

## The 1996 Olympics

by John Farrow

The 1996 Olympic Games were not kind to distance runners from New Mexico. The brutal heat and humidity in Atlanta easily trumped New Mexico's altitude training. On the U.S. team, neither **Matt Guisto** nor **Olga Appell** could advance past their initial heats. Guisto finished 9th in his 5000 meter heat, while Appell was a dismal 17th in her 10,000 meter heat, finishing minutes, not seconds, behind the leaders.

Distance runners from other countries who trained locally had similar experiences. Neither **Lieve Slegers** of Belgium nor **Charles Mulinga** of Zambia, both of whom trained with Eddie Hellebuyck, could advance in the 10,000. Of the three women who trained locally for the marathon, only one, **Helena Javornik** of Slovenia, finished, and she was 53rd out of 63 finishers. **Carol Galea** of Malta and **Salina Chirchir** of Kenya joined many other well-known runners, including Jenny



Spangler, Uta Pippig, Elena Meyer and Lisa Ondieke, with a DNF beside their names.

In the men's marathon, the best showing by a runner who trained primarily in Albuquerque was by **Peter Whitehead** of Great Britain with a time of 2:22:37, good for 55th overall. Russian **Leonid Shvetsov** finished 66th, just ahead of **Eddie Hellebuyck**, representing Belgium.

Of course, much was made in the local news media of the fact that the winner, Josia Thugwane, along with his two South African teammates, spent June and part of

July training in Albuquerque. In reality, they did most of their training and racing elsewhere. Thugwane won the Hawaii Marathon earlier this year and credited that race and his preparation for it as integral to his Olympic victory.

Frank Shorter commented that it was vitally important that training be specific for a particular race. In this case, the race was in hot, humid conditions, and it was therefore important to train and race in hot, humid conditions.

The conditions certainly did not affect the shorter distances, as numerous world and Olympic records were set in the sprints, including Michael Johnson's incredible 19.32 in the 200. But all of this may ultimately bode well for distance runners in the 2000 Games in Sydney, however.

With the reversal of the seasons down under, the 2000 Games will be held during Australia's winter. The high temperature in Sydney on the day of the men's marathon in Atlanta was only 61E. Perhaps we will see race results in Sydney the reverse of the Atlanta Games, with conditions being more suited to record performances in the distance events.



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