

Roller-skating rumored to be possible Olympic sport

By GREG ZOTT

Troy's Skate-World arena was the proud host of the 22d annual Great Lakes Regional World Roller-Skating Championships held July 1-6.

The Great Lakes tourney, which included 752 entries from five Midwestern States, is the final qualifying meet before the national roller-skating tournament in Lincoln, Neb. at the end of this month.

Rose Martin, tournament organizer, said interest in the races increased this year with the rumor of international and Olympic competition in the near future.

"Roller-skating as a sport has always been big," said Rose, who helped her father, Fred Martin, organize the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association (RSROA) at Arena Gardens in Detroit in 1937.

"But with competition in the Pan-Am games in 1975, and a possible Olympic tournament in the '80s, our press coverage is getting bigger."

Competition in the tournament is organized by both the United States Amateur Confederation of Roller-Skating (USAC) and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). The result is stringent touring rules that make qualifying and winning as tough as any amateur sport.

"You have to be in great shape to compete in roller-skating tournaments," said Martin, who spends much of her time teaching classes on skating at Skate-World.

"Your legs especially have to be able to work hard. With the balance and speed involved, you have to be a very good athlete to excel at the sport."

The three levels of competition at the Great Lakes tourney included artistic skating—equivalent to intricate dances put on by ice skaters—speed skating and hockey. Speed skaters, according to Martin, have surpassed ice skaters in racing against the clock.

"Roller-skating has been proven to be faster than ice skating," said Martin. "Now that everyone has plastic wheels and plastic-coated floors, speeds should keep increasing with the improvement in skaters."

The first world roller-skating meet was held in 1947, but it was 10 years ago that the RSROA made it possible for roller-skating to become a big-time sport in America. In less than one year's time, the RSROA grew from the visions of 17 men to a strong association of 100 rinks across the country.

The addition of the Federal International

Roller-Skating Organization (FIRS) in the last 25 years has established the sport as a growing international competition.

"Roller-skating is becoming a fantastic sport everywhere in the world," said Martin. "We now have 1,400 to 1,500 rinks that hold tournaments every year. We hope that we can become an Olympic sport, if not by 1980, by 1984."

Those hopes, said Charlie Wahlg, a veteran referee and coach of roller-skating throughout the Western Hemisphere, are beyond even the most optimistic thinking of skating enthusiasts in the country.

"We are still very far away from Olympic competition at any level," said Wahlg. "For the International

Olympic Committee (IOC) to recognize you, your sport must be competitive in 35 countries and on three continents. We have only about 15 countries at this time who are seriously engaged in the sport."

Roller-skating followers are hopeful that the Pan-Am games experience will promote the sport on a level never before achieved.

If the world picture for the sport is cloudy, the national view is the opposite. The Great Lakes tourney, traditionally the strongest in the country," said Martin, was packed with teams, spectators and excitement.

"The Great Lakes is just one indication of the sport's appeal," said Martin. "We had over 1,000 entries for a three-

day tournament over the Memorial Day weekend. The demand is almost over what we can control."

Such control is the least of the worries for the Rose Martin's. Skate-World arenas and roller-skating clubs around the country. The continuing avalanche of interest is just one more indication of America's love-affair with sport—

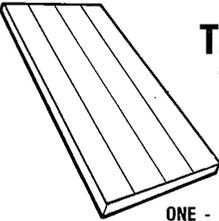
any sport—in the twentieth century.

"We hope that Troy Skate-World can keep the tournament as long as possible," said Martin. "I think it's one of the most exciting sports around."

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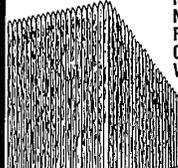
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Beechview loses NSSL dual meet

Beechview Swim Club is finding life hard in the upper division of the Northwest Suburban Swim League, as it dropped its third dual meet in a row to Forest Hills, 229-226.

Beechview, undefeated last year in the lower division, continued to improve its times, but could make no headway against the strong Forest Hills team.

Four Beechview swimmers were double winners, led by Paula King, who broke team records in both her victories. She took first in the 9-10 girl's 50-meter fly (35.8) and the 50-meter free (32.2).

Other double winners included Mary Wik in the girl's 7-8-year-old 25-meter fly and 25-meter back; Kirk Taylor in the boy's 7-8-year-old 25-meter breast and fly;

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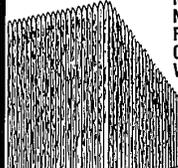
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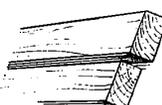
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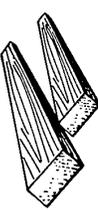
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