1984

LOS ANGELES
The 1984 Olympic Games marked a transformative moment for the modern Olympic movement and the rise of Los Angeles as an international city. The three men who spearheaded Los Angeles’ role as host of the 1984 Games — John C. Argue JD ’56, Peter Ueberroth LLD ’91 and David Wolper MFA ’49 — all had strong ties to USC. The challenge of bringing the Games to Los Angeles fell largely to Argue, an attorney who headed up the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games. Civic leaders originally formed that committee in the afterglow of the 1932 Games, and through the group, Los Angeles had participated in every Olympic bid since 1939. In 1974, Argue led the committee’s bid for the 1980 Games; after losing to Moscow, he was back again four years later. The group’s first objective was to persuade the U.S. Olympic Committee to back Los Angeles as its candidate city. Competition came from five other cities: New York, New Orleans, Boston, Chicago and Atlanta. In September 1977, after every other city but New York had dropped out, the Olympic Committee selected Los Angeles. The central strategy of Los Angeles’ successful bid for the 1984 Games was fiscal constraint: using existing facilities — including the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and the Sports Arena — to avoid the catastrophic construction problems and more than a billion dollars of debt that Montreal incurred in 1976.
Next, Argue had to persuade the International Olympic Committee. In the days preceding the Iranian Revolution, Tehran voluntarily withdrew from the bidding process, leaving Los Angeles’ bid unopposed. Even so, it was no slam dunk. After a year of financial haggling between the International Olympic Committee and the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley was so fed up he drafted a letter withdrawing Los Angeles from the bid process. The deal went through in large part because of Argue’s persistence. In 1994, he was honored with the Olympic Order, the highest award given by the IOC.

The 1984 Summer Games were radically different from their predecessors. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and the U.S. Olympic Committee assumed the entire financial risk of the Games, making the Los Angeles Olympics the first privately funded Games.

Managing such a colossal project proved a perfect fit for Ueberroth, a San Fernando Valley businessman. The Games’ local organizing committee chose Ueberroth as its leader over such big-name prospects as NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle, future Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca.

Ueberroth’s efforts resulted in an unprecedented athletic, aesthetic and financial triumph — including a whopping $232.5 million surplus, making it the most profitable sporting event up to that time. The Games also created a financial impact of about $2.3 billion to the Southern California economy.

In addition, the modern Olympics movement has mandated that cultural events “of an equal standard to the sports events” be presented at the Games — a mandate honored inconsistently through the years — but Los Angeles took it seriously. The Los Angeles Olympics Arts Festival — a 10-week, $11 million arts marathon — presented more than 400 cultural events by 146 theater, dance and music companies representing 18 countries.

To generate the $450 million to $500 million needed up front to finance the Games,
Ueberroth focused on three principal sources: television rights, commercial sponsorships and ticket sales. The success of his strategy translated into an eightfold increase in these revenues over the previous three Olympics.

The organizers relied heavily on existing facilities, but USC in particular benefited with the addition of a few important landmarks. The new McDonald’s Swim Stadium was built as a venue for swimming and diving competitions. Nearby, in King Hall, Café ’84 was created as a dining facility for visiting athletes. And Pardee Tower, now a campus residence hall, was built to house athletes in the Olympic Village. All told, nearly half of the University Park Campus was leased to the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, and the remainder was refurbished to welcome nearly 127,000 visitors daily.

Just as they had in 1980, politics played a role in the 1984 Games. In response to the U.S.-led boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, 14 Eastern Bloc countries — including the Soviet Union and East Germany — boycotted the Games. Nonetheless, the Los Angeles Olympics attracted a record 140 participating nations. USC alone saw 36 athletes win a total of 24 medals.

In the wake of the Games’ stunning success, Ueberroth was named *Time* magazine’s Man of the Year in 1984. He would go on to become commissioner of Major League Baseball that same year, and chaired the U.S. Olympic Committee in the mid-2000s.

The third USC name intimately involved with the 1984 Olympics was television and documentary producer David Wolper, who orchestrated the Games’ larger-than-life opening and closing ceremonies.

The four-hour opening ceremony featured a 1,000-member choir, 84 baby grand pianos in a mass performance of George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue,” a flowing mosaic of 85,000 cards raised on cue by stadium spectators and a man wearing a jetpack landing on the Coliseum field. The spectacular production earned Wolper a plethora of awards, including the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and prompted Motion Picture Association of
America President Jack Valenti to dub Wolper "the new DeMille."

A founding member of the USC School of Cinematic Arts’ Board of Councilors, Wolper served as vice chairman of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee. He helped Ueberroth negotiate a $225 million deal with ABC, $200 million more than the network had paid for TV rights to the Montreal Games.

After the Olympics, all three men continued their strong relationships with USC. Argue joined USC’s Board of Trustees in 1984 and was named chairman in 2000. He died in 2002. Ueberroth became a USC trustee in 1985 and continues to serve as a USC life trustee.

Anne Ottenbrite learned to swim at the age of 3 in her family’s pool in Whitby, Ontario, quickly developing a whip kick — the circular kicking motion used in the breaststroke. From the start, she showed tremendous flexibility, a major asset for a breaststroke specialist. Because she was double-jointed, she could turn her feet around completely and whirl her arms at the elbows, which enabled her to undulate her upper body in her stroke long before it became commonplace among swimmers.

But Ottenbrite was also a bit of a klutz. After injuring herself during separate incidents involving a plate glass window and a potato processor, Ottenbrite dislocated her right kneecap while walking in a new pair of high heels. It was a relatively minor injury, but it slowed her down and prevented her from swimming in the 1984 Canadian Olympic Trials. Despite that, the Canadian team’s technical director and head coach, Trevor Tiffany, added her to the team based on her outstanding past performances in national and international competition.

Ottenbrite’s fortune nearly took another turn for the worse before the Games. She already had to modify her swimming stroke slightly because her body’s wave-like motion caused her legs to break the water’s surface, disqualifying her from some events at international meets. After she arrived in Los Angeles for the Olympics, she was in a car crash that gave her whiplash. She also strained a thigh muscle while playing a video game at the Olympic Village.

She refused to let these challenges keep her from achieving Olympic glory. In the 200-meter breaststroke final, she passed Japan’s Hiroko Nagasaki at the race’s midpoint and held off last-moment surges by Susan Rapp of the U.S. and Ingrid Lempereur of Belgium to win the gold. Ottenbrite became the first Canadian woman to win an Olympic title in swimming.

But she wasn’t done yet. Ottenbrite took silver in the 100-meter breaststroke and then helped Canada’s team to a bronze medal in the 4x100-meter medley relay.

Ottenbrite had enrolled at USC prior to the 1984 Olympics but in 1987 transferred to Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, where she eventually earned her undergraduate degree. After retiring from competition in 1986, Ottenbrite became a highly successful coach, working with numerous swim clubs including Swim Ontario, Wilfred Laurier and the University of Guelph. She was inducted into Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame in 1994 and was elected to the International Swimming Hall of Fame as an Honor Swimmer in 1999.
During the 1970s and early 1980s, the preeminent international men’s volleyball team did not hail from the United States, the country where the sport was invented 89 years before the 1984 Olympics.

That distinction belonged to the Soviet Union, which won the gold medal at the 1980 Games in Moscow and the 1981 FIVB World Cup. In 1982, the Soviets dominated the FIVB Men’s World Championships in Buenos Aires and crushed Brazil in the final.

But when Eastern Bloc nations including the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland and Cuba decided to boycott the 1984 Olympics, those volleyball powerhouses were replaced by the less prominent teams from South Korea, Tunisia, Italy and China.

Suddenly, a gold medal was ripe for the picking for the United States, which had never triumphed on the Olympic volleyball stage. Before 1984, the U.S. volleyball team had competed in just two Olympics, finishing ninth in Tokyo in 1964 and seventh in Mexico City in 1968.

The 1984 group was different from previous American Olympic volleyball teams. In addition to boasting arguably the greatest volleyball player in U.S. history, Karch Kiraly, the Americans were led by a trio of game-changing players from USC.

There was Pat Powers (right), who, after winning the 1977 state junior college championship with Santa Monica College, transferred to USC and helped lead the Trojans to an NCAA title in 1980. Then there was Dusty Dvorak (left), Powers’ setter on the championship Trojan team, and Steve Timmons (center), whose fire-red flattop haircut earned him nearly as much attention as his exploits on the court.

The dark-horse American team opened Olympic play in Los Angeles with a victory over Argentina, which had won bronze at both the 1982 World Championships and 1983 Pan American Games. The U.S. then swept both Tunisia and South Korea to book its ticket to the semifinals.

In the fourth match of the Games, the U.S. faced Brazil, which had won the 1983 Pan American title and the South American Volleyball Championship nearly every year, but found itself needing a victory to remain alive in the Olympic competition.

With their backs to the wall, the Brazilian players handily defeated the U.S. team. But the Americans didn’t panic, dispatching Canada in the semifinals to earn a rematch with Brazil in the competition for the gold.

Powers, who earned a degree in psychology from USC in 1981, recalled being uncomfortably nervous before the Olympic final and deciding to try some self-hypnosis that afternoon. He awakened refreshed, and that evening, when he walked onto the court and saw the Brazilian team, he realized something. “I looked into their eyes, and I just knew we had them,” he told Sports Illustrated in 1984. “I had no doubts about it.”
PAM MCGEE ’84
Pam McGee was a key player on USC’s NCAA championship women’s basketball teams in 1983 and 1984. She won Olympic gold in Los Angeles as a member of Team USA.

CHRIS CAVANAUGH ’86
After missing the U.S.-boycotted 1980 Moscow Games, swimmer Chris Cavanaugh got to compete in Los Angeles in 1984, winning gold as a member of the U.S. 4x100-meter freestyle relay team.

PAM MCGEE
LOS ANGELES WELCOMED WOMEN TO THE MARATHON FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OLYMPIC HISTORY. ONLY 56 YEARS EARLIER, WOMEN WERE BARRED FROM RUNNING FARTHER THAN 200 METERS IN THE GAMES BECAUSE IT WAS CONSIDERED TOO STRENUOUS.

DEBBIE GREEN
Two-time All-American Debbie Green led USC’s volleyball team to national championships in 1976 and 1977 before helping the U.S. win a silver medal at the 1984 Olympics. She was inducted into the Volleyball Hall of Fame in 1995.

ARTO BRYGGARE
Arto Bryggare, who attended USC in 1979, won bronze for Finland in the 110-meter hurdles in the 1984 Games. He went on to represent the Social Democratic Party of Finland in the country’s parliament for two terms.

LET’S RIDE
CYCLISTS IN THE MEN’S ROAD TIME TRIAL IN THE LOS ANGELES OLYMPICS RODE ON A STRETCH OF THE ARTESIA FREEWAY.
FANFARE
KNOWN FOR THE FILM SCORES FOR JAWS, THE STAR WARS AND INDIANA JONES SERIES AND MORE, JOHN WILLIAMS COMPOSED THE GRAMMY-WINNING THEME FOR THE 1984 GAMES.

TROJAN VICTORIES
AND HIGHLIGHTS OF
THE 1984 LOS ANGELES GAMES

USC OLYMIANS: 36  GOLD: 9  SILVER: 11  BRONZE: 4

CYNTHIA “SIPPY” WOODHEAD ’90, MFCC ’95
A three-time All-American at USC, Cynthia “Sippy” Woodhead was runner-up for the Sullivan Award in 1979 and later became an assistant swim coach at USC. She claimed a silver medal in the 200-meter freestyle in the 1984 Games.

GET MOVING
REPORTS VARY, BUT THE 1984 GAMES TURNED A PROFIT OF MORE THAN $200 MILLION. PROCEEDS ENDOWED THE LA84 FOUNDATION, WHICH FUNDS YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAMS.

MICHAEL O’BRIEN ’88
After winning gold in the 1,500-meter freestyle in Los Angeles, swimmer Mike O’Brien joined the team at USC, where he captured two individual NCAA titles.

SID AKINS
USC pitcher Sid Akins was a member of the U.S. Olympic baseball team in 1984. The Texas Rangers selected him in the third round of the 1984 amateur draft.