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Swiss Hopes for Serajevo

For the first time in their history, the Winter Olympics are to take place in Eastern Europe, that is to say, in Serajevo (central Yugoslavia), the Capital of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serajevo is 535 meters above sea level and its half-a-million population makes it the fourth largest city of Yugoslavia. All the competitions take place within a maximum radius of 30 kilometers from the city. Still, here and there serious doubts have been raised as to whether Serajevo is the right choice for Winter Olympics at all. Of course, minarets make for an exotic background, but the athletes would much rather have enough snow around and a foolproof transport system.

Switzerland is sending some 50 athletes to the Olympic center on the mountain river of Miljacka. Having failed to score enough points for admission to the Olympics, our tobogganers, speed skaters, biathlon competitors, and ice hockey players will this time stay at home. In other words, the Swiss Olympic team is made up exclusively of bobsleighters, skiers, and possibly one skater or the other.

The ski jumpers can hardly expect to win medals in Serajevo, unless our little Hansjoerg Sumi from Gstaad regains that top trim he used to be in when he ranked among the world's best. In the last two years, he has usually not got beyond short jumps.

The cross-country skiers number about 6 aces altogether. From the Grisons there are 3 successful women: Evy Kratzer from St. Moritz, and the Thomas sisters Cornelia and Karin (Pontresina), who, if everything works out fine, are likely to take places among the first twenty. The same is true of 3 men who presently belong to the

top cross-country skiers: Andy Gruenenfelder (Domat-Ems), Giachem Guidon (St. Moritz), and Konrad Hallenbarter (Obergoms) who, on March 8 this year, was the first Swiss to win Sweden's traditional 86-kilometer Wasa run.

Prospects are bright for our skiers. Our team, starring a number of potential medallists,



Erika Hess

will be competing from February 7 through 19, 1984. Ladies first, mind you, so, first and foremost Erika Hess from Grafenort! Triple World Champion that she is, one expects her to excel in the more technical disciplines. Too bad that her teammates are not quite there yet. Doris de Agostini, after winning the World Cup in the downhill race once more, has quit. Michela Figini, a 17-year old girl from Airolo (Tessin), or Schaffhausen's fair-haired Ariane Ehrat, or Maria Walliser (Toggenburg) would all be capable of taking over from her. Engelberg's Zoe Haas and Erika's cousin Monika Hess have not yet fulfilled their promises of success. Will they do it in Serajevo?

The men's team seems, on past experience, more promising than the women's team. To be more precise, they managed to catch up with and overtake the Austrian team last Winter and they will dispatch a large number of athletes to the Winter Olympics. Among them are: Conradin Cathomen, Peter Mueller, Franz Heinzer, Bruno Kernen, Toni Buerger, Urs Raeber, Pirmin Zurbriggen, Peter Luescher, Max Julen, Jacques Luethi, Hans Pieren and Joel Gaspoz. A tough cookie for the selectors, indeed, as in Bjelasnica only 4 athletes are eligible for each discipline.

Our bobsleighters are faced with exactly the same problems. The wider the choice, the more ticklish it is! There are 5 possible winners, but only 2 disciplines! These five are the steersmen Ekehard Fasser (European and World Champion of the 4-men bobsleigh in 1983), Ralph Pichler (World Champion of the 2-men bobsleigh), Olympic winner Erich Schaerer, ex-World Champion Silvio Giobellina, and Hans Hiltebrand. Hence, the preliminary elimination runs are certainly going to be a lot harder for the Swiss bobsleighters than the 2 Olympic meets, for which there is only one rival, though a tough one – the team from the GDR.

The Swiss hope that at least one or the other of our representatives will make it to the victory ceremonies. Our ice hockey players will certainly not since they will be competing at home in our national championship; nor will our skaters: Denise Biellmann, sad to say, belongs to the past.

Sepp Renggli