

# Barbershopping Wins The Gold At '84 Summer Olympics

by Brent Anderson

The Olympics have come and gone. I think most would agree that it was good for America, and good for the city of Los Angeles, to have hosted the games. In addition to some of the best athletic competition in the history of the games, we also saw, in the finest of Hollywood traditions, spectacular opening and closing ceremonies. The opening ceremony was a huge musical celebration of America. And while barbershop harmony was not featured at this time, the Olympics did include barbershopping during the games.

One of the venues for athletic competition was the beautiful Lake Casitas, nestled in the foothills just south of Santa Barbara. Lake Casitas was the site of the rowing, canoeing and kayaking events. It was here that the wonder-

ful sounds of barbershop harmony were heard echoing off the mountain tops. The Santa Barbara Sound, a well known Far Western medalist quartet, sang on three different occasions to over 25,000 people.

The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee did a great job of scaring everyone off the L.A. freeways, so the traffic during the Olympics was not the horrendous problem everyone had predicted it would be. However, Lake Casitas has only a two lane road leading to and from the lake, and understandably they were worried about 8,000 spectators all trying to get to an eight o'clock event at the same time.

That's where the Santa Barbara Sound came in. The organizers of the Lake Casitas venue had heard about the quartet

and auditioned them one night at their local chapter meeting. The members of the Santa Barbara Sound are all very active in the Santa Barbara Chapter. The tenor, Brent Graham, is also the director of the chapter. The lead, Bob Wilke, is a 30-year Society veteran and the founder of the Santa Barbara Chapter, some 27 years ago. The baritone, George Hoffman, is a 10-year Society veteran. The bass, Brent Anderson, is a nine-year member and currently public relations officer for the chapter. All these Barbershoppers are staunch chorus supporters, section leaders, show chairman and great ambassadors of barbershop harmony.

The "Sound" was thrilled at the prospect of singing for the Olympics until the entertainment committee said, "Well, we'd love to have you and we'd like you





The Santa Barbara Sound (l to r) George Hoffman, barl; Brent Anderson, bass; Bob Wilke, lead; and Brent Graham, tenor.

to start singing at 5:45 a.m."

"A.M.?" was the astonished reply.

It seems that in order to facilitate traffic, the officials planned to open the gates at 6 a.m. and encourage people to arrive early and have breakfast at the lakeside venue. The Santa Barbara Sound would then stroll among the early arrivers and entertain them while they waited for the events to begin.

Although bass Brent Anderson was quite excited about singing at 5:45 a.m., there was some concern as to whether the higher voices could sing at that time. But every morning at 4:40 a.m. the "Sound" hummed their way to Lake Casitas. By 5:45 their voices were warmed up, and in fact, have never sounded better.

Most of the audience was American and they delighted in seeing and hearing barbershop quartet music. Many were amazed that the quartet used no instruments other than their voices. Many Barbershoppers from the U.S. and Canada stopped to say hello and occasionally sing a song or tag with the quartet.

One such Barbershopper was Roger Rowell from Madison, Wisconsin. He met the "Sound" at their car early one morning as they were singing their final warm-up and donning their arm garters and straw hats. Roger has been active in

rowing events for many years and he had taken a three-month leave of absence from his job to come to Lake Casitas and help set up the course. After introductions and a song, Roger was asked what it was like to be out on the lake. He promptly replied, "How would you like to ride on the official barge, down to the finish line?" The "Sound" agreed and climbed aboard for the 2,000 meter ride.


This particular day was the only foggy morning of the first week and it was the day of the men's finals in rowing. So instead of singing along the beach shore, the crowd was treated to the sound of barbershop harmony coming through the fog off the lake. It was just foggy enough that the quartet could be heard but not seen. And while most of the crowd in the grandstands were American, most of the competitors on the lake were not.

So the Santa Barbara Sound introduced barbershop harmony to people from all over the world by taking it to them in a most unusual manner. More than one team of Olympic rowers dropped their oars and listened from their sculls as they heard the sounds of "In The Good Old Summertime" sung in four-part barbershop harmony. As the quartet neared the finish line and the timing tower, all the Olympic officials

and ABC-TV cameramen cheered, as out of the fog came first the sound and then the sight of the Santa Barbara Sound.

Later that day the quartet was invited to be the special guests of the O.O.C. and the featured entertainment for all the various Olympic officials and V.I.P.'s of the rowing venue. This group included the President of the O.O.C., Peter Ueberroth, the President of the I.O.C., Juan Antonio Samaranch, and ABC Sports commentator Kurt Gowdy.

As the quartet performed for these dignitaries and officials from over 40 foreign nations, the audience not only responded with enthusiastic cheers and applause, but also by rewarding the quartet with Olympic pins from the various countries. Although the "Sound" had not gotten involved in collecting the various Olympic pins, they found themselves suddenly showered with some very unusual and special Olympic souvenirs.

The 23rd Olympic Games were successful due, in part, to the tremendous numbers of volunteers who gave so many hours to the games. The Santa Barbara Sound is very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the games. They also hold the distinction of being the only volunteers whose uniforms were not supplied by Levi Strauss. 



Madison, Wis. Barbershopper Roger Rowell was an Olympic volunteer at Lake Casitas.