

KATHIMERINI

Spectators' protest

The vast majority of the Greek spectators who were on the stands of the Olympic Stadium on Thursday evening do not believe that sprinters Costas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou are innocent. Most will concede that the two athletes and their coach Christos Tzekos did everything they could to dodge the drugs tests and that the supposed motorbike crash was a badly staged cover-up. Finally, they believe that the reckless and provocative behavior of Kenteris and Thanou caused serious damage to themselves and the country, casting a long shadow over an otherwise successful event.

But this did not prevent them from shouting "Kenteris, Kenteris" from their stands. Their protests had more than one object. They were not so much prompted by Kenteris's withdrawal from the Games, but by his unprecedented disgrace — which people felt went too far. First of all, the IOC spokesman did not hesitate to hold up the accreditations of the two athletes before the eyes of hundreds of journalists as if their documents were the trophies of a bloody combat — despite the widespread impression that the IOC is vulnerable to outside pressures that result in the selective enforcement of doping controls.

However, protests were also aimed elsewhere: firstly, at those who joined in the chorus of condemnation at home. Turning the spotlight on the issue is one thing but seeking to humiliate the protagonists is quite another.

Most people believe that Kenteris and Thanou are old enough to be held accountable for their actions. They do not see them as the victims of some dark conspiracy. No doubt Kenteris's victory in Sydney upset the US domination in the 200-meters competition. It is no coincidence that following his triumph Kenteris became a target for the IOC and the Western media. However, this is only one side of the story. The other is that his behavior gave his foes a perfect excuse to attack him.

Greeks feel the condemnation of Kenteris is to a certain extent unfair. Perhaps it is because they are convinced that the use of performance-enhancing drugs is the rule rather than the exception among top-class athletes. World records and medals are not just the product of hard training — chemistry also has its share. These days, doped athletes are the ones who are caught (and the ones who get all the humiliation). Anyone who uses last-generation drugs that are still undetectable is a hero. And so is any athlete who enjoys protection from those on high.

As things stand, public skepticism is justified even if IOC chief Jacques Rogge is making sincere efforts to curb drug use.

The bitterness felt by the Greek people and their emotional protest on Thursday is not unjustified. But as the hosts, they should have avoided aiming the boos at the competitors.

Post-Olympic venues

Most Olympic venues are to be handed over for "private use" (rented or sold to private businessmen), according to a debate Thursday, which was led by Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis and attended by Economy Minister Giorgos Alogoskoufis and Alternate Culture Minister Fanni Pali-Petralia.

But the meeting focused on intentions rather than decisions (which are probably going to be harder to reach than expected).

COMMENTARY Indeed, if these venues had been constructed according to the original deadlines and budget in a way that facilitates post-Olympic use, the government would now face less of a problem in making plans for their cost-efficient maintenance.

The Athens 2004 Organizing Committee itself (and in some cases even the International Olympic Committee) had expressed reservations about the construction of certain Olympic venues as "heavy" structures rather than the "lighter" — and cheaper — prefabricated alternative.

But there is no point in postmortems. The main concern now is to find the best use for the venues so that their maintenance does not burden state coffers and they do not fall apart from lack thereof.

However, the handover of venues for "private use" is still theoretical as the purchase or renting of a venue is riddled by legal obstacles.

50 YEARS AGO TODAY

SELECTION: MICHALIS KATSIGERAS

August 28, 1954

CREATIVE STATE-ISM: The Public Power Corporation (PPC) yesterday replied to questions from the committee set up to study the exploitation of the Ptolemaida site. PPC emphasized delays in beginning construction of the two new power projects in Megdova, by a year, and the Acheolos, by three years, combined with the increased demand for electric power, called for the construction of a thermal electric plant of 80,000 kilowatts in Ptolemaida (...). The total outlay for the construction of the plant, which will be completed by spring of 1958, as well as additions to the transmission grid, is estimated at 16,540,000 dollars, of which 11,380,000 will be in foreign exchange and 5,160,000 in drachmas. PPC has undertaken to cover the cost from its reserves. (...) The Ptolemaida factor will supply the Athens region with 62,500 kilowatts. **G. ROUBANIS:** Berne, 28 - During today's European athletics championships here (...) Georgios Roubanis jumped 4.25 meters in his first attempt at the pole vault, putting him in sixth place. (Editor's note: Roubanis won an Olympic medal in 1956 in Melbourne.)

H KAΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ

Ethinharou Makariou & 2 Falireos, Athens 185-47 GREECE ■ Tel: 210.4808000, Fax: 210.4808460

KATHIMERINI

English Edition

PUBLISHED BY I.H.T. - KATHIMERINI S.A.

Editor NIKOS KONSTANDARAS

Regional director ALBERTO J. CANO PORQUERES

E-mail: kath-ih@email.kathimerini.gr

Call 210.4808222 to order a subscription

SUBSCRIPTION RATES	12 months	EUROS	407,00
	6 months	EUROS	204,00
	3 months	EUROS	102,00

New subscribers **47% off**, students **68% off** the cover price

MILESTONES & FOOTNOTES

By NIKOS KONSTANDARAS

Combustible emotions

These Olympics would have been less than perfect if the Greek people had not managed to break the tyranny of impeccable behavior that marked the first week of the Games. Defying all expectations, Athens was ready, the opening ceremony set a new standard for such events with its inspiration and perfect execution, the sports events were running along perfectly. Transportation was great. There were no strikes and no demonstrations. Even the weather behaved, with August pulling its punches and not reaching anywhere near the heat and mighty winds of other years. Athenian drivers, the unruliest of all Greeks, were conforming to new, stiffer traffic restrictions and were keeping out of designated Olympic lanes. In fact, where the Greeks were most noticeable was where they were absent, as in most of the seats in many stadiums during the first week. Those who were there, and those who could be seen flitting about the city, were like pale shadows of what our visitors expected. It was as if (like the normally exuberant American athletes who were suddenly subdued to avoid attracting attention) we were so well-behaved as to appear unnatural. The Stepford Greeks even cheered the American team at the opening ceremony on August 13. For our visitors and the world's television viewers, this must have been most disconcerting and a little disappointing — a little like going to the jungle and not seeing any wild animals. On the one hand everyone was happy that they didn't get eaten, but they must have also felt a little cheated after the breathless tales of other travelers and journalists.

It was left to the Athenian taxi drivers to keep misbehaving. Maybe the temptation was too great for them to do otherwise as they found themselves in the middle of so many unwary customers. Most of them probably behaved for better than usual, sharing the pride of a city that was suddenly transformed for the pleasure of visitors and residents alike. But enough of them acted like sharks in the middle of a school of fat tuna, giving those who survived encounters with them something that they could proudly narrate to their grandchildren back home one day — like stories from a war. For the rest of our guests, though, they would go home with no (figurative) scars, with medals won only for sporting prowess and not bravery. It was like everyone was at a party but the host was acting like the butler, as if he was filling in for someone else. But suddenly, in a few swift, bold movements,

the Greek spirit for drama burst through and took over the situation. And it happened with an intensity befitting the Olympic homecoming, a moment which put Greece and every Greek right in the center of the world's stage. On the one hand, it was as if the Greeks, after making such an effort to get everything right in time for the Games in the face of endless negative press, and after seeing that all was indeed going superbly, decided it was time that they took kicked off their shoes and enjoyed the party. And then the sport began. On Saturday, August 21, one week into the Games, the crowd made its first starring appearance. The setting was perfect. Pyrras Dimas, the charismatic young ethnic Greek from Albania who had signaled the dawn of Greece's athletic achievements with a gold medal in Barcelona in 1992, was waging his last battle in pursuit of an unprecedented fourth victory in four Olympiads. Now 33 years old and plagued by injuries and five operations, he went for gold in his very last try and, in slow motion, collapsed under 207.5 kilograms, falling backward onto the floor. He got up slowly, undid his laces, left his wrestling shoes a little to the right of the fallen weights and walked off the stage barefoot. It was the end of an era. He won bronze. A day earlier, Greece's first medal of these Games, also bronze, had been tainted by claims that its winner, weightlifter Leonidas Sampanis, had been found with an abnormal level of testosterone, a banned hormone. On the morning of Dimas's contest, a tearful Sampanis had sworn, on the lives of his two little children, that he had not taken any banned substance. This claim (which did not save him from being stripped of his medal) had turned public opinion firmly in his favor. In this light, Pyrras Dimas's dramatic farewell after a noble battle set the scene for what happened at the medal ceremony that night. As he was crowned with an olive wreath and awarded the bronze medal, the crowd that had packed the hall erupted into chants and cheers. It hijacked the ceremony, forcing the silver and gold medal winners to wait a good five minutes before they too were crowned. But although Georgia's George Asanidze (gold) and Belarus's Andrei Rybakov (silver) at first seemed taken aback as tears welled up in Dimas's eyes and he bowed his head and patted his heart in acknowledgement of the thanks he was being given, you could almost see the two who had beaten him wondering if they too would win such glory one day. Very

few Greeks — in the hall and at home — must have had dry eyes. Dimas has been part of our lives over the past 12 years. But there was also a sense of rebellion, of reaction to the humiliation of Sampanis, who had won silver medals in the past two Games. Coming after the shock of the country's two top sprinters — Costas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou — pulling out of the Games after missing a mandatory doping test, and the public's anger at them, the Sampanis story and his tearful call to the public not to abandon him, began to create a backlash. By now the denials of those accused of using illegal substances and the claims of some news media that they were the victims of unnamed conspirators had begun to insinuate its way into the public debate. (The motorcycle crash that Kenteris and Thanou said they had been involved in may have won them scorn across the world, but despite increasing suspicion against them, it kept them in the hospital for five days and so spared them from being caught using illegal substances, if they did use them.) The display of adulation for Dimas seemed to carry that message as well: Enough. Hands off our heroes. Then, two days later, on Monday, another crowd picked up the baton from the weightlifting fans. But this time they jeered, they did not cheer. In a gymnastics event, they held up the horizontal bar final for about six minutes with boos and whistles after disagreeing with the low mark judges gave Russia's Alexei Nemov. Finally, Nemov's gestures to the crowd to calm down allowed the event to continue. The genie was out of the bottle: People power could be used not only to applaud but also to taunt and to deride. The awe that the Olympics invoke was being brought down to the individual level — people who felt strongly about something were expressing themselves, and this feeling grew and multiplied through the crowd until it took on a life of its own. By this time, several Greek athletes had come out in support of Kenteris and Thanou. In unique Greek style, what many athletes and journalists now appeared to be saying was that Kenteris and Thanou had been singled out while other athletes, especially Americans, had not been persecuted. This suggested that seeing as everyone uses dope, then the Greeks should get away with it too. This was not what most people thought, but it was certainly said loud and often by some. By Thursday night, several events had con-

spired to create an explosive situation in the Olympic Stadium. The unanimous outrage at Kenteris and Thanou had begun to erode. The way in which the IOC had stripped Sampanis of his medal (not giving him a three-month grace period that the Greeks had requested) and unverified reports that at least some American athletes had not been tested, encouraged the sense of victimization that we slip into at times of insecurity. The International Olympic Committee was seen as having been merciless and arrogant in dealing with the Greek athletes. What it did with others was not part of this equation, of course, because whenever we reaffirm our victim complex we turn our backs on the world. So there was a sense that it did not matter what the rest of the world did or saw, we had bowed our heads over Kenteris and Thanou and were not going to do so any more. Add to this that many of the people in the stadium on Thursday had bought their tickets months ago in the expectation that they would be watching Kenteris defend his title in the 200-meter sprint and you can begin to smell the combustible gases. What happened next, when the athletes came out for this final, can be understood even if it cannot be excused.

The cheers for the absent Kenteris and the boos for the IOC and their hypocrisy over doping (according to various explanations given by some present) was, in reality, a distraction and an insult to the runners. Whatever rich range of feelings the Greeks who packed the stadium were trying to express, it was the runners who had to put up with the hysteria. After going to so much trouble to prepare Athens, running up what may be a generation's worth of debt, working so hard to make the Olympic city a safe place in an unsafe world, after holding an impeccable and richly symbolic Games, it was absurd that the mock heroism of bad behavior for these five or six minutes should stain these Olympics. And yet it appeared the Kenteris-Thanou incident that had cast its grim shadow over the start of the Games would just keep getting darker and longer. But what the crowd destroys, the crowd can also build. Last night, when the three Americans who won gold, silver and bronze in what might have been Kenteris's race were crowned and given their medals, the packed stadium clapped and cheered and stood for the winners' national anthem. It almost made the previous night's madness worthwhile. And we certainly gave everyone something to remember.

S O U T H E A S T E R N E U R O P E

EU executive arm to present report on Turkey entry talks

Commission to release recommendation, impact study on October 6

BRUSSELS (AFP) - The European Commission said yesterday it would say whether it would recommend opening EU accession negotiations with Turkey on October 6.

EU leaders are due to decide in December whether or not to begin accession negotiations with Ankara based on progress made by Turkish leaders in the area of individual liberties and respect for human rights.

Jean-Christophe Filori, a spokesman for Enlargement Commissioner Guenter Verheugen, said that under the currently agreed-upon timetable, the Commission would release a report on October 6 that would contain a recommendation and an impact study.

That process is similar to the one used for the admission of 10 new EU members on May 1.

The Commission report will be presented by outgoing European Commission President Romano Prodi, who prepared it, but his successor, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, will be also briefed on it, the spokesman said.

The report will then be submitted to EU foreign ministers who are expected to discuss it during one of their sessions after early October. Last April, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer signed into law a number of constitutional amendments aimed at bringing his country closer to EU standards of democracy.

Denktash not to stand for office again

ANKARA (AFP) - Rauf Denktash, leader of the breakaway Turkish state in northern Cyprus, will not stand for re-election next April, the veteran leader announced yesterday.

"It's my final decision," the veteran leader, who has been president since the foundation of the statelet in 1983, said. "It's not right that the same person always holds the same post. Change is a good thing." Denktash, 80, was a leading figure in Cypriot politics in the 1960s and has been in charge of the republic, recognized only by Turkey, since the Turkish invasion of the north of the island in 1974.

Unlike the Turkish government and Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Talat, Denktash was vehemently opposed to a United Nations reunification plan, which was put to the vote last April in both sides of the island, with the Greeks voting against and the Turks voting massively in favor.

His opposition saw him lose the support of Ankara and the United States, which were both in favor of the plan, and let it be known that they no longer considered him to be a representative leader of the Turkish-Cypriot community.

Denktash bitterly said he could no longer carry on as president when "things do not go as I want them to."

NATO: Kosovo security bolstered

PRISTINA (AFP) - NATO's commander in Kosovo said yesterday security had improved in the mainly Albanian province since bloody interethnic riots in March that left at least 19 people dead.

"There are no indications of new violence. To the contrary... the security situation has improved significantly over the past few months," German General Holger Kammerhoff said.

Kammerhoff said the almost 18,000-strong NATO force in Kosovo (KFOR) had

been equipped with more armored vehicles in the aftermath of the violence, and the peacekeepers were undergoing crowd and riot control training.

KFOR was also more adept at reacting to volatile situations after streamlining operational procedures between the 36 contributing nations, he said.

"When we are meeting the local population, I believe that they have understood that what happened in March really damaged Kosovo's image," Kammerhoff said.



Demonstrators chant anti-American slogans as they display pictures of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr during a demonstration in Istanbul, Turkey, yesterday. The demonstrators were protesting the standoff at the revered Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf and the US occupation of Iraq.

BRIEFS

Four dead, one injured in Turkish factory collapse

ISTANBUL (AP) - A factory being built in central Turkey collapsed yesterday, killing four workers and injuring another, the Anatolia news agency reported. Rescuers pulled out five workers trapped under the rubble following the collapse of the building in the central Anatolian city of Eskisehir, but only one survived, Anatolia said. The worker was being treated at a local hospital. There was no word on his condition. Authorities suspect a problem with a crane and other construction mistakes likely contributed to the collapse, Anatolia reported.

Entire bridge stolen in southern Bosnia

SARAJEVO (AP) - In what could qualify for "Ripley's Believe It or Not," seven thieves stole an entire 13-meter bridge near the southern Bosnian town of Mostar, police said yesterday. Over several days, the group dismantled the metal bridge built during the Austro-Hungarian Empire some 150 years ago, transported the parts to a local junkyard and sold them, a police statement said. While it happened in a remote mountainous region, local villagers saw the thieves loading parts of the bridge into vans and alerted police yesterday. The seven men were arrested and are being held pending a decision by a prosecutor. Without disclosing their names, police said the Gypsies, or Roma, sold the metal parts for 280 convertible marks (\$170 or 140 euros).

Nastase. The governing Social Democrat Party in Romania yesterday officially nominated Prime Minister Adrian Nastase as its candidate in November's presidential elections. "I am convinced we are going to win the legislative elections and that I will win the presidential vote," Nastase said after a unanimous vote by party members here. He said their aim would be to consolidate progress achieved in Romania over the last four years. A recent opinion poll by CURS Institute showed Nastase would win the presidential election with 43 percent of the vote. (AFP)

Rejected. Serbia's Parliament late Thursday rejected a proposal by nationalist allies of Slobodan Milosevic to keep a lawsuit alive against NATO over the 1999 bombing of the former Yugoslavia. The proposal was submitted last month by Serbia's opposition Radical Party after Belgrade indicated it may abandon the suit amid efforts to improve relations with NATO and the EU. It needed a simple majority vote in the 250 seat assembly. But after a heated three-day Parliament debate, only 102 lawmakers supported the move, 58 were against and 50 abstained from voting. The other legislators were absent from the session. (AFP)