

THE OTHER GAMES

One month earlier and 3,000 miles east, a sporting contest of a different kind was taking place . . . and being photographed.



Gold medal-winner Nancy Anderson (right) and Bronze medal-winner Jane Spitzley (left), both from the United States, celebrate their boccia ball victories.

By Suzanne Christy

Bruce Bennett, the official photographer for the four-time National Hockey League champion New York Islanders, can usually be found at ice level with nothing but a lens and a camera separating him from airborne hockey pucks, flying sticks, frustrated fans and churlish giants skating at 30 miles an hour. Dismissing the physical dangers,

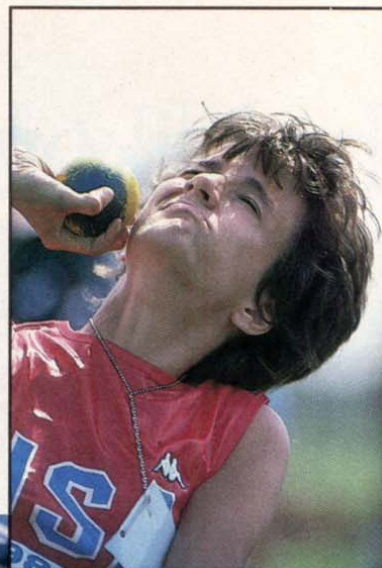
Bennett has kept on shooting in the face of some furious action.

But when this veteran of the ice wars photographed the sports activities of 1,500 of the top amputee, cerebral palsy, blind and *les autres* athletes, his composure was shaken. "No one was there to cheer," Bennett recalls. "Finally, I just put my camera down and clapped for them myself."



Ronald Roselle of Holland, with their seal mascot, accepting the gold medal for his record-breaking time in the 100-meter free-style swimming event.

U.S. athlete Nancy Anderson, who placed fourth, competing in shot put.



One of the U.S. cerebral palsy competitors practicing for the wheelchair races.

Estimated to attract spectators ranging from 250,000 to half a million in number, the International Games for the Disabled in Nassau County, Long Island, featured athletes from 50 countries, who competed in 22 world-class events. Unlike the heralded Summer Olympics, the only time the crowd flocked to *these* Games was when Ronald Reagan officiated at the opening ceremony. Many of the countries who pulled out of the Los Angeles Olympics were represented, local media coverage was plentiful and organizations such as IBM, the National Football League and even the U.S. Olympic Committee sponsored the event, and still, sighs Bennett, "the turnout was disappointing."

Yet the action that the public didn't show up to watch was recorded for a commemorative book, *The Road to Glory*, by Bennett and his ten-man staff. More than a year beforehand, a publisher friend asked Bennett to organize the assignment. "It was a photo opportunity that I just couldn't pass up," says the 27-year-old photographer, who has shot fashion, portraits and industrial reports, as well as sports.

With only one shot at covering events that he'd never seen or even heard of before, like boccia and goal ball, Bennett learned "to adapt to the unknown quickly." One of the biggest surprises was the lighting requirements. He'd planned on strobing many of the indoor events. Once there, he

discovered that the large blasts of light distracted some of the blind athletes and caused many of the cerebral palsy competitors to go into convulsions.

Even the simplest photographer's maxim backfired. Bennett cringes when he remembers how one of his photographers told a group of athletes to "look this way." They were all blind. "At first, you think you want to die," Bennett laughs. "But it really didn't faze them. They just turned their faces in the direction of the photographer's voice."

"The worst part," Bennett says, "was the end of the Games. For two short weeks the participants were able to relax and socialize. They didn't have to worry about other people's reactions to their handicaps. But what happens when they go back home?"

Despite the emotional and physical drain and the complications of organizing a staff for the assignment, Bennett would love a second chance. "After planning a year for this, I was really looking forward to unleashing

some of my creativity," which tends to get lost in the shuffle of shooting 120 hockey games a season. But he wasn't behind the camera as much as he would have liked. Instead, as the book's photo director, he had to divide his 12- to 16-hour days between taking pictures and overseeing the entire operation. "I seemed to spend a lot of time behind a desk. Next time," he laments, "I'd hire nine photographers and one organizer. I'd be the tenth photographer and spend the whole day shooting."

Still, as one of the few witnesses to the athletes poignant season of triumph, represented on more than 400 rolls of film, Bennett provides a lasting memorabilia of the Games, *The Road to Glory*. In attempting to reach people who all speak different languages, "there's nothing more revealing than photos. The book crosses all language barriers and might open some eyes, perhaps even pave the way to a greater understanding of the handicapped." ■