

Olympic medal for Mexicans?

By Bob Gates Sports editor of The Christian Science Monitor

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Protest casts shadow

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By Bob Gates

Sports editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*

Mexico City

The people of Mexico stand a little taller in the eyes of the world today.

As the Summer Games of the 19th Olympiad turn into their second week, it is not too early to judge them a huge success. The 15 days of competition, involving nearly 8,000 athletes from 108 countries, concludes on Sunday, Oct. 27.

The 1964 version in Tokyo was known as the "Fun Olympics." The Mexicans wish these Games to be remembered as the "Peace Olympics." Were it not for the pre-Olympic conflict here between university students and the government, well they might be.

Now, with the student unrest simmering under an Olympic truce, the "Exciting Games" might best describe this first quadrennial festival in Latin America.

Warmth generated

The Spanish beat echoes well into the night. The Mexican, roused from a *mañana* mood, is a little awed by the influx of visitors, but he has started to swing.

Striking architecture, bold color, the lack of sophistication, the unbridled enthusiasm of the host nation, the simple friendliness and sincere desire of all Mexicans to be liked and appreciated, combine to give these 1968 Olympics a warmth not fully attributable to El Sol Caliente.

In the light air and on the fast Tartan

(rubberized) track here 7,354 feet above sea level, Olympic and world records are falling like autumn leaves. The much-maligned altitude, said to work a distinct (oxygen-debt) disadvantage in any speed event taking over two minutes, is proving to be a fickle participant. It has at times seemed a nonexistent factor, and then again sent favorites to the sidelines, gasping for breath.

The well-conditioned, however, and those who thrive on special challenges have had little difficulty—leaving many to believe attitude and desire much the stronger influences.

Protest raises questions

Facilities for the athletes here, competition and training sites as well as housing in the spacious Olympics Village, have been saluted by all countries as A-1. And the genuine friendliness of the Mexican people also abounds among the athletes. Only the Czechs and Soviets noticeably keep their distances.

Many visitors from abroad continue to question American journalists about Negroes on the United States track-and-field team who used the three-tiered victory stand to stage a silent but unmistakable civil-rights protest.

Wearing a black glove on one hand and carrying white track shoes in the other, the American sprinters answered the crowd's

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Associated Press Wirephoto

Above the medal, protest

American sprinter Tommie Smith, gold-medal winner in Olympic 100 meter dash, raised black-gloved fist in racial protest when awards were given.

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cheers with a wave of the shoes. Then when the United States flag went up and their national anthem was played, they bowed their heads and thrust the black-gloved first high in the air in an obvious "black-power" gesture. During competition several Negroes also wore calf-length black stockings.

Protesters suspended

Negro sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos were suspended from the American team by the U.S. Olympic Committee for "untypical exhibitionism" during the victory ceremony.

Typical reaction heard from European spectators over the protest displays was one of dismay, suggesting that Olympic Games are no place "for that sort of thing."

Traffic and considerable distances between venues have been the biggest problems of the Games thus far. This ancient Aztec capital, to the visitor, seems to have bumper-to-bumper traffic 18 hours a day. And many a weary, bus-hopping, non-Spanish-speaking tourist wishes he had left Ciudad de Mexico for another day and was home watching television coverage of the Olympics in the comfort of his living room.

There he would undoubtedly have had a better view of the proceedings, though not the Latin-American flavor and crowd reaction.

There have been upsets aplenty in all 19 sports thus far and more expected before the week is out. Indomitable Al Oerter's unprecedented fourth-consecutive gold medal in the discus, Tommie Smith's fantastic 19.8 world mark in the 200, the Soviet Union's Victor Saneev's setting of a new world best of 57 ft. 0¾ in. in the triple jump have been among the most sensational efforts here.

But the one single story which stood out at the halfway point in the competition had to be the Cinderella accomplishment of little Collette Besson, France's surprise winner in the women's 400-meter dash. Collette, who is an attractive brunette from Bordeaux, was almost left behind by the French team because her best time of 53.8 seconds wasn't even close to the top 20 who would appear here. Her coach interceded, however, agreed to pay her way if she wasn't included, and finally got her on the plane.

Charging up the middle of the track with a terrific burst of speed over the final 50 meters, Collette passed Jarvis Scott of the United States and nipped favored Lillian Board of Britain with a lunge at the tape—

equaling the Olympic-record time of 52.0 seconds.

"When I heard the Marseillaise, I could not keep from crying," she said. "I thought of home, of my family, and of France. Going around the track, it seemed that my feet had wings."