

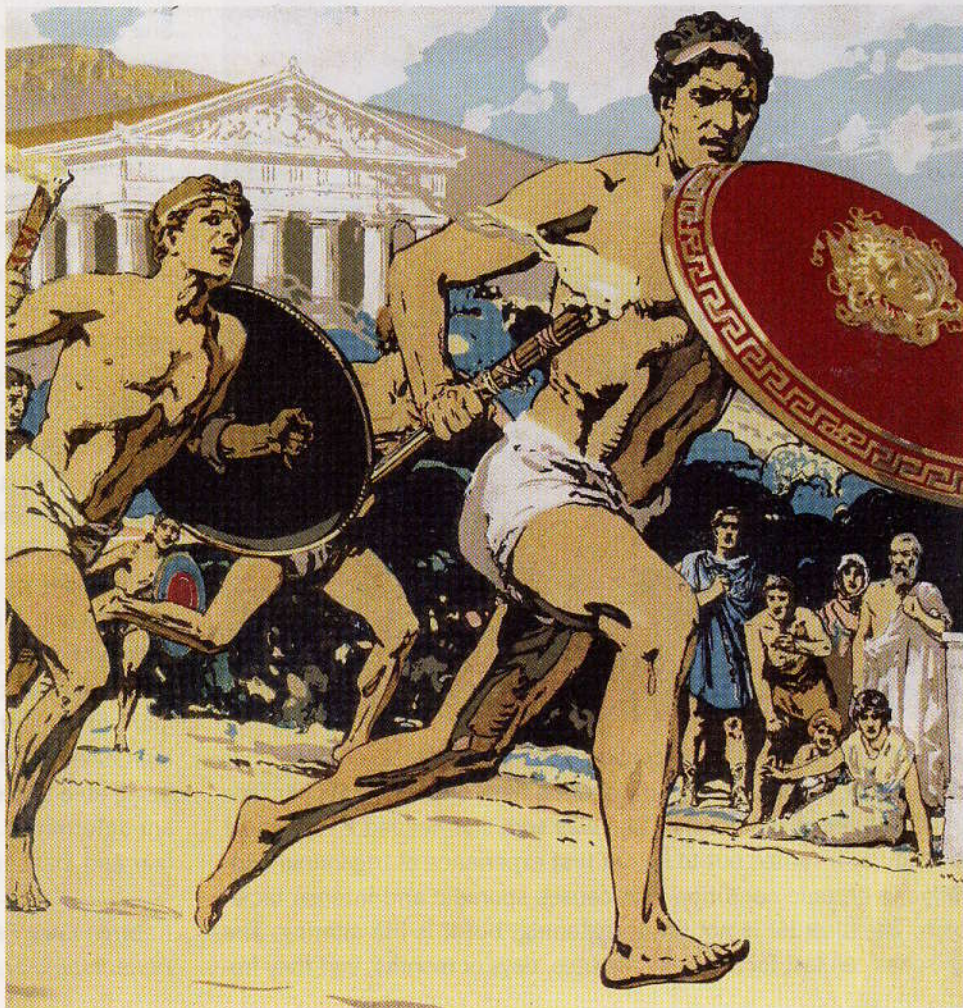
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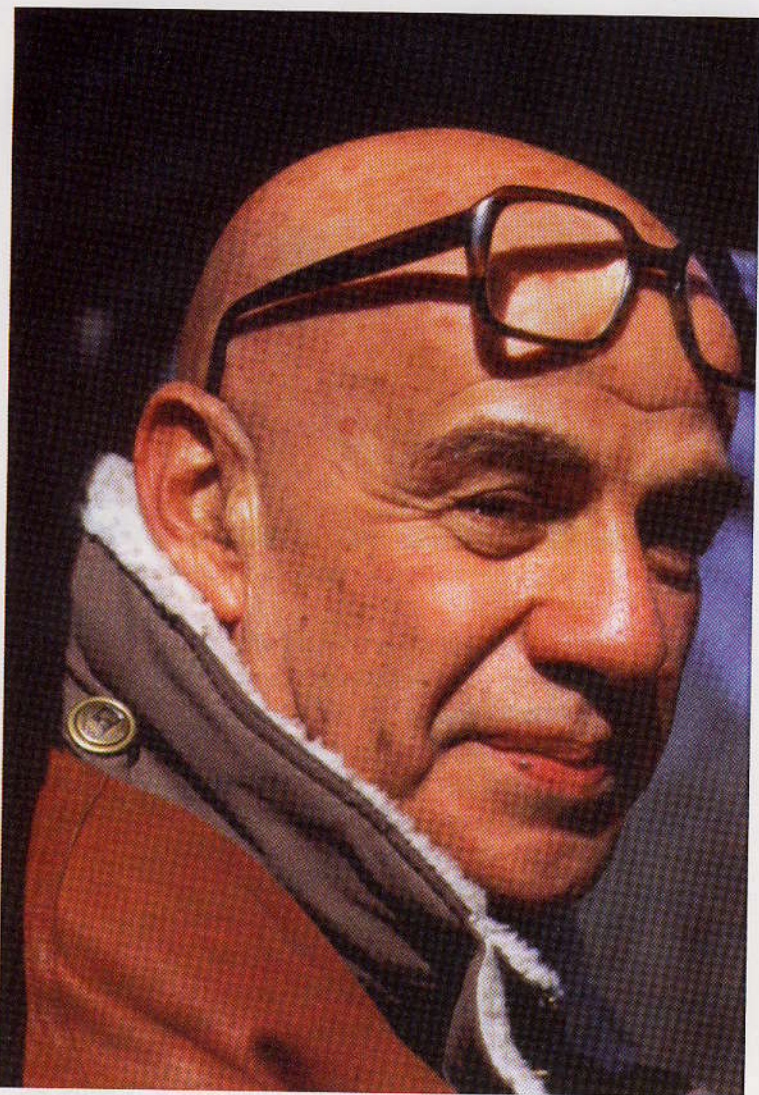
MR. OLYMPIA

Bud Greenspan has defined how we view the Summer and Winter Games.

By Hillel Kutler

To those who can kayak, vault, counterpunch and curl better than anyone else in the world—and to everyone who loves watching them compete in the Olympic Games—Bud Greenspan is a legend.





"He sets the standard for the creation and excellence of Olympic films. He has managed to capture the story of athletes from the United States and other countries better than anyone in history," says Mike Moran, who, as U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) spokesman, collaborated with Greenspan for two decades.

Nearly 82, Greenspan has covered professional athletes, Olympians and 20th-century history through an impressive body of work that includes books, television dramas, documentaries, record albums, articles and commercials.

Greenspan is aware of and appreciates his singular contribution to spotlighting the heroic qualities of Olympic athletes, especially those toiling in obscurity.

He is motivated by the desire, he says, "to leave something that can be used in my generation and in future generations. I want to know that in 2080, Bud Greenspan will be remembered. I can do that by excelling."

Parkinson's disease and a six-week hospitalization last spring for

an upper-respiratory problem have slowed Greenspan down. On a visit to Greenspan's apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side, a reporter sitting close by strains to grasp every word. Greenspan apologizes "for being so difficult" to hear. He occasionally stops in mid-sentence.

Greenspan's opinions and his recall for details remain sharp, though. Sporting a shirt from the 2000 Sydney Games, he easily delves into his sports memory bank, back to when he broadcast St. John's University basketball games and New York Rovers hockey

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matches in the old Metropolitan League. Like the athletes he documents, Greenspan's career is woven into a rich, personal tapestry.

Greenspan relates his family's near-tragedy in 1932. His older sister Judy fell gravely ill with pneumonia. "She was examined by a doctor, and there was no way she was going to live," he says. "There was no penicillin, no miracle drugs. My father's father [Albert] said to my father [Benjamin], 'Let's go to the synagogue now and pray for her soul.'

"So they went to the Mincha service Saturday afternoon. My father broke down and cried. He said, 'If You save my child, I'll devote my life to Judaism.' Like a miracle, he comes back from the synagogue and her temperature has broken. She was dying, then suddenly she wasn't dying.

"He said, 'This is the way it's going to be, with a kosher home, with dietary laws, and we're going to live a Jewish life and I don't want any of you kids to question it. This is how I want it to be.' And this is how it was. We kept a kosher home."

Benjamin, a magistrate and a judge, would establish the Wall Street Synagogue, which still functions. He remained observant to the end of his life. Greenspan honored his father's wish, but became less observant because his early broadcasting work meant attending Saturday games. "I'd walk to sporting events on Saturday. It was hard," Greenspan says, because they lived at 149th Street and

document

Riverside Drive, and Madison Square Garden stood five miles away, at Eighth Avenue and 50th Street. Benjamin considered Bud's effort "righteous."

"I did it because he wanted the attempt made" and because Benjamin "believed that God was good to us," Greenspan said.

Has God been good specifically to him? Greenspan is asked.

"He's been very good," Greenspan responds. "He kept my family around for quite a bit. We were successful. I became a name in the sports world."

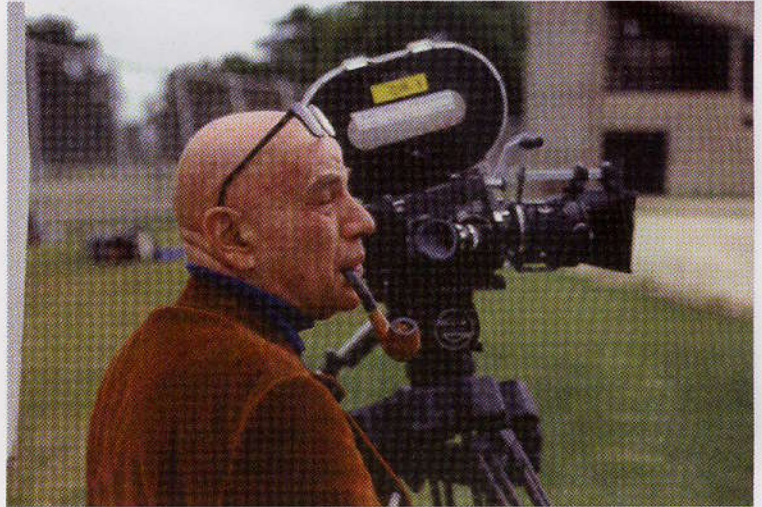
As did Greenspan's brother David, who later changed his surname to Perry. David narrated many of Greenspan's Olympics films. He "was a natural actor," Greenspan says of David, who died 10 years ago. "He had a magnificent voice."

At the 1972 Munich Olympics, the live voice was Greenspan's. He and his late wife Cappy worked for NBC's radio network. They were awakened by a telephone call, notifying them about Palestinian terrorists' kidnapping of Israeli athletes and coaches.

Greenspan recalls standing in the Israelis' "blood-stained rooms," trying to interview West German chancellor Willy Brandt, who was speaking on the telephone nearby. Athletes milled about the compound, tossing footballs and practicing the high jump. At the press center that night, "we thought they were going to tell us good news" about a deal to free the Israeli captives, Greenspan says. The tension was prolonged as the announcements first were made in German, then French, neither of which Greenspan spoke.

The next morning, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Avery Brundage famously declared that after a day of mourning for the 11 dead Israelis, "the Games must go on." While calling Brundage "a fascist," Greenspan says he agreed with the move to continue the competition because canceling "could have curtailed" the Olympic movement.

Brundage's decision, he says, "saved the Games."

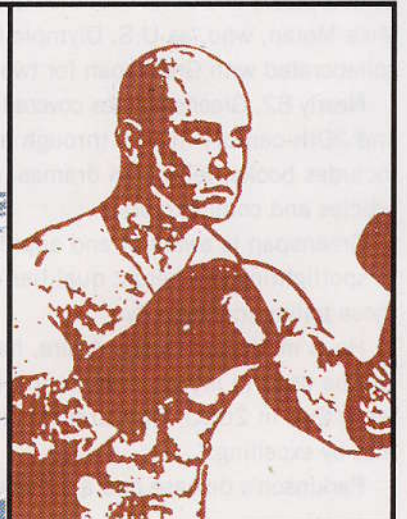


He is a camera: Bud Greenspan in a familiar role.

Thirty-six years later, and more than a half-century after making his first film about the Olympics, Greenspan has at least one more grand-scale project to complete. He will head a team of 10 from his company, Cappy Productions, to the Beijing Games. There, they will compile additional footage for a film about the great American Olympians dating back to the birth of the modern Olympiad in 1896.

Greenspan has no idea whom he'll profile in China. "We never anticipate athletes," Greenspan says. "Inevitably, some of our best stories are about athletes who hadn't had one word of print about them ... and ended up being heroes." Covering specific people has always been tricky, he explains: While he thoroughly researches competitors' backgrounds, the result of expecting stories to happen is that "you usually get burned."

China itself has been an important story since Greenspan's favorite Olympics: the 1984 Los Angeles Games, when he ran a crew of 125 who operated 26 cameras. Greenspan recalls L.A.



Olympic Organizing Committee president Peter Ueberroth flying to China four times to persuade Beijing to return to the Games after a 52-year absence.

Even when China agreed to come, Ueberroth worried how its team would be received by L.A. Memorial Coliseum spectators and other athletes at the opening ceremony, especially on the heels of the Soviet Union-led boycott—retaliation for the U.S.-led snub of the 1980 Moscow Games.

“Ueberroth was scared stiff that the audience would boo [and] that the Chinese would leave the arena,” Greenspan recalls. “When they marched in, in suits, the audience cheered. It was a very heroic thing that Ueberroth took the chance. It could have blown up.”

Greenspan believes that Beijing “never would have gotten the Games without the breakthrough in Los Angeles.”

Within six months of these Games, Greenspan hopes that his film will be ready to air on Showtime. Its title—*Bud Greenspan Remembers*—says it all. Who better to discuss American Olympians than Greenspan, who can relate first-hand his friendship with track legend Jesse Owens and his admiration for discus thrower Al Oerter’s winning an unprecedented four consecutive gold medals beginning with the 1956 Games?

Greenspan, however, is hardly magnetized solely by victors. He feels for those who make the supreme effort and do not come in first. He speaks glowingly about the lessons in sportsmanship and drive taught by Tanzanian marathoner John Steven Aquari in 1968 and British 5,000-meter runner Dave Moorcroft in 1984, both of whom finished last. Greenspan has a soft spot for a competitor “who may not win in the traditional sense, but wins in the sense that he does better than he did before.”

Greenspan mentions American speed skater Dianne Holum, who medaled four times in 1968 and 1972. Holum’s daughter Kirstin skated in the 1998 Olympics. She finished sixth in the 3,000-meter race but skated a victory lap, anyway. Holum, serving as an assistant

coach, raced to Kirstin, who was in tears. Greenspan relates Holum’s words to her, “Darling, you did something that no one else has done. You have [finished] sixth-best in the world. Two billion people would love to be where you are.” With that, he says, Kirstin stopped crying.

For Greenspan, the moral is this: “It’s not the victory that counts. Rather, it’s the courage of someone entering the arena, [who] makes the attempt and performs with honor. Sometimes, it’s hard to take: winning by a hundredth of a second. It’s infinitesimal. It can’t be seen. Where was that hundredth of a second lost or won? I defy anybody to tell me.”

When spectators or television viewers jeer an athlete, Greenspan is motivated further to uncover the person’s struggle and determination—“to do as good as they do.”

“I’m a hero worshipper among the spectators of the world,” he says.

That attention has been reflected back on Greenspan. He has received the IOC’s Olympic Order, won Emmy awards and been inducted into the USOC and the International Jewish Sports halls of fame. And in May, ESPN aired a tribute, *Bud Greenspan: At the Heart of the Games*.

Bonnie Blair says that she admires Greenspan for the thoroughness of his research for films on her life and for his friendliness toward her mother.

The five-time speed skating gold medalist calls him a “unique” filmmaker—so much so that when Blair’s children are old enough, she’ll sit them down and screen his films to help them understand her career. “He loves his job, and he puts his heart and soul into everything he touches,” Blair states.

“That’s nice to hear,” Greenspan says. “It’s so enjoyable, what I do. I’d pay to do it.”

Hillel Kutler is waiting to see which Olympians will be Greenspan-worthy in 2008.

