenspan's brother, David, who used the stage name David Perry, became known as the voice of the Olympics. He narrated the 1984 Sarajevo film and *16 Days of Glory*.

16 Days of Glory, as with most official films, begins with the Opening Ceremony. The narration mentions the Soviet bloc's revenge boycott. When the Olympic Flag is carried into the stadium by famous US Olympians, the narrator calls attention to one of the athletes following



the flag, boxer Richard Sandoval, who had qualified for the 1980 Olympics, but was not allowed to compete because of the US boycott. Although it is not noted in the film, when the US team enters, they do not do so in step. This was a break with tradition, although it would soon be almost universally adopted by other countries.

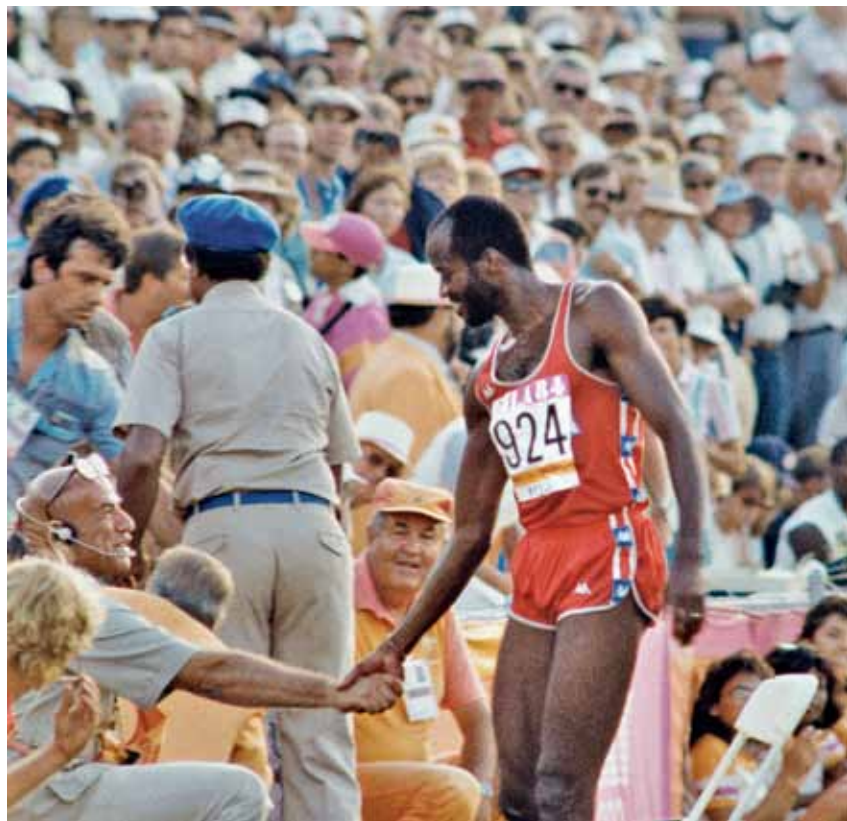
Greenspan's specialty was storytelling. Although *16 Days of Glory* includes footage of various events and montages of different sports, at its heart are 18 stories, most of which highlight one or two athletes, including interviews with the athletes conducted after they have returned home. Greenspan makes his point that the Olympics isn't just about medal winners by using his first story segment to relate the travails of Great Britain's Dave Moorcroft, who held the world record at 5,000 metres. Although he had been one of the favourites, in Los Angeles he was hampered by a pelvic injury. He qualifies for the final, but it immediately becomes clear that he is in pain. Rather than drop out, he is determined to finish, and we watch his struggle to avoid being lapped by the winner, Saïd Aouita. Moorcroft succeeds, barely.

Greenspan humanizes several of the athletes by focusing on their spouses and other family members as they watch from the stands. For example, Linda Moorcroft, Dave's wife, describes the agony of watching her husband struggle through the race. Sometimes this technique backfires in the long run because the couples divorce within a few years of the husband's Olympic triumph. Such was the case of Bruce and Chrystie Jenner, who were featured in the 1976 Montréal official film. And such is the case in *16 Days of Glory*, in the segment about US hurdler Edwin Moses. His wife, Myrella, seated between IAAF President Primo Nebiolo and IAAF General Secretary John Holt, suffers though the final while Holt and Nebiolo reassure her that Moses is running well. After he wins the final, Moses embraces Myrella and then jogs over to and shakes hands with Bud Greenspan. Edwin and Myrella divorced a few years later.

Half of Greenspan's interview subjects are Americans, but some of the most compelling segments deal with non-US athletes. Of particular interest is his coverage of the decathlon duel between defending Olympic champion Daley Thompson of Great Britain and world record holder Jürgen Hingsen of West Germany. As is often the case, Greenspan and Perry do an excellent job of explaining how events work, including strategy that would not otherwise be clear to a general viewer.

Coverage of Carl Lewis's quest to match Jesse Owens's 1936 feat of winning gold medals in the 100 metres, long jump, 200 metres and the 4x100-metre relay is intercut with footage of Owens's victories.

The famous clash between American Mary Decker and Zola Budd, representing Great Britain, in the women's 3,000 metres, is shown in slow-motion detail, but the race is primarily described from the point-of-view of the



winner, Maricica Puică of Romania, and her husband/coach Ion.

Greenspan does an excellent job of using slow-motion replays to deal with a controversy in the men's 100-metre freestyle. American Rowdy Gaines is first in the water and then beats Mark Stockwell of Australia by less than half a second. Stockwell is furious, and the Australians file a protest, claiming that Gaines jumped the gun. However, as Greenspan shows, Gaines did not jump the gun, but rather, starter Frank Silvestri fired the gun before Stockwell was in a set position.

Other segments deal with Olympic champions Yasuhiro Yamashita, Michael Groß, Mary Lou Retton, Joan Benoit (although she did not submit to an interview), Pierre Quinon, Sebastian Coe, Nawal El Moutawakel, Greg Louganis, Peter Vidmar, Ulrike Meyfarth, and Connie Carpenter-Phinney. However, we also follow the journeys of US steeplechaser Henry Marsh, who places fourth and is then carried away on a stretcher, and Briton Steve Ovett, who is hospitalized with a respiratory problem after the 800 metres and then starts the final of the 1,500 metres, but has to stop running and, like Marsh, exits on a stretcher.

In one odd editorial choice, whenever a non-English-speaking athlete is interviewed, his or her answers are dubbed into English by a narrator with the accent, often heavy, of the interviewee's nation.

The film concludes with a montage of athletes waving to the spectators while Plácido Domingo sings in the background. ■

Los Angeles 1984:
In *16 Days of Glory*, director Bud Greenspan dedicated a segment to American 400 m hurdler Edwin Moses. After the final, he congratulated Moses on his Olympic victory.