



REVOLUTION GAMES

officer to Gen. Charles de Gaulle and the Free French in London, and after the war he joined the TIME bureau there. By 1955, Winston Churchill was calling Laguerre the best political reporter in Britain.

Luce, who knew little about sports, insisted on having Laguerre at his elbow during ball games and horse races to explain the action. In March 1956, Luce asked him to come to New York to help run his struggling sports magazine. Laguerre was devastated. He loved the hurly-burly of overseas reporting, the proximity to power and great events. He agreed only out of loyalty to his boss. So Laguerre must have brightened when Phinizy reached Melbourne with his orders. Here was a chance for Laguerre to return to the action.

Three times Laguerre met with members of the Hungarian delegation: early one morning in the corner of a practice field, at midday in his hotel room and late at night at a house in the Melbourne suburbs. "While it was not for us to urge the decision itself," he explained in SI's Dec. 17 issue, "it seemed our moral responsibility to prevent any decision against going to the U.S. from being taken solely because of some relatively minor material difficulty which we could help overcome." After that first meeting Laguerre cabled New York: MUST REPORT THAT SOME AUSSIE FOOTBALLERS HOLDING PRIVILEGED JOBS HAD MOST UNAMATEUR OUTLOOK AND APPEAR MAINLY INTERESTED IN FINANCIAL REWARDS. His observation foreshadowed the eventual decision of some defectors to return home and reclaim their roles as kept athletes in Hungary's state-supported system.

Another Laguerre telegram read, PLAYERS' CONFIDENCE IN COACH TURNBULL SEEMS BY NO MEANS UNANIMOUS. Telegdy wanted to restore the Hungarian monarchy. "We weren't communists," Nick Martin recalls, "but we weren't royalists either." At one point Telegdy recruited four Romanian Olympians of Hungarian descent to defect, prompting SI writer Roy Terrell to cable New York that "Turnbull" was GATHERING OPPRESSED PEOPLES LIKE A DOG GATHERS FLEAS.

As the Games wound down, Hungarian delegation chief Gyula Hegyi asked those who didn't plan to return home to let him know, so their flight bookings could be canceled. The hour had come. Young and single, Tabori, the runner, was guided by a telegram from his sister Elizabeth: SITUATION VERY BAD. DO WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT. The night before the team was to leave, Tabori asked his coach, Mihaly Igloi, what he planned to do. Igloi walked away without saying a word. But Igloi had spent five years in Siberia after Russian soldiers grabbed him on a Budapest street. At the airport he told Tabori he too would be leaving and added, "Why don't we stick together?"

The women gymnasts won the team gold medal on the final day and had to choose their futures only hours after stepping off the podium. "Being so young, you don't think about the dangers," says one of them, Marta Nagy Wachter. "Today you'd linger over a decision for days or weeks. It's still amazing that we did it."

The first two to push off were, symbolically, the boatmen: rowing coach Zoltan Torok and coxswain Robert Zimonyi. On their way to the gate of the Olympic village they walked down a street called Liberty Parade—"one of those dramatic coincidences which occa-

sionally brighten the drab hues of reality," Laguerre noted. Whisked away in a sports car to a safe house in the Melbourne suburbs, they toasted the future over a bottle of Hungarian Egri Bikaver red.

Most of the defectors went to the airport to see off those who were flying back to Hungary. Balint Galantai, who would settle in Australia, cried as he kissed fellow wrestlers goodbye. An anguished young gymnast called the scene in the terminal "the funeral of Hungarian sport." Those staying serenaded those who were going back with the pre-Soviet anthem *God Bless the Hungarian Nation*.

The defectors were spooked by the *Gruzia*, a Soviet ship docked in Melbourne's harbor. "Russian athletes would be taken from the podium to the ship," Hernek recalls. Australian federal security police threw a cordon around the Hungarians' quarters until the *Gruzia* pulled up anchor.

Then, on Dec. 18, not quite a month after Tower's memo was delivered, word came: The U.S. State Department had granted asylum to 34 Hungarians and Telegdy's four Romanians—one full team and eight substitutes. (At least a dozen more Hungarian athletes and coaches would defect to other countries.) To transport them to the U.S., Pan Am chairman Juan Trippe provided the clipper *Trade Wind*, which would leave Melbourne on Dec. 23.

If freedom and resettlement had been the sole purpose of the operation, the defectors could have been placed anywhere in the West—even Melbourne, with its Hungarian émigré community. But Luce and Jackson, Szapary and Telegdy, agreed: So much had been done

to bring the Hungarians to the U.S. that their arrival should be leveraged for full propaganda value. For that, SI had a plan.

BEFORE THE *Trade Wind* touched down in California, Martin stood in the aisle to address the team: *Forget how it's done in Hungary. We'll be in America, where things are done differently.*

"He said we should try to fit in, whatever the situation," Ordogh Zimsen remembers. "I thought it was a marvelous piece of advice."

Invited into the cockpit, Martin could hardly believe the scene laid out before him. San Francisco shimmered in sunshine on the day before Christmas. Gymnast Andrea Bodo Schmid-Shapiro recalls the huge Christmas tree in the lobby of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, where the delegation stayed. Tabori went for a run in Golden Gate Park. Zador got a ride over the Bay Bridge in a white Cadillac convertible, top down, to a reception in the Oakland hills. "The lights, the car, the wind in your face, it was enormous," Zador recalled before he died at 77 in April. "I said, 'This is where I'm gonna die.'"

"The deluge of new impressions," fencer Eugene Hamori adds, "didn't leave much room for sentimentality."

Three days later the party flew to New York City. Just before New Year's, Siak, the diver, who hadn't been able to reach his family before departing from Budapest, appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. His father and brothers saw him on TV in Canada, to which they had escaped, and rushed down to see him. "I decided for sure not to go back only when I heard from them," Siak says.

In early January the Olympians embarked on SI's Hungarian

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