

THE SYDNEY OLYMPICS

ADVERTISERS PRAY FOR



RIGHT & WRONG: Advertisers prefer Olympic moments such as wounded gymnast Kerri Strug being carried to the medals platform to the image of Richard Jewell (inset), the security guard wrongly accused of planting the Olympic Park bomb.

N.Y. Post Charles Wenzelberg, Reuters (inset)

By MICHAEL GILTZ

The folks at NBC aren't the only ones crossing their fingers during the Olympics.

Advertisers have \$900 million riding on the Sydney Games, and they're all hoping for a hero — one of those stirring, heartwarming stories that makes the athletes human and the commercials effective.

The marathoner who stumbles before the finish line, the long jumper who achieves a personal best, or the swimmer who snares a record number of golds.

Indeed, those unpredictable moments are golden for advertisers as well.

"That's the emotional connection to the Games," explains Tom McGovern, director of sports marketing at ad agency OMD USA. "That's really why you do it."

Those stories always de-

Hoping to cash in on that one special hero

velop, but not always the way the networks or the advertisers want. The 1972 hostage crisis in Munich, obviously, wasn't the ideal environment for peddling soft drinks or new cars.

More recently, everyone who has their memory prodded about the '96 Games can recall U.S. gymnast Kerri Strug being carried to the awards ceremony.

But what's the first image that pops into their minds about the Atlanta Games? The Olympic Park bombing and security guard Richard Jewell.

"You want it to be about the athletes," says McGovern. "That's why Jewell may have been cleared of wrongdoing but still hasn't received any product-endorsement offers."

Unlike those events,

some Olympic highlights can be anticipated.

"Think back to the Tonya Harding-Nancy Kerrigan showdown," says McGovern. "We knew that was going to get very big ratings."

Also certain to get big ratings this year in Sydney are stars-in-the-making, such as Jenny Thompson, the swimmer who could garner an unprecedented number of medals, and Blaine Wilson, the gymnast who has a long-shot chance at an individual medal and hopes to captain the men's team to at least a bronze.

Tennis Williams sisters should bring their charisma and talent to Sydney — probably overshadowing the higher-ranked Lindsay Davenport, just as they do on tour.

And everyone's hoping the U.S. women's soccer team will have announcers trying to come up with new twists on "Do you believe in miracles? Again?"

More off-beat possibilities to capture America's attention — and advertisers' gratitude — include Cheryl Haworth, the stout female weightlifter who's such a novelty that virtually every wrap-up story about the Olympics includes her picture.

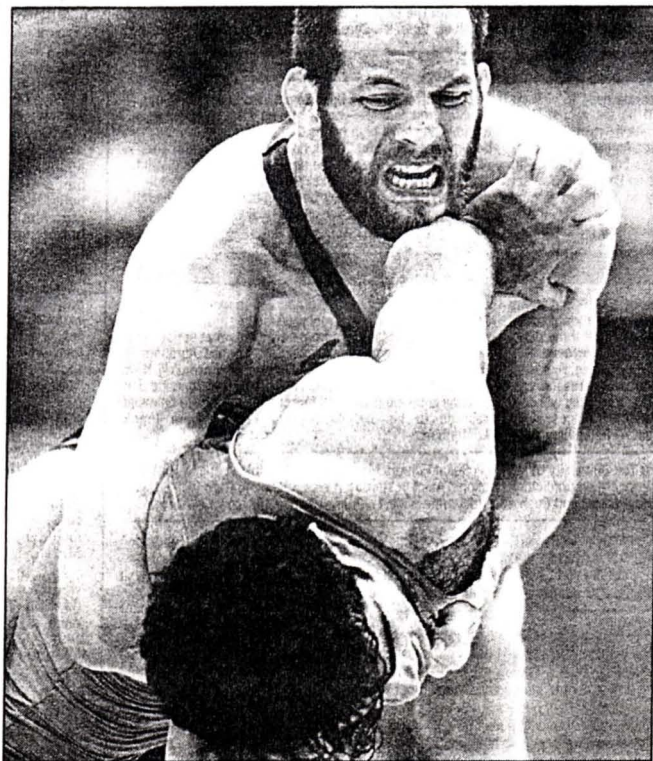
Another possibility: Wrestler Matt Lindland should get a lot of attention for his tortured, litigation-heavy route to the Olympics — he sued after losing during the Olympic trials. Can he live up to the pressure of performing when some would argue he didn't earn the right to even be in Sydney?

Controversy sells, but even the most contentious of figures will seem benign with the passage of time — and a few triumphs on the field.

Muhammad Ali was once thought too controversial to touch, but now he's as wholesome as mom and apple pie. Hence, the adoring documentary about Ali that serves as the centerpiece of NBC's taped segments.

"What was once considered a risky proposition has changed," says McGovern. "He's an American hero."

Still, the best stories at the Olympics seem to por out of nowhere.



GOING TO THE MATT: If Matt Lindland, who sued to get on the U.S. wrestling team, wins a medal, advertisers might get one of those big moments they prize.

Reuters



THE SYDNEY OLYMPICS

A 'GOLDEN' MOMENT



KEEP AN EYE ON THESE CONTENDERS

Australia's Ian Thorpe swims so fast, they call him "Thorpedo." He's the youngest male swimmer ever to set three world records during the Olympic trials, but, in every other regard, he's a typical 17-year-old — except for those size-18 feet. He thrives on lasagna, Dr. Pepper and spending time with his mates.



IAN THORPE

She's the world's fastest woman and, if Marion Jones makes good on her boast that she'll take home five golds in this summer's Games, she'll become an Olympic legend. She's after medals in the 100 and 200 meters, the long jump and the 400- and 600-meter relays — a feat that has not been accomplished since 1924.

MARION JONES



LANCE ARMSTRONG

Lance Armstrong staged one of the most heroic comebacks in sports history by beating cancer — then returning to his chosen sport to lift its most coveted prize. Armstrong won back-to-back Tours de France in 1999 and 2000, and wants to cap it off with his lifelong dream — an Olympic gold medal.

"Stories develop," says McGovern. "I would guess the producers at NBC are sitting there right now thinking they know what the stories are. But that always changes."

Is there an ideal Olympic moment? Not really.

"You have to remember, the Olympics reach everyone," says McGovern. "They reach all demographics: kids, women, men, upscale, middle-income, lower-income."

Furthermore, the advertisers on the Olympics aren't trying to reach any particular niche, such as

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women from 18 to 34. They're trying to reach the world.

"It's practically the only worldwide-audience sporting event," says McGovern. "World Cup soccer is not big in the U.S., and the Super Bowl isn't big overseas."

And only the big boys get to play in that advertising arena.

"If you look at the advertisers that are in the Olympics, they tend to be market leaders, the

strongest in their category," says McGovern. "The up-and-comers don't have that opportunity."

"In other words, McDonald's buys the exclusive rights to the Games — so no ads from Wendy's or Burger King will ever pop up."

When that stirring, unexpected, gotta-e-mail-my-friends moment occurs, they expect to benefit from that warm glow.

And it doesn't even have to be the flush of excitement from being the best.

"There was a woman who won the Pulitzer Prize for her photograph of the Nigerian track relay team as they celebrated winning the bronze," says McGovern. "It's not always about the gold."