

SPORTS BOARD

SPORTS, GAMING, HORSERACING

March 3, 1988



SPORTLIGHT

By R.L. Greene

The Olympics

CALGARY — On Wednesday, Feb. 24, Debi Thomas stepped onto the ice to begin her bid to capture the Olympic women's figure skating gold medal. It would be no surprise that she was leading after the compulsory figures competition, one of her strong suits.

Born in Pughkeepsie, N.Y., Debra Janine Thomas began skating at the age of five. Now almost 21, she is attempting to become the first Black athlete to capture a gold medal in the Winter Games. But despite what the television announcers will blather over the air, Debi is not the first Black athlete to compete in the Games or even in figure skating. Not even the first Black American woman.

Most Americans didn't realize the racial background of Tai Babilonia, who teamed with Randy Gardner to win the pair's title at the World Championships in Vienna, Austria, in 1979. It was only when an ABC-TV "Up Close And Personal" visited to Tai's home did the viewer get a chance to notice a picture of her darker-hued brother.

And at least one West German skater in the 1984 Olympics could trace her family tree, if she wanted to, to an Afro-American father.

In 1980, the United States bobsled team included Willie Davenport, better known as a

hurdler in the Summer Olympics, and Jeff Gadley, while Bob Wilson was on the Canadian bobsled squad.

Bears wide receiver Willie Gault, who was named in a move that caused controversy "I feel cheated," said Don

the understanding that eventual team members must first compete there. However, Gault joined bobsled training in January after the Bears were eliminated from National Football League playoffs.

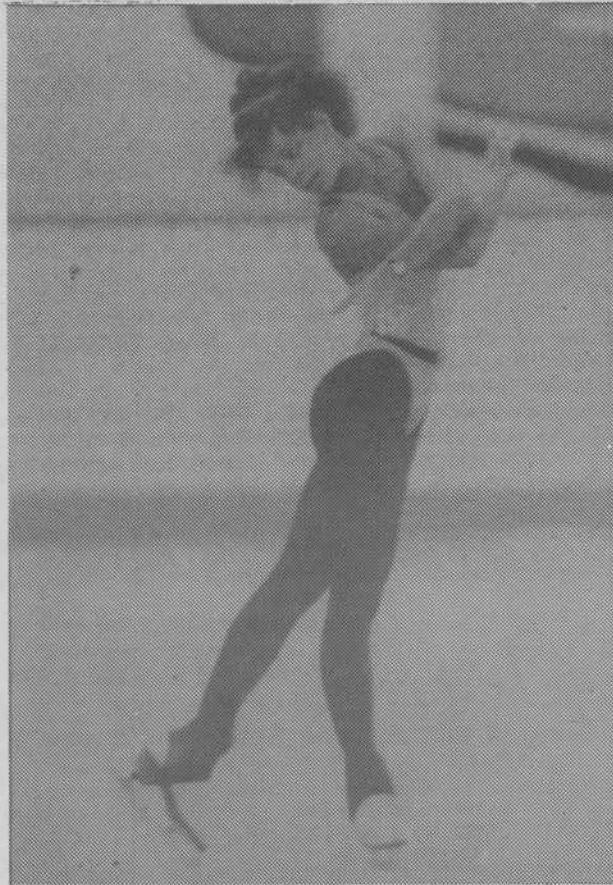
"Virtually at the last minute someone comes along, and Don was bumped off the team," LaVigne's lawyer said. "It makes it sound as if everything that happened before doesn't matter. He (Gault) just seemed to show up uninvited in January and was selected for the team."

Gault was named as side-pusher on an alternate four-man bobsled team. LaVigne has since been added to the U.S. team along with Gault.

Gault seemed unconcerned about the controversy. "It's no big deal," he said. "It's not a matter of life and death. Playing for the Chicago Bears prepares you for anything."

Also at Calgary will be Claude Vilgrain, a member of Canada's hockey squad, and a bobsled team from Jamaica, some of who had never seen snow or stood next to a bobsled until August. Vilgrain could wind up with a gold medal. Hockey, after all, is Canada's national pastime. And so could Debi Thomas.

Two years ago, Debi won her first U.S. title, then upset East Germany's Katarina Witt, the defending titleholder, in the World Championships. Last year, hobbled by tendinitis, Debi lost both crowns. But she regained her U.S. title in Denver earlier this



DEBI THOMAS: Warms up for women's figure skating event.

In 1984, Erroll Fraser, a Black speed skater from the British Virgin Islands, finished 40th in the 500-meters and 42nd in the 1,000 meters, while Lamine Gueye of Senegal was 51st in downhill skiing.

This year's U.S. bobsled squad includes Chicago

LaVigne, a bobsledder who postponed his senior year at Harvard to compete for the team. "I have taken the risks and made the sacrifices and commitments, and presumably had qualified."

LaVigne took part in October's Olympic Trials in Winterberg, West Germany, with

INVITATIONAL INTERSERVICE MILITARY VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT SCHEDULED

The City of Las Vegas Department of Parks, Recreation, and Senior Citizen Activities is proud to host the Invitational Interservice Military Volleyball Tournament, March 5-6.

Teams from all four branches of the military will meet at the Stewart-Mojave Community Center, 275 N.

Mojave, for the competition; strengthening the "Esprit de Corps" of our servicemen. This friendship tournament will include teams from California and Nevada.

For specific information regarding starting times and schedule of events, please call Joe Campbell at 386-6563. There is no charge for spectators.

year, the first time in 54 years a dethroned champion has regained the crown.

She feels it's her new routine and confidence, fashioned with the help of ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov, and George de la Pena, a former American Ballet Theater soloist.

"Baryshnikov let me see it. George made me feel it," Debi said of her fresh sense of drama on the ice.

"She's a spitfire," de la Pena says of Debi. "She's lusty, she's fun and she has a great sense of humor. She's open to growing."

The compulsories count for 30 percent of the final score. On Thursday, Feb. 25, the women's short program was staged, a two-minute routine in which every skater must do seven requisite moves. That counts for 20 percent of the final score.

Then came Day 15, Saturday, Feb. 27, and the free skate portion which counts for 50 percent of the total score.

"This is my last year, and one of the things I want most is to leave this sport with a good performance," Debi says. "That's the way I want to go out."

Although Calgary is bathed in snow, the 1988 Winter Olympics are not an all-white Games.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, Debi, who skated last in the freestyle on Saturday, faltered, falling out of three of her jumps, and was able to capture only the bronze medal, being bested by Katarina Witt, who won the gold and Canada's Elizabeth Manley, who gave a flawless performance which catapulted her ahead of Debi into second place for the silver medal.

IBA ANNOUNCES TRYOUTS

The International Basketball Association holds open tryouts for the Las Vegas Silver Streaks Saturday, March 5 in UNLV's North Gym. The 12-hour camp begins at 8 a.m. and includes full court scrimmages and half-court drills.

All applicants must be under 6'5" and must have graduated from college or have been out of high school for at least four years.

Pre-registration is suggested as the camp is limited to the first 100 applicants. The cost is \$25 per person.

Silver Streaks' head coach Sonny Allen, along with other selected coaches will evaluate all potential players. Notification will be made by March 20. Regular season camp begins in mid-April.

For more information and tryout applications call the local IBA office at 798-6464.

SPORTS PROMOTIONS BASEBALL SHOW AT SHOWBOAT

Harmon Killebrew, who ranks fifth on the major league's all-time home run list, will sign autographs at Sports Promotions Baseball Show Saturday, March 5.

Killebrew, a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, was in the majors for 17 years, with the Washington Senators and the Minnesota Twins.

The slugger will appear from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Showboat Hotel's Natchez Room.

On Friday, March 4, former Olympian Scott Bankhead, a pitcher for the Seat-

See BASEBALL, Page 13

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