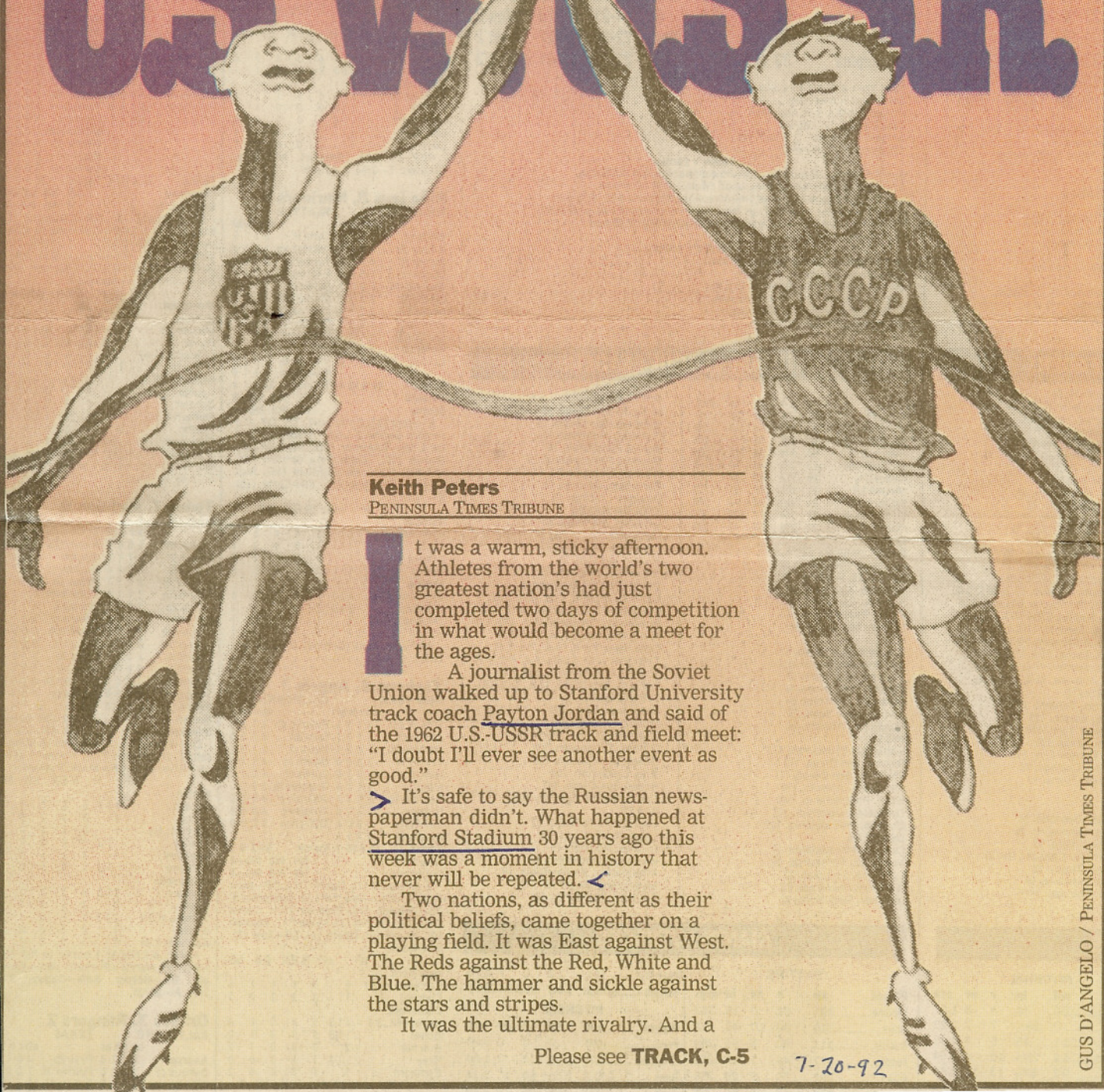


It was 1962. It was the Cold War. It was the greatest track meet of all time. And it was the ...

U.S. VS. U.S.S.R.



Keith Peters

PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

It was a warm, sticky afternoon. Athletes from the world's two greatest nations had just completed two days of competition in what would become a meet for the ages.

A journalist from the Soviet Union walked up to Stanford University track coach Payton Jordan and said of the 1962 U.S.-USSR track and field meet: "I doubt I'll ever see another event as good."

> It's safe to say the Russian newspaperman didn't. What happened at Stanford Stadium 30 years ago this week was a moment in history that never will be repeated. <

Two nations, as different as their political beliefs, came together on a playing field. It was East against West. The Reds against the Red, White and Blue. The hammer and sickle against the stars and stripes.

It was the ultimate rivalry. And a

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two-day crowd of 155,000 — the largest ever to watch a track and field meet in this country — turned out to view the spectacle.

For a brief time, the Cold War thawed. Hated enemies became close friends. Americans stood and actually sang the "Star-Spangled Banner". Peoples cheered. And they cried.

"It was a wonderful moment," said Jordan, the organizational genius behind what many have called the greatest track and field meet in U.S. history. "It had more value, in that respect, than any Olympics I've ever been to. <

> "I constantly hear people say it was the best event they've been to in their lifetime," said the silver-haired Jordan, now 75 but as physically vibrant as ever. "You'll never see it again. It was a one-time thing."

Jordan is correct, for another event is about to take place that will assure the U.S.-U.S.S.R. meet its permanent place in history.

When the athletes march into the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona this week for the opening ceremonies of the 1992 Summer Games, the Soviet Union will be only an athletic shadow of its once powerful self.

Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania have separated from the old URS (Soviet Union), whose 11 allied leftovers — the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — will join with former Soviet republic Georgia in competing under the Unified Team flag.

> The old U.S.-Soviet rivalry is as dead as communism, and there is no hope of resurrecting it. It has gone the way of the Berlin Wall and the sawdust high jump pit.

> "You'll never see it again," Jordan said. "There is no similar circumstances — internationally — at this period of time. The CIS won't have the clout or unity as before. Their teams will never be as dominant."

While the 1962 meet at Stanford wasn't the last meeting between the two superpowers, its successors never matched its intensity, the spectators' enthusiasm or the camaraderie between athletes.

A year later, the event shifted to the Soviet Union. It returned to the U.S. in 1964, where 40,000 saw the rivals compete in Los Ange-

les. In 1971, a combined Soviet-Commonwealth team ran against the Americans in Berkeley. The final U.S.-Soviet dual was back in Berkeley in 1978, but fewer than 22,000 turned out.

> "It all seemed to go downhill after Stanford," said Jon Hendershott, associated editor of the Mountain View-based Track & Field News magazine and a former national track writer of the year. "In 1962, it was the Big Red Menace, us versus them. It was long gone by the '70s. The desire and need for international dual meets just died."

Quickening the demise of such a grand event was the European circuit and start up of the Grand Prix system. Then there was the difficulty and cost of transporting whole teams from Europe.

> Now, there's a World Championships every two years in addition to the Olympics, giving many more athletes a chance to compete against the very best. In addition, the track athlete's loyalty has changed as much as the world's political climate. It's the free-enterprise system for all, on a world scale. World recordholders like Carl Lewis and Sergey Bubka command salaries never dreamed of in 1962.

> There is no time for dual meets. Nor is it profitable for the individual athletes. The call of one's country has been replaced by the call from rich meet promoters.

Thirty years ago, however, the U.S.-Russia dual was *the* big meet. The East Germans had not yet evolved into a power, leaving the Americans and Soviets as the world's most dominant track and field powers.

"It really was a summit meeting back then," Hendershott said.

> Surprisingly, the 1962 meet came about as a way to solve a budget deficit in the Stanford Athletic Department. The 1960 Stanford football team was moribund, compiling an 0-10 record and the department was \$100,000 in the red. <

> The late Al Masters, then the athletic director, approached Jordan and asked if a track meet could create a gate.

> "I said, 'Sure.' Then he said, 'Do you think we could get the Russians here?'" Jordan said.

Jordan, of course, did.
> As a track star at Southern Cal in the late 1930s, Jordan received



FILE / PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

One of the major highlights U.S.-USSR track and field meet at Stanford was Valeriy Brumel of Russia setting a world record with a leap of 7-5 in the high jump.

a letter from a Soviet athlete asking for some training tips. That athlete, Gabriel Korobkov, later became head coach of the Soviet track and field team. <

When Jordan took a U.S. team to Moscow in 1958, he met Korobkov — and a friendship was struck. It was Korobkov whom Jordan contacted for the 1962 meet.

> Following long planning sessions to make sure everything would run smoothly, Stanford put up \$125,000 to cover the cost of bringing the Soviet team to the West Coast for the first time. History was in the making.

"This community went for it hook, line and sinker," Jordan said. "They embraced the meet and the people."

Soviet workouts attracted crowds of 5,000 to Angell Field and Stanford Stadium. After all, it was a chance to see the "Reds," as they were described by the media during their stay. Peninsula residents, however, discovered that these strangers from behind the Iron Curtain were hardly cold-

hearted individuals. <

> "People sat here and saw they were decent human beings," Jordan said, recalling the moment when Soviet woman shot putter Tamara Press, unable to bend down to receive her gold medal, picked up AAU official Howard Berlinger and gave him a big kiss as he placed the medal around her neck. <

> There were other memorable moments during the two-day meet. Soviet high jumper Valeriy Brumel breaking his own world record with a momentous leap of 7-5; American Hal Connolly bettering his world record in the hammer with a 231-10; 1960 Olympic triple gold medalist Wilma Rudolph winning the 100 meters and anchoring the U.S. women to victory in the 400-meter relay; and future NFL star Bob Hayes winning the men's 100 meters.

But the best was saved for last. The planned closing ceremony was to have been a lineup of the two teams, parallel across one end of the football field. Flag-bearers

John Thomas of the U.S. and Viktor Tsibulenko of the USSR then were to lead the teams off and exit at the open end of the stadium.

> With a band blaring a march and the teams leaving to a standing ovation, Tsibulenko turned to Thomas and said in broken English: "We go all the way around, yes?" <

> Thomas nodded and the teams headed for a victory lap. Then something wonderful happened. American and Russian men and women began slipping arm through arm, putting arms around each other's shoulders and intertwining the white USA uniforms with the red and blue of the CCCP.

> They no longer were in separate lines. Instead, they were two groups of great athletes marching together.

It was an emotional scene as the 81,000 spectators stood and applauded. Many were in tears. They had all witnessed something special, something historic.

< Little did anyone realize that it never would happen again. >