

Fay (Nelson) Giordano's Microlympics Journal

The first Microlympics was to be held on Saipan from July 4 to July 12, 1969. The participants were from all six districts of Micronesia competing in "friendly competition" for gold, silver and bronze medals just like the real Olympics. There were to be over 400 athletes, coaches and trainers competing in track & field, swimming, volleyball, tennis, baseball, canoe sailing & paddling, basketball, table tennis and Micro All-Around (an event of swimming, diving, coconut husking, coconut tree climbing and spear throwing.) I found out just a few days beforehand that I was to be the "housemother" for the 30 or so (which turned out to be 55) female participants.

At first the girls were to stay in the Olympic Village which was to be Hopwood High School. Each district was to have two of the classrooms for their 50-plus guys and *all* the girls were to be in *one* room with *one* shower and *one* toilet. No! I knew that would not work so I arranged for the girls to stay in the residence hall at Mount Carmel High School. This was about 4 blocks from Hopwood, "the Olympic Village" where the boys would stay, they would all eat, and where the center of activities would be.

Since I was the housemother, I was included as the only female in the formal welcoming group at the airport to shake hands with the 75 participants from each district. The Ponape team was the first to arrive July 1. They were dressed up in white shirts or blouses, blue pants or skirts; the girls wore blue tennis shoes, white socks and wore colorful flowered cloth crowns, while the boys each wore handmade white coconut leaf cowboy hats. I gave them a short tour of Saipan as we bussed them to the dorm, where I went over the rules. After they showered, they came out looking very different from the nervous, dressed up, and tired girls I'd first met. Now they were in their colorful dresses and zories. They had let their long beautiful hair down and were a group of really attractive girls. I didn't know then that I'd be with these girls nearly four weeks and become very close to them.

I was really impressed by the girls and we were all excited as we closed the doors the first night at 9:30. The next morning they were all so anxious that at 4:30 a.m.

they were up, took their showers and were ready to go at 5:30 a.m., an hour before their bus would be there.

The team from Truk arrived the next day, armed with Polaroids. The team from Yap came later, with no female participants (due to their culture). The men were unmistakable, with coconut leaf betel nut bags under their arms and smiles revealing their red betel nut-stained teeth. At first it struck me as ugly, but later watching them quietly walking around with their bags, red smiles and red “thus” (one long strip of material wrapped around their midsections as their only clothing) they were so beautiful.

After Palau, the last group to arrive was the team of 55 from the Marshall Islands.

The girls’ discipline and respect were so great that I couldn’t foresee any problems except one: disappearances.

They all spent the first days practicing on the new areas and getting ready for the events. On July 4, I got all the girls dressed in their uniforms and downstairs early so I could get a picture of each team before we walked over to Mount Carmel Church yard for the beginning of the parade. The teams in their uniforms looked very impressive as they marched down Beach Road to the music of the Air Force Band from Guam. There was marching, formations and speeches including one by the High Commissioner Edward Johnston.

As the band played, the hundreds of spectators excitedly awaited the arrival of the torchbearers to officially open the MicrOlympics. The flame was brought down from Mount Tagpachau (Saipan’s highest mountain) by the winners of the recently held Junior Olympics. The last boy gave the torch to a group of six athletes, one from each of the six districts of Micronesia, who ran with it to the field, around the track and finally handing it to Tino Olopai, the Marianas athlete who walked up the steps and lit the cauldron. There were tears in my eyes and a chill in my body as I watched this impressive sight and listened to the meaning of the lighting of the flame and the goal of the Olympics. Preceding the first MicrOlympic event, the baseball game between Ponape and Truk, the Air Force flew some aircraft over the field and sky divers landed on the baseball field. High

Commissioner Johnston threw out the first 2 balls which were autographed by President Nixon and Secretary of the Interior Hickel. Thus began the MicrOlympics which were to be a total success.

The story that will be most remembered about the Olympics will be the Ponapean runner, Ishiro, who won all the long distance track races and who would speed up at the very end of the long race, leap across the finish and even came in smoking a cigarette after the 45 minute 10,000 meter race that he had led by quite a distance all during the race. He got his practice chasing deer on the hills of Ponape, then killing them with his machete.

The girls were great! They had such respect and were very easy to lead. Some of them were my age but most were about 16-19. I can't imagine a group of 55 girls of this age in the states, as young as I am, I'd never be able to have such a job, housemother!

Every day went from 6 a.m. to lights out at 10, except for nights with basketball games that kept on as late as 1 a.m. Other than colds, cuts, blisters from running in shoes for the first time and a dispute over the direction the fan was blowing in the dorm one night, the only real trouble I had was girls coming in after the doors were locked at night or not coming in at all! At the games I knew the participants from all five other districts and I was so excited to see the people I knew do well and to watch them climb the three-leveled stand to receive their medals.

One of the athletes and some other boys from Truk were in an automobile accident, a really bad one for Saipan. One boy was killed. It was because of speed, on Truk there's no place where they can drive fast (anything over 20 mph). This brought sadness to the Olympics but it wasn't a fault of the Olympics itself and it was the only negative factor associated with the event. Everyone had predicted black magic, bad feelings, and fights, especially, but nothing happened!

It was so great! One hundred percent success. It was the largest step in uniting the six distinct districts into one. Many friends were made. Many people had a chance to travel from their home for the first time.

All the teams left on July 13 and 14 except Ponape, because they had transportation problems. Their leader left me with 18 beautiful, appealing, naive girls!! We had to entertain them for 2 weeks. I enjoyed them but felt sorry for them. It was their first time ever away from home, and then for nearly a month. My worry was the girls' disappearances at night. And then one of the girls showed me a package of birth control pills!!

The Ponape team left on July 26. I had a very lonely birthday the next day, my 21st!