



Olympic Memories - Buses, Burgers, Frisbees ...and Sport.

Coverage of the Los Angeles Olympics was the biggest project AAP has ever mounted outside Australia. A total of 19 staffers set up base camp in the cavernous LA Convention Centre, and considering they flew there from our offices in Sydney, Melbourne, London, Brisbane, Hobart and Wellington their output was remarkably cohesive.

In fact, old games hands could not recall an Olympic or Commonwealth Games campaign which had operated so smoothly.

Five Coyote terminals (and a sixth for the New Zealand Press Association) gave the games staff a direct satellite link with the Sydney database, and for the first time the complete games file was issued from source, with the exception of results and medals snaps, which were handled from international agencies by a special Olympic desk in Sydney.

When the games were in full swing AAP's daily output from Los Angeles, including supplementary traffic from Australian and New Zealand newspaper correspondents, approached 60,000 words - the equivalent of a medium-sized novel - illustrated by up to 25 black and white pictures and three or more colour prints.

Gathering the words and pictures was less than the glamorous task supposed by colleagues and relatives. The 23 games sites covered an area the size of Belgium, and consequently much of the time was spent trekking through the jungle of freeways which make up much of the city.

The predicted traffic snarls never really eventuated, but the sheer distances covered ensured that the eight reporters and two

photographers saw as much bitumen as they did Olympic competition.

The 8000 press were ferried around in a fleet of yellow school buses, which might have been just the ticket for seven-year-olds in 1948, but for such upstanding citizens as the 190cm (6ft 3in) Gil Breikreutz and Howard Northey, and the much-burdened lensmen Russell McPhedran and Clive MacKinnon, they were mobile torture chambers.

The irrepressible Breikreutz, incidentally, pulled off one of the scoops of the games when he went for a training run with the secretive Robert de Castella two days before the marathon.

The outcome of the race is history, but what transpired on the road 48 hours before is not precisely known. Informed opinion is that Gil offered a few words of advice on the subject of fluid intake, on which he is something of an authority. Gil solemnly informed his colleagues that during the games he only had two beers a day - Coors and Budweiser.

Scoops apart, the production of editorial copy was an exercise in extremes. The reporters sat unsheltered in daytime temperatures of 35 degrees and more, while the sub-editors and copytakers were forced into a troglodyte existence inside the MPC (Main Press Centre) for up to 16 hours at a stretch.

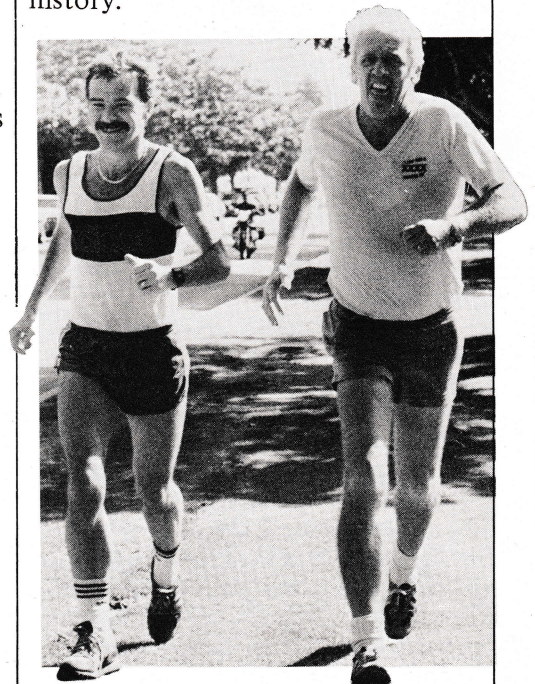
The air conditioning and artificial gloom of the place tended to do curious things to the brain. Two staffers found that occasional light relief was to be obtained by throwing a mini frisbee up and down the corridor outside the AAP newsroom, but the practice ceased when a misdirected throw landed in the offices of the

Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, whose stern-faced inhabitants refused to give it back.

The press centre also obliged workers to follow the strange dietary habits of the Southern Californians. The Games organising committee had awarded the sole MPC food franchise to a catering firm which offered a menu of polystyrene-burgers (\$3.25 US), apple danish (\$1.50), mayonnaise-infested parodies of a ham and salad roll (\$3.45) and that most loathsome of American concoctions, the hot dog (\$2.50).

By-lined AAP reports filled provincial and country papers around Australia, and at times pushed staff writers from the front pages of their own metropolitan dailies.

Five people worked double time to keep the picture circuit busy, and it took AAP's dramatic picture of heat-stroked marathon runner Gaby Andersen-Schies to persuade the Sydney Morning Herald to run a colour print on its front page for the first time in history.



Who's that running with Gil Breikreutz?

For the record, the AAP LA team was: Reporters Gil Breitzkreutz, John Coomber, Andrew Darby, Ian Dick, Winsor Dobbin, Howard Northey, Ian Telford and Joyce Thompson, photographers Clive MacKinnon and Russell McPhedran, sub-editors Doug Conway and Ross Gilligan, editor Peter Brown, engineer Glenn Smith, copytaker/operators Pat Byrne, Joyce Colbran and Beverly Dunn, picturegram operator Carmen Ranallo and manager Lyall Rowe. In Sydney, the desk was manned by David Eskell, Warwick Stanley, Stephen Dettre, Andrew MacSwan, Michael Visontay and Louise Williams.

Baudrunners Actually Run.

It might be described as not unusual for certain AAP employees to stagger wanly in to work on Monday after a weekend of over-indulgence; fourteen did so on Monday, August 6, but were like bears with sore legs rather than heads after a rare venture into big-time athletics.

Twenty-four hours before, AAP had fielded its first team in the annual City-to-Surf race, 14 kilometres of ups and downs between William Street and Bondi Beach. To the surprise of certain cynical colleagues, 14 would-be de Castellias showed up at the starting line, clad in fine white-and-blue "AAP BAUDRUNNERS" T-shirts donated by the company.

To the surprise of everyone, not excluding some of the 14, everyone finished the course and qualified for Certificates of Merit after beating the deadline of two hours 30 minutes.

For the record, AAP finished 23rd in its team section, for which the fastest three runners scored, in a combined time of 193 minutes 41 seconds.

First in was systems analyst Greg Kelly, who cantered home in a praiseworthy 62:24 not far ahead of finance journalist Ron Corben in 61:41. Third was Ron's colleague Bruce Hextall in 68:36. Trailing in behind came: Don York (Comco) 70:33, Bob Graham (System Control) 71:26, Danny Allsopp

(Comco Accounts) 72:44, John Lowing (Technical Services Manager) 80:02, Kevin Ricketts (Editorial) 80:42, Ric Purcell (Editorial) 81:15, James McCullough (Editorial) 81:45, Michael Graham (Sales) 86:23, Len Ryan (AAP-RES Manager) 94:56, Jim Shrimpton (Marketing) 99:14, John O'Sullivan (AAP-RES Sales) 122:49.

Coomber's News Drought Ends.

For a few days in July, New Zealand seemed like the centre of the universe.

The Wellington dateline dominated our news files and John Coomber's superb copy won unprecedented bylined play on the front pages of metropolitan dailies. The most spectacular was the full front page of the Melbourne Sun Pictorial on July 14. John filed this account of some long days and nights.

"Having spent nearly three years in New Zealand in search of a news story it was something of a bonus when the freshly-knighted Sir Robert Muldoon called his snap election.

"The bonus soon became a rather dubious one as the four biggest news stories of the posting broke within 48 hours.

"The government toppled, foreign exchanges were closed in advance of a 20 per cent devaluation, the defeated PM refused to obey the wishes of the new government and the incoming PM had a fight on his hands over banning American nuclear-powered ships.

"Less than 24 hours after Muldoon conceded defeat, if not power, Hayden and Schultz arrived spitting tacks over the looming ANZUS breakup.

"The next days rank with the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy and the breaking of the Packer affair as the toughest of my career.

"On the Monday Wellington was at its most splendid. There was a 60-knot wind, it rained an inch every hour or so and at noon it was four degrees Celsius.

"The devaluation announcement was expected any time, and I took a punt on several figures, set up snaps and asked NZPA to hit the

button if it happened while I was being propelled by the weather between office and ANZUS briefings,

"The file was around 5000 words a day for six consecutive days, sleep was a fleeting ghost and home remembered by the odd phone call.

"The last story went on Friday morning, there was a quick consultation with Sydney, a 20-minute packing job, and a car to the airport. Twenty-seven sleepless hours later the Editor carried my bag into the Los Angeles hotel, bought me a beer and told me there was an Olympics to cover. To add to the sense of unreality, dear quiet little New Zealand was all over the front pages of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal."

Out and About.

Walkley award winner Tony White had two more scoops — on Mr Justice Stewart stepping down from the NSW Supreme Court and on Judge John Foord identifying himself as the District Court judge accused by Chief Stipendiary Magistrate of intervening on behalf of "Neville" in the Morgan Ryan case. Both stories led the SMH — under other bylines.

Canberra's major assignment was the ALP Federal Conference at the Lakeside Hotel, on which all members of the bureau staff, plus Everard Himmelreich from Melbourne and Jenny Dennis from Sydney lent a hand. Our cover frequently made up a full page or more in metropolitan newspapers. Leigh Mackay weighed in from Jakarta with Indonesian reaction to the ALP decision on East Timor and Foreign Minister Bill Hayden's visit to Jakarta to explain the new policy.

Brisbane was also a very busy bureau with Australia's Davis Cup semi-final win over Italy which won Wayne Heming and Margaret McDonald wide bylined play. Heather Grant did equally well with the long-running case in which Brian Maher and four others are accused of conspiracy to defraud the Commonwealth of tax liabilities totalling \$100 million.