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By Larry Eldridge Sports editor of The Christian Science Monitor

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The attempt to have the 1980 Olympics called off, removed from Moscow, or boycotted has been marking time for the past few weeks as the United States drummed up support for its stand at home and abroad. But now the day has come for events to take a more active turn.

This weekend on the eve of the winter games at Lake Placid, the suggestion made by President Carter on Jan. 20, repeated in his State of the Union message, and supported by overwhelming votes in both the House and the Senate will be translated into a formal proposal to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It will demand that if Soviet troops are not fully withdrawn from Afghanistan by Feb. 20, the Moscow games be either postponed, canceled, transferred to another site, or split up into multiple alternative venues. Implicit in the proposal is the threat of a boycott, which Mr. Carter has

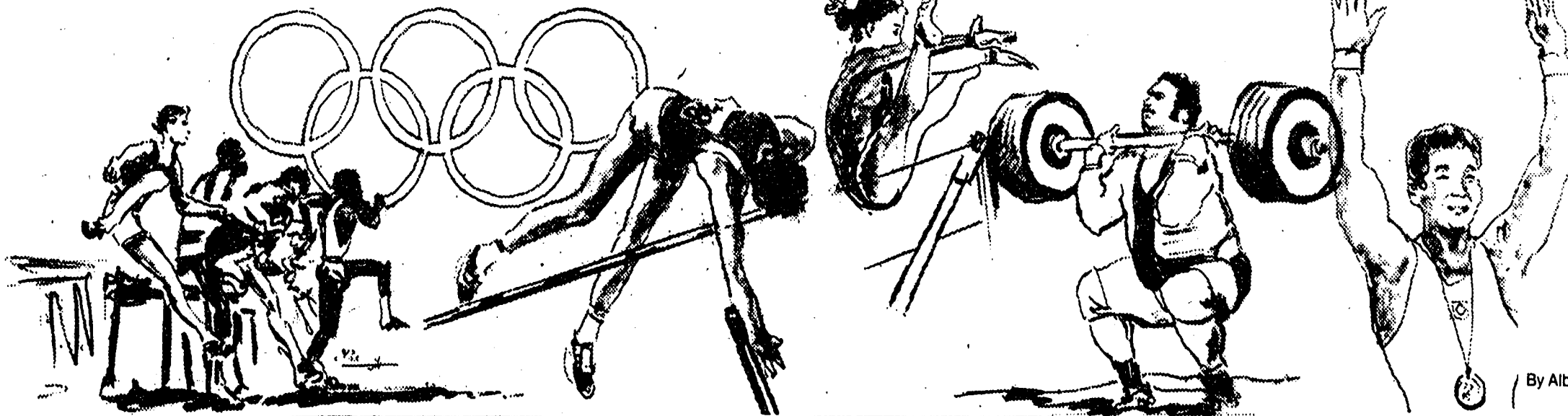
said he would urge if none of his conditions is met.

Since a Soviet withdrawal appears out of the question, the next move is up to the IOC, which will be holding a regularly scheduled business meeting in Lake Placid Feb. 10-12 and will presumably clarify matters by issuing some sort of definitive statement at that time. If the committee stands by its previously announced commitment to keep the games in Moscow, the obvious next step for the United States will be to begin implementation of a boycott.

The key question therefore, is how many

other countries — and which ones — would join a prospective US withdrawal. This is a tough one to answer, since government pronouncements on such subjects are often couched in vague, ambiguous language or with "pass the buck" qualifiers such as, "It's up to our National Olympic Committee." Most US allies, such as Great Britain, Japan, Canada, and West Germany, have at least expressed support for the idea of moving or canceling the games, but they've pretty much refrained from coming right out and saying they would go all the way

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By Albert J. Forbes,
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with a boycott.

An educated guess, however, is that the United States has received at least some private assurances of down-the-line support from key countries — and that it hopes to convince the IOC it can carry enough nations out with it to wreck or severely damage any attempt to hold the games in Moscow.

Ever since President Carter first brought this subject up more than a month ago in the wake of the Soviets' late December move into Afghanistan, IOC president Lord Killanin has repeatedly stated that the games could not be moved to another site at this late juncture and that he expects them to be held in Moscow as planned. Thus unless he and the committee have a change of heart, they are expected to reject the US proposal. But no one can be certain of this, so everything is pretty much on "hold" at the moment until the IOC conducts its meeting and decides upon its course of action.

Those most seriously affected, of course, are the athletes — many of whom have been training four years or more for what could be their only chance at Olympic glory. Thus, not too surprisingly, initial reaction in the athletic community to talk of disrupting the games was largely negative. Four-time discus gold medalist Al Oerter, marathon favorite Bill Rodgers, and others voiced a quick chorus of "why us?" statements and cited the Olympic ideal that sports and politics should be kept separate whenever possible.

This attitude softened quickly, however, when reaction among the media and the general public indicated most people agreed with the President that there's no way of keeping the two things apart in times of genuine international crisis.

"It's time to put personal considerations aside," Oerter said on television just a few days after he had voiced strong opposition. And both he and Rodgers — along with many other athletes — made it clear that although they may not be happy with the situation they will support national policy.

Officially, with groups like the Athletes' Advisory Council to the US Olympic Committee — and for that matter the USOC itself — the position at the moment is solid support of the President's proposal to move or cancel the Moscow games, leaving the question of a boycott in abeyance until the other attempts are exhausted. There's little doubt that if it comes to a boycott they will go along, however — if for no other reason than that they really have no choice.

This was made clear at a White House press briefing immediately after Mr. Carter's Jan. 20 speech when presidential counsel Lloyd Cutler was asked how the government would enforce a boycott if the USOC and/or individual athletes opted not to go along with it. "We haven't crossed that bridge yet, and we don't think it will be necessary...." Mr. Cutler said. "But...if we need authority and we lack it, I don't think we would have any trouble getting it." And in response to further questioning in the same briefing he added: "Well, there are such things, you know, as passports, there are powers of the federal government...there are various ways in which, I feel sure, the US government, ...could prevent US



UPI photo

Russians in Lake Placid — but what about Moscow?

athletes from participating in the games."

The message was clear enough, but it's doubtful that most athletes really needed it. Craig Masback, a leading mileprospect who has taken a year off from his doctoral studies at Oxford to train, articulated the way many of his fellow competitors undoubtedly feel when he told reporters:

"One takes part in sport with an awareness of the realities, that politics are involved. On the one hand, I feel a great frustration and disappointment over having a dream that I've devoted myself to shattered. But as a citizen, the reality of the situation requires that we take some move that symbolically and really has some effect on the Soviet Union. . . ."

In the same vein, University of Arizona swimming coach Dick Jochums, who has coached Olympic medalists Bruce Furniss and Tim Shaw, told the Monitor:

"I don't think anybody in America realizes the sacrifices and extreme effort these kids have gone through for four years. Some have even sacrificed families. I think it's a tragedy. But we're all Americans. If we choose to do these things, I can understand. Maybe we shouldn't have gone to the games in 1936 when the Nazis held them. Maybe that was a mistake, and if we'd chosen not to go we could have saved some lives. Maybe it's time we do the right thing."

The comparison with the '36 Berlin games, which Adolph Hitler used to propagandize his Third Reich, has been raised frequently in the current case.

"Holding the games in Moscow is the moral equivalent of holding them in Berlin in 1936," said Rep. Jack Kemp, R-N.Y., the former pro football star who was one of the first members of Congress to strongly support Mr. Carter on the issue. "They should be moved to another site."

And indeed, many government analysts have pointed out that like the Nazis 44 years ago, the Soviets have been spending vast amounts of time, energy, and money in hopes of staging a spectacular production that will showcase their regime to the world. It has also been noted that despite their superpower status the Soviets still have a certain sense of inferiority — of not quite fully belonging to the world community — and that they have long wanted to host the Olympics in the

belief that a successful staging of the games would help to confer an aura of legitimacy upon them.

For all of these reasons, it is believed that losing the games — or having them sharply curtailed via a boycott — would be a devastating blow to the Soviets in terms of pride and prestige as well as a major financial setback.

If the IOC should agree to move the games, there's still the question of whether any city would be able to stage even a modified version of the Olympics on such short notice.

In the more likely event of an eventual boycott, the question of alternative competitions also arises. The USOC has already said that regardless of what happens it intends to continue selecting and training a team, and, if there is a boycott, to try to stage some sort of alternative event — probably a National Sports Festival similar to, but far greater in scope than, the ones it has held the past two years. On a grander scale, the Administration has indicated it would help finance an alternative international competition — an "Independence Games," "Free World Games," or whatever — to be attended by those countries not going to Moscow.

The current controversy also has revived the idea of trying to reduce the quadrennial political squabbling by locating the games permanently in one site — probably Greece.

One problem for the athletes right now is calling up the discipline and determination to keep on training despite the uncertainty of the situation. Many have indicated they find it very difficult to maintain the same intensity, and have cut back accordingly, but most seem to be trying to keep it up as much as possible until things are clarified.

Among other people being kept up in the air are the approximately 11,000 Americans who have put up some \$16 million in reservations to attend the games. The Russian Travel Bureau (RTB) in New York, which was appointed by the USOC to handle travel arrangements, says \$9 million is still being held in a New York bank but \$7 million has already been sent to the Soviet Union as a down payment, and the status of the latter amount isn't clear at the moment.

Also facing quite a dilemma is NBC, which has an investment of some \$100 million involved. The network has insurance for 90 percent of this, but would still take a heavy loss both in cash and in the ratings boost it was counting on the Olympics to provide heading into the fall season.

The fact that NBC had insurance covering possible cancellation or boycotting of the games and that the contract signed by prospective US tourists with the RTB contained provisions for the same eventualities indicates that anyone who read his history was well aware of such possibilities. One only has to go back to Montreal in 1976 to recall the walkout of 28 African nations, while at Melbourne in 1956 there were boycotts by Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands in protest of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and by some Arab nations because of the Suez Canal crisis. There have been isolated instances of unilateral walkouts too, but none by any nation as big or influential as the United States, and certainly nothing on the scale of the one currently in prospect.