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The Road to Glory

Bruce Bennett

Seven-Hundred man-hours and 15,000 photographs later, the real work was about to begin. The largest and most lengthy task to perform still remained — that of sorting and editing the slides shot at the 1984 International Games for the Disabled.

The planning began one year earlier when Steve Bernheim the publisher, Bob Stampleman the editor, and myself, came together to map-out a project that would involve the complete documentation of these games and the compilation of facts and photos into a commemorative book to be entitled "The Road To Glory." The previous book, published in Holland four years earlier did a good job of showing the sporting events, but a poor job at delving behind the scenes to see more of the athletes on a personal level.

The Holland book was written in English and French. Luckily we were not burdened with those guidelines, as only English was re-

quired and the book was largely photojournalistic in content. They say a picture can tell a thousand words, but more importantly for us, a picture speaks a thousand languages. The book will be mailed to forty foreign countries.

Planning For The Event

Many plans needed to be mapped-out as we went about the process of selecting photographers. Each photographer had a different specialty — sports, feature, 'people,' photojournalism, special effects. Each brought varied experience and backgrounds and each qualified for the job in different ways. Several of the photographers worked other jobs and needed to arrange for time off. The games lasted for two weeks in the latter part of June. As the event drew closer, the schedule underwent many revisions as the Games committee received information on how many athletes would attend. Because of the Olympic boycott, several teams

pulled out of these games. Russia, Cuba and Iran were some of the countries to stay home. The athletes were to make many sidetrips to local beaches, shopping centers and museums, and these had to be scheduled as the games progressed. Photographers were also sent to athletes' parties and get-togethers to photograph social events.

Building a staff of interested photographers was no problem. We finalized the number of photographers at eleven with several working one week only. Each signed a contract in terms of rate of pay, and ownership of slides, as well as our agreement to allow for the usage of material in portfolios after selections were made for the book. The remainder of the material is being donated to the Games Committee.



Memorable moments at the Special Olympics were found outside of competition.

© Bruce Bennett



Athlete glances into grandstand at the 1984 Special Olympics.

© Jack Weber 1984

Some preliminary details about the Games helped plan our course of action. We were photographing several disability groups — blind, cerebral palsied, amputee, and les autres (French for 'the others'). From there, groups were broken down to the severity of the handicap so athletes would compete against those in equal terms. The photographers saw many things they did not expect, and although at times it was difficult to shoot, the photo staff handled the situation tastefully. Many of the events for the cerebral palsy athletes had never been seen by most of us, so we weren't quite sure what to expect — advance researching on these sports was next to impossible.

Many of the swimming and track & field events were the same as those seen in the Olympics. The events for the CPs included precision toss, ball kick, slalom and club. Some of the other events included rifle & pistol, lawn bowling, wrestling, powerlifting, soccer, wheelchair basketball, and an event for the blind called Goalball. It was stressed that a picture would have to be special to find its way into print. Kodak had donated 500 rolls of film and processing, and we had every intention of using it all. The final edit would reduce those 500 rolls to just three or four-hundred images. There just wasn't room for run-of-the-mill photography.

Exposure Problems

Kodachrome was used for most of the outdoor events and whenever possible. The lighting was so poor in the three main sports venues that Kodak P800/1600 was used. Light readings and filtration was deter-

mined a month in advance so photographers were equipped with 30 Magenta filters, which were helpful in many situations. In pregame meetings with the photo staff it was determined that strobes should be setup where possible, as we were not happy with the P800/1600 grain structure or clarity. In any case, even shooting at 1600 ASA with a 30 magenta filter was insufficient to stop motion.

The Nassau Community College Gym & Fieldhouse had the worst lighting, and quite luckily these were the easiest places to set up strobes — our early scouting uncovered ideal overhead positions for light placement. Four Balcar 2400 watt-second power packs with tri-tube heads were triggered with Hawk remotes to eliminate the problems encountered with hardwire. (Mordecai Cyngiel of Tekno arranged for the loaner equipment and was helpful with technical advice about the use and placement of the units).

Another problem cropped-up. The coaches of the U.S. CP team explained that the bright flash stunned the CPs and they would be thrown into convulsions. Events such as Boccia and Slalom were largely shot with available light



© Bruce Bennett

Coach reassures athlete that he should be proud of his performance.

(available darkness) or setup after the events. The blind athletes also had problems dealing with the strobes. For those in the higher classifications who could just barely make out images, the flash was startling. Some of the swimming events had to be shot with available light, however, the south side of the swim center is filled with windows so strong diffused daylight helped our exposures.

Canon was an official sponsor of the Games and they supplied the photo team with loaner equipment, on-site repairs and all the customary freebies which the photographers displayed freely.

After the opening day festivities that 15,000 attended, the crowds slowly dwindled. Highly attended events included powerlifting, wrestling and wheelchair soccer, but all too often the backgrounds were



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Athlete attempts to clear the bar during high jump competition.

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sparse and empty. Many people claimed that they meant to come but few did. All too often the athletes performed for themselves and their countries with little encouragement from anyone but their coaches and the other athletes.

Should we undertake a project of this size again a few changes will be necessary. Fewer photographers will be hired and each will shoot more hours. Although the original idea was to get as many viewpoints as possible, I think it would be more beneficial to have the working photographers get more engrossed in their work. They will "get into it" more and I think it will show in the strength of the images.

Next time the project would be at least 50% black & white. Many situations, especially those in low light and moody behind the scenes views, required black & white to be effective.

Editing Process

When we got down to the nitty gritty of editing slides, we separated them into "must use," first, seconds, outtakes, and "garbage" categories. Garbage remained in the Kodak boxes and was returned to the offending photographers. This proved a good method in that we

had some direction with which to go into production with Joan Marino, the Art Director on the project. Her problem was balancing the heavy text with my insistence that certain photos be used. Not an easy job being the referee between writer and photographer. Next time more editorial control (and restraint) will be mandatory.

After months of planning and making schedules I had to revise them as two photographers contracted food poisoning at the opening ceremony. I had to pick up photographers' film and run it to Kodak for processing as the games proceeded. We also had to make sure photographers had the proper credentials and didn't have any problems with police security. Field trips had to be assigned spur of the moment as we found out about them, and at times photographers had to be taken off their regular assignments to follow writers around for interview pieces.

There simply wasn't enough time or energy left to throw myself deep enough into the photography aspect. To do it again would require an organizer to handle all the details. Although it's one of the things I do best, I still prefer the excitement of being a photographer.