

'Stalag USC' Awaits Olympic Visitors: Prison-Like Atmosphere Outside ...

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'Stalag USC' Awaits Olympic Visitors

Prison-Like Atmosphere Outside Gives Way to Festiveness Inside

By ERIC MALNIC,
Times Staff Writer

The gates have slammed shut now, and from the outside, observed through the chain-link fencing—some of it equipped with electronic sensing devices, some of it topped by barbed wire—much of the campus at USC looks like a federal penitentiary.

But from the inside, where workmen have been putting the finishing touches on the landscaping, the "Baron's Bistro" and the decorative "glitter and goo" along Hoover and 34th streets, the campus is fast becoming one of Southern California's two principal

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Olympic Villages, where athletes from around the world will begin gathering Saturday for the upcoming Olympic Games.

This is the week for the dress rehearsals—cooks trying their hands at frying hamburgers, ushers practicing how to show people to their seats, maids beginning to make up the beds.

And officials say the preparations at USC—and at all the approximately 50 competition and training sites that compose Southern California's Olympic complex—are still pretty much on schedule.



BEN OLENDER / Los Angeles Times

Double fencing with barbed wire surrounds Olympic Village and dormitories on the USC campus.

"Things are rather frenzied, but overall, I'm pleased," said Ed Keen, the veteran construction boss charged with bolting the final elements of the Games together.

"It's going very well," said Philip

N. Brubaker, mayor of the USC Olympic Village. "We're a bit ahead in some areas—equipment and furniture move-in, things like that. We're a bit behind in others—things like power installation

for the phones. . . ."

"Some of it still looks like a jigsaw puzzle with some of the pieces missing," Keen said last week. But he reiterated his earlier

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promises that his 2,700-member construction crew will finish the job on time.

And as for his earlier threats to "knock over" anything that impedes progress and, if warranted, "leave a few bodies along the way," Keen said none of that has proved necessary.

"We're ready to work in a 24-hour situation," he said, "but I don't see the need for it. . . . There are a few hiccups. But we'll be ready at 4 p.m. on July 28."

That's when the Opening Ceremonies will begin at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Brubaker says he'll be ready two weeks before that—this Saturday—when he and his USC Village force of about 5,000 to 6,000 paid and volunteer workers begin playing host to a contingent of about 6,500 athletes, coaches and team officials.

USC is the largest village—there will be another 5,500 Olympic competitors and officials housed at UCLA, with about 1,000 from the combined total bedded down at UC Santa Barbara until the rowing and canoeing events at Lake Casitas are completed.

USC will be host to teams from 80 nations, ranging from the United States, which has the largest contingent—more than 600 competitors—to countries like Guyana, with only a handful.

USC will be the hub of Olympic activity. Within its confines is the McDonald's Swim Stadium, site of the swimming and diving competition. Half a mile to the south (the athletes will take buses to get there) are the Sports Arena, where the boxing will take place, and the Coliseum, site of the track and field competition and the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

Pools by McDonald's

USC figured in Los Angeles' earliest plans for the 1984 Olympics—all the way back to 1977, when U.S. Olympic officials agreed that Los Angeles would be the city to submit the bid for the United States. Even then, the officials envisioned the novel concept of multiple Olympic Villages—with USC being one of them—and although the idea met with considerable opposition, primarily from the Soviet Bloc nations that eventually boycotted the Games, International Olympic Committee officials endorsed the plan. On May 18, 1978, the IOC awarded the games to Los Angeles.

In August of 1980, the company that has given the world the "Big Mac" and the "Egg McMuffin" agreed to build the swimming complex at USC—two pools, complete with plumbing and hardware but devoid of stands, restrooms and other amenities for spectators.

By the summer of 1981, the LAOOC had signed its rental agreement with USC for use of roughly half of the 150-acre cam-

pus for an Olympic Village. While the arrangement meant that USC would have to abandon one session of summer classes during the Games, it left the school enough of its land and facilities to continue basic research and administrative functions uninterrupted.

Under the agreement, USC handled the construction contracts for the three Olympic facilities that are to become permanent fixtures on campus—the swimming complex, a 900-seat kitchen and dining hall and a weight-training room. USC also accelerated its own master landscaping plan—under which streets were converted into pedestrian malls and utilities were rerouted underground—for completion before the Games.

Construction of the swimming complex began in December, 1981, and work on the dining hall started a year later. The contract for the weight room was let last February, and the subterranean structure was not completed until a few weeks ago.

On May 9, one day after USC's commencement exercises, Keen's construction men started work on campus, causing as little disruption as possible. On June 19, with the summer session students gone, the construction began in earnest.

With the horror of the 1972 Munich massacre of Israeli athletes still a vivid memory, security was given top priority.

The entire perimeter of the 65-acre village—and many of the individual facilities within it—have been ringed with chain-link fencing, in most areas two chain-link fences, set about 10 feet apart, with a barbed-wire apron capping the outside fence. In some areas considered particularly sensitive, a third, "radar" fence has been constructed between the other two.

Additional sensing devices are

hooked to the conventional chain-link fences.

Los Angeles police officers have been in and around the campus for weeks, but they have delayed their official deployment until at least Tuesday because of the failure of the LAPD and Olympic committee to reach agreement on security costs.

A special tower has been erected near the Shrine Auditorium that—in addition to serving as a dispatch facility for buses transporting athletes and journalists—will house security personnel from various police agencies.

But once inside the village, the "Stalag USC" image gives way to a far friendlier aspect—the "festive federalism" that is the decorative theme of the XXIII Olympiad.

Scaffolds Erected

Last week, workmen largely completed the erection of scores of scaffold structures that will serve as skeletons for the decorative sculptures—some shaped like Roman triumphal arches, others resembling piles of children's building blocks—that are scattered about the village.

By now, the skeletons are acquiring their skins—drapery painted in the same 11 colors—ranging from "hot magenta" to "clean aqua"—that have been bursting forth recently on banners, cylindrical "sono tubes" and giant cardboard stars at public buildings and along public streets in Los Angeles.

Along the recently completed pedestrian malls and walkways at the USC village, gardeners have been planting flowers and carpeting bare earth with sod. At the baseball field that is being converted into a main spectator entrance, a temporary reflecting pool—framed

with plywood and plastic—has been laid across the infield. In a parking lot behind the swimming stadium, workers are putting the finishing touches on a far bigger pool—a full-sized, above-the-ground, prefabricated aluminum Olympic model that will be used for training during the Games, then cut up and hauled away.

At the swimming stadium, workers have been completing the temporary stands that will hold about 17,000 spectators, painting and numbering the plank seating, draping the metal scaffolding with fabric screening. Portable potties have been wheeled into place, turnstiles stand ready to regulate and record incoming traffic.

A parking lot beside 34th Street is being converted—through the use of gaily decorated tents, portable serving tables and a prefabricated metal kitchen—into a collection of fast-food stands catering cuisine ranging from all-American to eclectic European.

Across the street, Taper Hall—a block-long, multistory brick building—is being converted from a humanities classroom facility into convenience shops, hair salons, a post office and a video arcade. "We're putting new doorways in here and there," Brubaker said. "After it's all over, we'll plaster them up again."

Off to the side is the "Baron's Bistro," named for Baron Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympics. During the day, it will be a quiet place to stop for a cup of coffee. At night, it will be a loud place to listen to disco music.

Brubaker said the village's quiet areas—meditation rooms, music rooms—tend to be favored by athletes before they compete, as they gradually "taper down" their training schedules to conserve their physical and mental energies for the challenge of competition.

Complaint About Rooms

"Once they're done," he said, "it's the disco"—a chance to break out of their rigid regimens and enjoy the late hours and the food and beverages of choice, so long denied.

Brubaker said that one of the favorite refuges during the quiet, "taper down" period is the athlete's own room and that care has been taken to make sure that the USC dormitories being used will be free from distractions and discomfort.

During the U.S. Olympic Trials at the Coliseum last month, sprinter-long jumper Carl Lewis was quoted as saying the rooms he and other athletes had been assigned for the trials were "hot," that they "stunk" and were "unlivable."

But Mike Moran, a spokesman for the U.S. Olympic Committee, said that during the Games, the U.S. athletes will be using different quarters, at Webb Hall, a high-rise, air-conditioned apartment complex near the swimming stadium.

During a USC "Olympicnic" open house last weekend, some of the rooms at Webb Hall and other dormitories to be used by Olympic athletes were shown to the public, and those on view were cool, odor-free, spacious and attractively furnished.

At midnight Saturday, the gates around the Olympic Villages slammed shut, excluding the passers-by, the curious, the neighborhood kids on bikes and the stray dogs that until now had been largely free to wander at will.

Today, the village should be relatively quiet, except for the workmen putting finishing touches on the decorative "glitter and goo."

Music, Movies, Hot Dogs

On Monday, the maids will begin making up the beds at the Olympic dormitories. Music will begin blaring from the disco speakers and movies will begin to flicker at the village cinema. The bland aroma of American hot dogs will blend with the spicy fragrance of Polish sausage. Coca-Cola—the product of one of the sponsors—will gush from the dispensers.

"It's essentially the rehearsal," Brubaker said. "They have their uniforms, their basic orientation.

It's on-the-job training."

"We're making sure they can help one another," said Anita De Frantz, an LAOOC associate vice president who won a bronze medal in rowing at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. "We're making sure they can help our guests."

Starting Saturday, the guests arrive.

Two weeks after that the Games begin.

Two weeks after that, the Games end.

Two weeks after that, classes resume at USC.

And if everything goes according to schedule, all the fencing, all the temporary structures, all the people in Olympic uniforms, all the glitter and goo, will be gone.