

Not a good year for Swiss Olympic hopes : first Albertville, now Barcelona

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Not a good year for Swiss Olympic hopes

First Albertville, now Barcelona

Switzerland's participants in the Albertville winter Olympics went from one disappointment to another. But did their summer colleagues really do as badly in Barcelona as some have made out?

Let's imagine that Othmar Müller von Blumencron had saved Switzerland's honour at Barcelona. This yachtsman – a German speaker with a Swiss passport – was little known before these summer Olympics, but when Switzerland's main medal hopes, Peter Steinmann and Werner Günthör, failed – all bets were laid on the one horse still in the race.

But the Swiss team in Barcelona did in fact obtain 17 diplomas, which means 17 places in the first eight; even if an actual medal proved elusive until the very end, this was far better than expected. And finally it was tennis professional Marc Rosset – thought rather uncouth by many – who had to pull the coals out of the fire on behalf of an increasingly frustrated nation of sportslovers. True, his preparations for the Olympics and his general attitude had been inadequate – he had told interviewers straight out that his position in the World Cup and the Davis Cup was more important to him than the Olympic Games – all that was pushed into the background when he got the medal; as was the fact that tennis in Barcelona did not really excite much interest. The main thing was – finally a medal for Switzerland, and a gold at that!

Even before the games were over the first experts were analysing the Swiss team's performance. Sports federations, journalists and other experts were busy pointing out that original hopes had been pitched too high, that the performance of Swiss sportsmen and sportswomen was the true expression of a country made flabby by prosperity, that at six hundredths of a second away from third place the quadruple scullers had really had bad luck, that the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, had robbed Werner Günthör of a certain medal with its warmed up drug scare, etcetera, etcetera.

There was probably a grain of truth in all these arguments, but then the question arises of whether all this ultra-

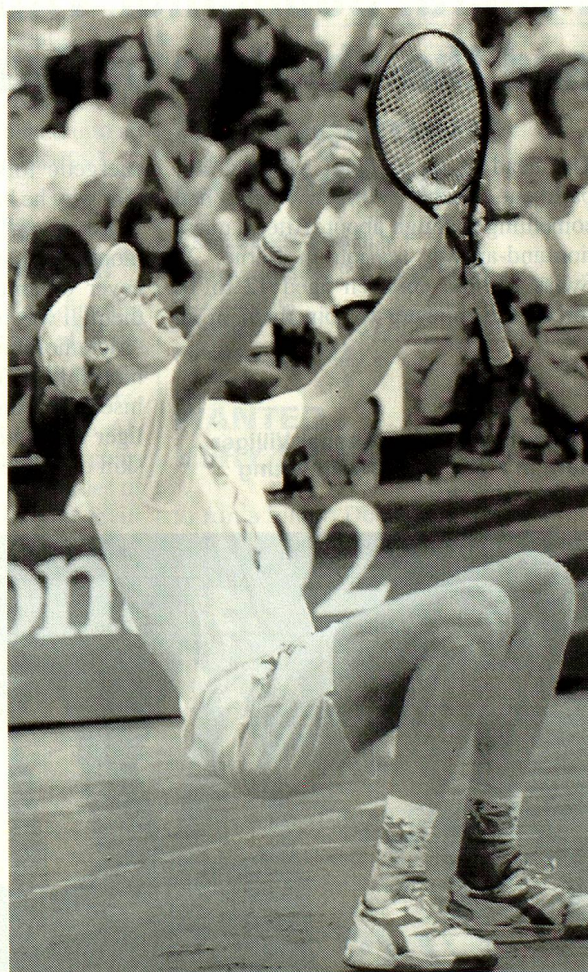
serious analysis is not a bit pointless. Switzerland has never been particularly bitten by summer sports, and in any case coincidence and surprise are always dominant features of sports competitions – witness Denmark's upset victory in this year's European Football Championship. And in any case most people back home would have been quite happy enough if Werner Günthör had in fact won his gold medal.

For the truth is that before the Olympic Games the Swiss shot-putter was the only member of the Swiss team who was thought to be sure of his medal. Although one or two more were hoped for, the rest were all probabilities: Peter Steinmann in the modern pentathlon, Hugo Dietsche on the rings and Eric Born for judo – with the oarsmen and the equestrians coming up behind. It is difficult to judge just how much the drug accusations brought out by the German news magazine really weighed on Werner Günthör; the

athlete himself at least had the grace not to blame this entirely and declared that he had simply not been able to achieve a victory of which he really should have been capable.

And again let's imagine that the Commonwealth of Independent States had relied entirely on Sergei Bubka as its biggest and practically its only certainty of a medal. But although his victory was considered even more certain than that of Günthör, the Unified Team's pole vaulter did not go over the top a single time without touching. This sensational failure of the world record-holder in the pole vault may have brought but fickle comfort to Günthör and the Swiss team, but it showed that "we" were not alone. For "us" it just hurt more because "we" had been concentrating all "our" hopes on that one single competition.

René Lenzin



Marc Rosset – Switzerland's Olympic gold. (Photo: Keystone)