



GRAINEY PICTURES

REVOLUTION GAMES

Athletes' Freedom Tour. Beyond keeping the Hungarian crisis in the news, each stopover raised money for refugee relief and gave the young magazine a hit of publicity. The tour featured two troupes—one for aquatics, the other for gymnasts and fencers—whose members competed in exhibitions. (Tabori and Igloi joined the U.S. indoor track circuit instead.) Over 10 weeks the Hungarians met Louis Armstrong backstage in Miami Beach and President Eisenhower in the White House; tried waterskiing in Orlando and inspected an auto plant in Detroit; saw the Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon and the Las Vegas strip. "We'd grown up in an isolated society where you didn't express your feelings, and here people were literally warm, *hugging us*," remembers Nagy Wachter. "It's one of the reasons I decided to stay in the States."

To tart up their exhibitions, the water polo players might toss an SI minder into the pool, while the fencers did a send-up of Hollywood sword fighting scenes, with gymnasts cast as damsels in distress. "It was a fabulous time," says Martin, "and for once in our lives we didn't have to worry about the score."

Each athlete had been handed something called *A Practical Handbook of the English Language*; upon meeting Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley, one mischievous Hungarian decided to drop some of the book's practice dialogue on Hizzoner: "My name is Mr. Brown. How do you do? Lend me a hammer, please."

SI made it clear that it would help anyone return to Hungary at any time. But two water polo players decided to take matters into their own hands, which led to the most cloak-and-dagger moment of the tour. Word had reached one of them, Laszlo Jeney, that his wife back home was pregnant; the other, Karpati, was engaged to a Miss Hungary. When the tour passed through Washington, D.C., the two athletes quietly arranged to meet the Hungarian consul at the Willard Hotel. But before they could enter the lobby, they were detained by U.S. agents. "They asked us to state our business," Karpati remembers. "We explained we wanted to go home." They were both deported before they could redefect, but the Feds made sure they left with a favorable final impression. "They flew us back first class," recalls Karpati, who says that all along he and Jeney had wanted only a sightseeing tour of the U.S. "We were worried what the conditions would be like after the revolution and what our reception would be. The reception was good because we were champions. It was good propaganda: See, these guys who won gold medals came home."

No one on the tour begrudged anyone else's decision to return. "Those of us who stayed for good understood," Hamori says. "We even sympathized with the logistical and political acrobatics the



BLOOD FEUD

Hungary's semifinal game against the U.S.S.R. in water polo was shortened by referees after the Soviets' Prokopov (above) delivered a cheap shot that opened a cut above the eye of Hungary's Zador.

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others had to go through, brownnosing the sports commissars to convince them that they hadn't really intended to defect."

The tour ended in mid-March back in San Francisco, after some 8,000 miles and 59 cities. It had more than paid for itself, leaving a surplus of \$10,000 (\$80,000 today) for refugee relief. The younger athletes sifted through college scholarship offers; the others had jobs lined up. Each of them had a small grubstake from saving per diems, as well as possessions collected during a shopping spree in a department store, where each was invited to fill a suitcase with anything but jewelry. "Most of us wanted to go to California," Nagy Wachter remembers. "California had a magic."

Before they scattered, the Hungarians returned to the top of the Mark Hopkins. My God, Takach thought as he looked out over the bay, we have seen so much of the world.

SIT DOWN with a surviving '56er today, and you're sure to hear a rhapsody about San Francisco in its brilliant winter light,

but you're also likely to hear of nightmares. Over the past 55 years Magay and Hernek, Gerlach and Schmid-Shapiro have all dreamed that they're back in Hungary and can't get out.

The flop sweat is only temporary, for life in the U.S. has been strikingly good for the defectors. Nearly all who stayed have prospered. How they made their way in the new world roughly conforms to their disciplines. Most of the fencers and gymnasts—sensible, calculating, mindful of balance—capitalized on those college scholarships, and many earned science and engineering degrees. The swimmers and divers tended to jump right into the figurative pool. Accustomed to the stray elbow, the water polo players took their dunkings and bobbed back up. "It's lucky we were so young," says swimmer Katherine Szoke Domyan, who's still married to water polo player Arpad Domyan. "Young people can do anything. Or so I discovered when I wasn't so young anymore."

At that time International Olympic Committee rules prevented most athletes from competing for a second country, and that ended further Olympic hopes for almost all of the Hungarian defectors. "I thought I was going to conquer the world," says Tabori. "It turns out the world conquered me."

FROM LEFT: BETTMANN/CORBIS, AP