

Francie Kraker's Olympic Diary

A Personal Look At '72 Summer Olympics

(Editor's Note: Francie Kraker, Ann Arbor's premiere female athlete over the last 10 years and a participant in both the Mexico City Olympics and the recent Olympics in Munich, Germany, has prepared the following article presenting her impressions of the events of last summer.)

By Francie Kraker

An irritable, gusting wind, suddenly cold from a heavy rain, rattles the empty yogurt cups and discarded papers across the main plaza of the village.

It is almost empty this Sunday night save for a few hurrying figures, anxious perhaps to escape the depressing chill, the memories of the place, of how a few days before while the usual gaudy assemblage was there, bartering, bantering, carrying on in its diverse manner, terrorists held the lives of nine fellow athletes in their malevolent grasp.

Just as most of the other inhabitants of the village, I knew almost nothing about what was going on most of that day. I went to Oberschlesheim to watch the canoeing and kayaking.

Later, I sat sunning by the lake in the village where I could see the building, the ambulances lined up, the crowds of people outside running back and forth.

It wasn't until a newsman interviewed me and I sat in the studio with Lee Evans and others, that the full implications hit very hard, that I learned the actual demands of the terrorists, and for the first time had the feeling that this wasn't just another hijacking, that those nine captive men were in grave danger.

Told the next morning that they were dead, I could only weep in helpless sorrow and anger.

It is this that I ponder as I hurry to escape this sad place. I have had enough. For me, the Games and all the fine things they stand for, are over.

I catch a train to Switzerland, to impassive mountains, serene lakes, fondue and wine. I don't know then if it is an Olympic experience to forget, or to painfully and carefully digest, sort out, and re-experience in the light of earthly reality.

The glowing superlatives which people are fond of expressing every four years to describe this event are inappropriate here. Yet the tragedy cannot be a repudiation of the ideals and the intentions of this Twentieth Olympiad, and it cannot cancel out the good. So I choose the latter course, and this is my examination of the total experience through my individual participation in it.

It all started where?

It would be a mistake to say that 11 years ago when I ran my first competitive steps that they and the subsequent odd billion steps I have run since were all directed to the moment I stepped on the track in Munich. I have been taking it year by year; running has become a life-style and competitive goals almost secondary. Yet I find myself placing second in the Olympic Trials, and, very excited about the fact that my time would have ranked me 12th in the world the previous year, taste a competitive challenge that I haven't felt in years.

I think back to the cornfields of Illinois. The University of Illinois is the site of the United States Women's Track and Field training camp. Francie Larrieu, American record holder in 1500 meters, my event also, and I go for an eight-mile run and get lost. It is unbearably hot and humid, the sweat pours out of us, we douse ourselves with water from the hose of a man washing his car. We have gone at least 10 miles and it's time to quit. Dragging and dripping, we jog down the main highway of Champaign, thumbs outstretched, even yelling "Please!" A good mile and 20 cars later we get a ride.

After two weeks of heat, humidity, competition and training, we arrive in Washington, D.C., to be processed and flown to Munich. This is perhaps the true beginning of the actual Olympic experience, what differentiates this from any other competitive event. It is exciting to be outfitted with over \$500 worth of clothes. I like the bright uniforms and find that they'll even be wearable elsewhere. We stay at a fine hotel and are treated royally. All the athletes eat together from a buffet of excellent food. This is the only other occasion besides the Pan-American Games where we meet athletes from the other sports. It's fascinating to learn about everything from the modern pentathlon to the rules of team handball. Team handball!

Thursday, August 17: This is our day to be honored at Congress and the White House. We sit in the chambers of the House and the roll is called twice. All 467 names. Two-thirds of them are half an hour late. Interesting. There are some good speeches, especially from former Olympian and now Representative Ralph Metcalfe.

In the afternoon we go to the White House. It is a glittering place, a stringed orchestra entertains us. We shake hands with Mrs. Nixon and Julie Eisenhower.

While in D.C., we are left to run on our own for two days. I jog around the monument grounds and sightsee. I also manage to step in a knee-deep hole and twist a leg. Finally we are bussed over an hour to a track in Maryland, McGruder High School, where we are welcomed with lemonade and spectators. I manage to fall off the track and pull a muscle jogging.

Friday, August 18: I had a publicity jog with Senator Alan Cranston and Representative Byron. There were three network movie cameras and a dozen photographers and reporters to see us jog about 300 yards and pretend it was a race. Politics!

Sunday, August 20: We depart D.C. with small fanfare and gifts to the track women from the Frederick Jaycees who had staged our Olympic Trials. The flight is eight hours and we are too weary to be very excited when we arrive in Munich. Dazed is a better description. I had dared to think only a little of this moment during the past year of training, fearful of being disappointed. Now that I am really here I have to be careful not to let the deluge of experiences and impressions anaesthetize me out of the sheer inability to grasp it all, to cope with the excitement.

The village is beautiful. The women are housed in two large buildings of about 19 stories. I am on the fourth floor. We each have our own little room, bright and homey, complete with kitchen, bathroom, and balcony. The bathroom is the most amazing; it is prefabricated, fiberglass, like a little ship's bathroom.

I am thinking about my race. It is constantly tugging at my thoughts. It does not worry me or frighten me. I find that I can't wait!

The food could be called "bland international." It is of good quality and extraordinarily plentiful but only twice, with wieser schnitzel and rouladen, are we treated to a German national dish.

Monday, August 21: My first day in Munich and I am in a daze. The time change, five hours, makes it incredibly difficult to drag out of bed in the morning, staggers me with fatigue by afternoon, and leaves me unable to sleep at night.

The village environs do not present as much rampant color as did Mexico; not as many flags and banners and no balloons. But what color there is in the combination of blue and green with accents of orange which are the official colors and it is very effective. In Mexico the contours of the village were extremely unusual because of the pyramids that had been uncovered while excavating. The Munich designers outdid themselves in approximating this on the previously flat land by building twisting, curving walkways, elevated plazas, and underfoot, a variegated mosaic of paving stones. Throughout the area there appear unexpectedly waterfalls; some are typical, others strange and fanciful. The children who will live in this housing development should especially enjoy the imaginative decorations. A common direction one might be given would be to "follow the green pipe to building 84." Elevated water pipes have been blended into the overall picture by being painted the official colors and matched to various building blocks.

Tuesday, August 22: We are allowed certain hours to use the tracks. Our team must ride a bus to a club outside the village. Our first workout is scheduled from 8:30 to 11:30 in the morning. Horrible! That hour is bad enough but especially so when my body still thinks it's 3:30 in the morning. We all look like zombies for several days running around the track with our eyes closed.

Wednesday, August 23: I've decided not to try in the pre-Olympic competition but go to the stadium to try out the track and try to get used to the place. The stadium is beautiful. That ceiling—it is too strange and lovely to be called a mere roof—dominates the architecture with its peaks and curves of leaded glass. As I sit on the grass inside, the giant cranes holding the ceiling in suspension appear as some mythical dragon or the tall figurehead of a Viking ship; an appropriate evocative vision in an Olympic Games which have achieved almost supernatural dimension.

I am too excited to sleep tonight so I go to a discotheque in the city: my first venture out. It is very easy to ride the U Bahn—the subway—to most major points. I toss back beer and schnappes German style and find that it leaves a lively glow.

Saturday, August 26: The opening day is finally here and the air thick with happy excitement. The sun is hot and bright. Everyone is dressed early, as for a long-anticipated party. I sit on the plaza and watch the people. A group of Frenchmen strut by in parade dress, the rooster symbol on the breast pocket. From somewhere there comes a loud cack-o-doodle-do! Spaniards in their burgundy coats and straw hats crowsing and laughing like fools. The Frenchmen retort with pig noises but they are laughing, too. Everything seems right on this beautiful day.

We wait three hours on a field outside the stadium. This 45-minute parade of nations is an unmatched spectacle but can be backbreaking for the participants until we finally begin to move. Even now as I write this I feel an incredible thrill. We must have marched a good quarter-mile between throngs of people outside the stadium to what, for me, is the absolute epitome of the Olympic Games. In Mexico it was too overwhelming for me to fully comprehend and feel. Determined this time to gorge myself on sensation, sight, and sound, I turn up my senses and step into that amazing arena, from the shadow of the tunnel into a mass of color and sound, the spongy track under my feet, my knees weak. Is this the fascination, the magic of pageantry and ritual which has enraptured man since the beginnings of his collective existence? I know what it's all about now, a oneness with over 90,000 people in that stadium, the millions more I knew would be watching. It is a human experience that can never be duplicated. This must be one of the few times a human being can strive for a goal, often in loneliness and obscurity, yet finally know so resoundingly that he has achieved it.

There also is a slight fear, knowing that the next time I step onto that track I will be experiencing the physical test itself. Could it be this overwhelming? I hope not.

The musical program is extremely impressive, in this land of Wagner. It is a blend of national themes and classical ones. There is a distinct pagan element; the echo of sirens and cymbals, of Grecian arenas. There is one very strange, almost sinister chant, like the one in the movie "2001." I do not like the tune chosen for the United States: "When the Saints Come Marching In." Maybe it was meant to be an ironic comment from the world community.

Thursday, August 31: The days are blending into one another now and the waiting is becoming dreadful. The air of the village is palpable; charged with tension and competitive energy. Seeing the swimmers getting on with it, finally, and winning medals is becoming too much.

Monday, September 4: Francie Larrieu, Doris Brown and I ride an airless, hot and overcrowded bus to the warmup track for our 1500 meter heats. I stagger out, nauseated and extremely nervous. As I get into my warmup I feel perfect, to my surprise, yet still have a sense of unreality that this mere physical effort is made confusingly out of proportion to all this preparation and waiting. Then I see Doris sitting on the grass by the track crying. She has sprained her ankle jogging her first steps and cannot run at all. We are told we don't need to report as early as the 30 minutes the officials have said. The big electronic board starts flashing lights for my heat but I wait 10 more minutes, then report inside the stadium. The official at the first checkpoint shows me my name, crossed off the list. I protest violently and am led to where the others are. They count every spike, they count our four numbers. I turn my back to change my shoes and they are all gone again. I run down the hall to the other end of the stadium and find them again. I have dreams like this sometimes only I call them nightmares. Please just let us run! I try to stride on the small area we are allowed. I fidget and tug at the glasses I wear for the first time, so I can see lap times on the scoreboard. This race must be paced carefully.

The first heat starts. The Russian world record holder, Ludmila Bragina, is clicking off laps at a pace no woman has ever run for 1500 meters. The rest of us mill around and glance anxiously at the scoreboard, uselessly wishing her to slow down. No effect. She breaks the world record. I walk onto the track in a strange, numb state. I am inordinately shook



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by the performance in the first heat. What is there left to do but just run. I remember instead that the last time I ran this race in the Olympic Trials I was dreadfully sick afterwards. That's no better to think about. The next thing I am aware of is a German voice saying auf die platze and in a startling instant I see my toe on the line and there's no stopping this thing now, then the catharsis of the gun and it's all okay now, all I have to do is run. I must be fourth to qualify, I am fourth. I barely feel the tiredness in my legs, just a glow of satisfaction, a commitment for the next race.

Tuesday, September 5: It is a day of terrible shock, the malignance of violence spreading even to here.

Wednesday, September 6: There is no competition today. Violence must be refuted but we will remember the dead first. I have an odd mixture of feelings during the memorial ceremony. I wonder at the blatant politicizing of Avery Brundage who has the heartlessness to compare the Rhodesian affair—his personal little defeat—to the earth-shaking tragedy that has just been enacted. When will the stupidity cease?

Thursday, September 7: Upon awakening it is hard to realize that I will be running again at 2:15. I go for a relaxed jog in the morning, eat lightly and carefully. Even as I go through the preparations I do not think about the race. The warmup is relaxed and easy. Again it is clear what must be done. I opt not to wear my glasses, I don't want to know lap times. To qualify for the final I will have to run so much faster than I ever planned that to see those times clicking off will only scare me, each lap faster than I have ever paced a 1500 meters before. Relaxing under the stadium after check-in I study the other women, all runners I have forced myself to recognize and think about individually even though I have never run against them. I, like most other American runners, am rarely given the chance to compete against these extremely competitive and experienced Europeans.

As we walk down the long corridor single-file, the astounding thought is that these women have ALL run three or more seconds faster than I have ever run. Okay, so now it's time for me to run that kind of time. This calibre of competition is long overdue anyway.

Out on the track we wait almost 10 minutes. The sun is very warm, I feel very comfortable. As usual the stadium is full to overflowing, a sea of color and faces. There are 80,000 people here! The section by the starting line seems to contain some friends because they are calling my name. My first reaction is to ignore it but when I look towards them and smile and wave I suddenly feel vastly relieved that there are some people there who care what I do out here and who are sharing it with me. I'm actually beginning to enjoy this!

This time I am on the line and prepared for the starting command, not trying to hold it off, pretend I'm not there. The pace is entirely too relaxed. In the second lap I have the absurd thought that if they're running as fast as I thought they would then I must be some kind of superstar to improve this much. The eventual bronze and silver medal winners are in this heat and have rejected the lead. Unfortunately, I should have worn my glasses after all. I stay up in the pack, in good position without running wide. They call out the lap times first in German, then French, then English. I don't see any Frenchwomen in this race, what is this! By the time I hear the atrociously slow time of 2:17 we are already into the turn but I take off and we run an unbearably fast third lap, accelerating from a 70 to a 64 which leaves me without any legs coming down the stretch. As the pack moves away from me into the finish I am already making resolves to taste more international competition before I hang up my spikes. The time I run here, 4:12.8 was ranked sixth in the world last year, but gets me nowhere here. Francie Larrieu, who ran 4:11 in the preliminary, runs 4:15 and does not qualify. I take my spikes off on the grass of the infield, hating to leave, wanting another chance.

Two days later Francie, Doris and I watch the final from the stands and look ruefully at the incredible times. We are still at least a year behind the progress of the Europeans and we resolve to set our goals beyond beating each other, to this kind of excellence, and hope fervently for the chance to run against these people more often than every four years.

I leave the Olympic Village and Munich before the closing ceremony. I know that for me there won't be any unforgettable moments here as there were in Mexico with the dash through the guards onto the track, the soft whisper of straw hats as the lights were extinguished, then the flare of fireworks and München 72, and the spontaneous run around the track, holding hands with other athletes. There cannot be that kind of innocent joy here, we have shared too much sadness, too much confusion and bitterness. It is best to leave our ideals intact, and not go through the motions here.

My own feelings are still mixed about these and future Olympic Games. It must be a reflection of the confusion we feel to the roots of our society, this lack of agreement as to the value and meaning of these Games and our part in them. The place of nationalism must be redefined, the emphasis redirected to the competition of athlete between athlete. If anything is eliminated, it ought to be the overweening press, looking for only the sensational. I feel much less political now than I did three months ago when I arrived in Munich, much less determined that my views about the war, about other world issues be forced on anyone. What the Games represent should be remembered by organizers, officials, athletes, spectators and press alike, and continued in that spirit without everyone bringing in his personal issues. If the Games truly represent peace, unity and brotherhood in fair and friendly competition, can that perhaps be enough?

NFL Predictions

Lions, Steelers To Prevail

By Neil Koepke
(News Sports Writer)

The Detroit Lions and Pittsburgh Steelers, two teams desperate for a divisional championship, take the field today in an effort to gain sole possession of first place in their respective conference divisions.

Detroit, tied for the NFC Central lead with Green Bay, takes on the Packers in the Wisconsin city, while the Steelers and Browns, deadlocked in the AFC Central, square off in Pittsburgh.

The Lions have not won a division title since 1957 and the Steelers have yet to finish first in their 39-year history in the NFL.

In previous meetings this season, Green Bay rallied to edge the Lions 24-23 while the Browns did the same thing to upset Pittsburgh, 26-24.

With two games remaining after today, both teams just about have to come up with victories or say goodbye to first place for this year. Losses will not eliminate either team but make it all the more difficult in the next two weeks.

The Steelers and Browns have one advantage in that the loser of Saturday's showdown will still be in good position to gain the AFC wild-card playoff berth. The New York Jets would be their main challenger.

Detroit and Green Bay have things a little rougher because Minnesota Vikings are just one game behind and are very much alive in the playoff scramble. The Vikings and Packers clash next week.

first in their division. Dallas was upset by 49ers Thanksgiving evening but will be ready to bounce back.

Miami (11-0) Over New England (2-9): Dolphins are three victories away from perfect season and will have no problems whatsoever knocking off the Patriots, a team they clobbered 52-0 in an earlier meeting.

New York Jets (6-5) Over New Orleans (2-8): Jets still can gain a wild card berth in the AFC playoffs but have to win all their remaining games. Saints rose to the occasion last week to upset Los Angeles but this week things will be back to normal.

Baltimore (4-7) Over Buffalo (3-8): Colts have won two straight behind quarterback Marty Domres, who threw for three touchdowns in last Sunday's shutout over Patriots. Bills' main threat is O. J. Simpson, who went over the 1,000 mark in yards gained last week.

Oakland (7-3-1) Over San Diego (4-6-1): Raiders hold 2½-game lead over Kansas City and a victory will wrap up the AFC West title. Chargers have won two in a row and can cause problems. Oakland has put things together in recent weeks and it doesn't appear anything will stop them from clinching the division crown.


Kansas City (5-8) Over Denver (3-8): Both teams are hard to figure and as a result this is anyone's contest. Chiefs need a miracle to regain title but after two losses in as many weeks Kansas City should rebound. However, it certainly won't surprise us if they don't.

New York Giants (7-4) Over Cincinnati (6-5): Bengals have

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