AFRO Sports

Pele upstages a Kennedy in accepting U.S. kudos

By Milton Richman

NEW YORK (UPI)—For Pele, the world is simply a soccer ball, which he now holds in the palm of his hand and needs only let drop when he pleases so he can score still another goal.

Product of a poverty-stricken Brazilian family, money no longer drives him.

Patiently, he tried explaining that in Portuguese Tuesday during a ceremonial signing for the news media which turned wild and unmanageable at one point when a pair of newsreel cameramen swung at each over the delicate issue of who was pushing whom.

Soccer star Pele money no matter

The New York Cosmos' soccer team was to blame for that. Cosmos' officials were ecstatically proud and excited about signing the 34-year-old Pele to a three-year contract calling for an estimated $4.7 million, but in all their ecstacy they neglected to choose a room large enough at the fancy "21" Club to accomodate the more than 300 attending newsmen, cameramen and gate-crashers.

Ethel Kennedy was having lunch on another floor of the club and nobody even noticed in the confusion.

Pele became Americanized in a matter of minutes.

It was easy to tell from the answers he gave. They were the same ones generally provided by any other 34-year-old U.S. ballplayer past his prime who knows he has lost a step or so along the way but still insists he's just as good as he has always been . . . well, almost as good, anyway.

Why was Pele coming out of retirement? Was it for the money?

No, not for that, replied Pele, reputed to be the world's richest athlete.

Everybody has a mission in life, a goal, he explained through his intergreter and friend, João Mazzei. His goal now is to promote soccer in the U.S., the only country where the sport hasn't really flourished. This all came to him in a dream, Pele said, and that's why he came out of retirement, not because of the money.

What about his age? Wouldn't that be a handicap?

Again Pele answered in terms of a U.S. athlete, choosing American football to illustrate.

"American football is different from soccer," he said. "In American football, a player's ability depends much more on his physical condition than upon his creativeness. An athlete's actual age doesn't really matter. What matters is how much care he has taken of his body. In soccer, you can be 34, 35, 36 or 37 and there is no problem if you have taken care of your body."

Pele undoubtedly has taken care of his. Not big by U.S. standards, the man acknowledged the greatest soccer player in the world has no fat whatsoever on him. He still is lightning quick, resourceful and imaginative on the soccer field.

There were more questions.

What about the soccer fans back in Brazil? Aren't they upset with him for not playing with their national team and coming here instead?

"Brazilian people, like all Latin people, are sentimental," Pele replied. "They were angry with me at first, but then when they realized for the first time Brazilian Know-how could be exported to the United States, they started to change their emotions. Now they're proud I'm playing over here."

Tuesday fight offers escape from the ghetto

"It's the roughest section in Washington," remembers contending welterweight Johnny Gant about the D.C. ghetto he was born into. "There was poison goin' down in those streets."

Gant was reflecting on how far he had risen from those mean city streets, to psych himself up, as he prepared for what may be his most important fight to date. After four years in the rankings Johnny Gant is in line for a shot at the welterweight title.

First, the fourth-ranked welter must qualify by proving himself Tuesday night at Capital Centre against Alphonse Hayman of Philadelphia, who last November scored an upset on him. As a result of the victory, Ring Magazine now ranks Hayman eighth.

This is why Gant is looking back to the hard work that has brought him from a delinquent, impoverished childhood to the threshold of financial security—providing a Hayman disaster doesn't happen again.

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"And I want to help my mother, she deserves a better life than she has now," says Gant. When Johnny Gant looks back to where he has been, now that his is so close to the top, he remembers, "We were a family of eight kids, and there was only my mother to support us.

"I will accomplish my goal," Gant now believes. "To become champ. I want the money, so I can become godfather to my family. To help my brother and sister, and my kids when they grow up, afford a college education they can't get."

With his boxing earnings Gant has been able to attend a computer programming college, and is one semester from graduation.

Gant remembers his mother struggling for her children. At that time young Johnny felt the responsibility of being third oldest and it led to his darkest moment.

"It was summer vacation and I held up a liquor store," says Gant, willing to talk about past mistakes. "I felt bad about it, but where is a kid just 16 gonna get a job?

"I needed money. It was need not greed."

Having considerably less style about his thieving than he shows now in his fighting, Gant lost an important bout to the law and was put in Lorton (Va.) Youth Reformatory for three years.

There Gant began to learn from his losses when he took up the sport of boxing. He merged from jail with a new hope. He believed he had a future in pro boxing that would help him and his family escape their poverty.

Today, he is a step or two away from proving it.

Johnny Gant eyes win, title shot

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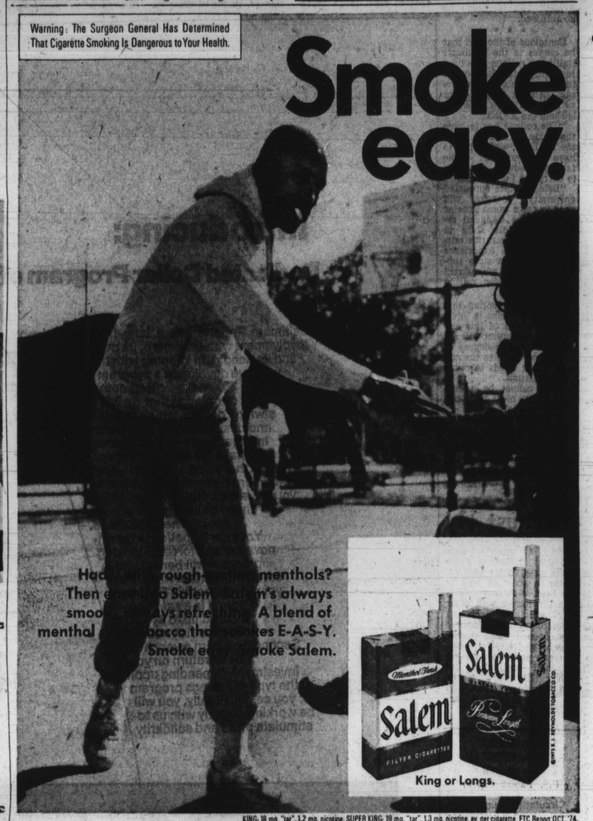

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CHARGE OF BLACK BRIGADE — Domination of American sprint racing is demonstrated in the finish of the NCAA 100-yard dash last weekend at Provo, Utah. Winner was Hasley Crawford (267) of Eastern Michigan, with Clifford Outlin of Auburn (39) second, Reggie Jones (916) of Tennessee third, and Ed Preston (32) of Arkansas State fourth. Black runners from Texas Christian (far left) and Arizona State (far right) are not identified. Crawford's time of 9.3 seconds was against a 2.4 mile headwind.

Ed Hurt among weekend Hall of Fame inductees

Former Morgan State College athletic director Edward P. "Eddie" Hurt will be among 13 celebrities in track and field history inducted in ceremonies at the National Hall of Fame, Charleston, W. Va., this weekend.

Hurt, who marked his 75th birthday on Feb. 12, will be enshrined for his many outstanding contributions to the sport.

During his tenure at Morgan, where he became a coach-of-all-sports as well as a highly-respected contributor to the national effort, Eddie tutored eight individual NCAA champions, 12 AAU champions, three NCAA relay champions, six AAU relay champions and countless CIAA and ICI-A title winning aggregations.

Prior to his 1970 retirement, Hurt also served as the coach for several USA teams on international tours.

Joining Hurt on the rostrum of inductees will be Ralph Metcalfe and Mrs. Alice Coachman Davis.

Metcalfe, 65, had the misfortune of being a contemporary of Eddie Tolan and Jesse Owens in the thirties.

Ralph, now a U.S. congressman from Illinois, was second to Tolan in the 1932 Olympics and second to Owens in 1936. He was a gold medalist as a member of the champion USA sprint relay team in the '36 Olympics in Berlin.

Mrs. Davis, a native of Albany, Ga., startled the sports world when she captured the gold medal in the women's high jump at the London Olympics in 1948 as Alice Coachman.

Others slated to be inducted are: the late Stockholm (1912) hero Jim Thorpe, two-time Olympic gold meadilst Bob Richards, sprinter Bobby Morrow;

Steeplechaser Horace Ashenfelter, decathlon titlist Bill Toomey, sprinter Stella Walsh of Poland; track club organizer Ted Haydon, sprinter Helen Stephens and coach Bill Easton.

Eddie Hurt track enshrinement

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Mets	1	3	.250
Twins	0	2	.000

National League			
Giants	3	0	1.000
Cubs	2	1	.667
Pirates	2	2	.500
Cardinals	1	2	.333
Braves	1	3	.250
Dodgers	1	3	.250

MOSHER RESULTS

Pirates 14, Dodgers 4
Tigers 10, Mets 4

MOSHER SCHEDULE

Friday
Orioles vs. Yankees, 6 p.m.
Saturday
Pirates vs. Braves, 11 a.m.
Cubs vs. Tigers, 1 p.m.
Monday
Dodgers vs Cardinals, 6 p.m.
Tuesday
Giants vs. Braves, 6 p.m. (All games at Mosher and Wheeler).

Famous dancer to be guest teacher at CCB

Anna Marie Moylan Schary, a former Baltimore ballerina who has appeared on Broadway, will return to Baltimore this summer to be a guest teacher at the Community College of Baltimore dance seminar June 23 through July 31 at the Mt. St. Agnes Center.

For information call Deborah London, 462-5830, ext. 280, or write to Miss London at the Community College of Baltimore, 2901 Liberty Heights Ave., 21215.

Summer basketball

The Urban Services Agency will sponsor a summer basketball league at the Community College of Baltimore. Any persons interested in joining the 18-and-under or unlimited teams should contact Cleveland Brister, at 225-7100.

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Ali gets flowergirl treatment in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR (UPI) — Pretty flowergirls, Malay drummers and thousands of wildly cheering Malaysian fans Tuesday welcomed Muhammad Ali as he flew in for his July 1 title defense against Joe Bugner.

A beaming, confident Ali was garlanded and sprinkled with scented flowers by girls in colorful Malay costumes as he stepped down from his plane at Subang Airport.

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More than 15,000 fans jammed the waving gallery of the airport terminal to catch a glimpse of Ali as he walked to the beat of Malay "kampang" drums to the lounge for a news conference.

The fans, restrained by 200 riot police, crushed around Ali when he moved to his Lincoln Continental for his 15-mile drive to the Malaysian capital flanked by police outriders.

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Another welcome greeted him at the Hilton Hotel, where the staff was joined by fans in welcoming him before he went to his penthouse suite by one lift reserved for his use.

Ali is a household name throughout Moslem Malaysia. His fight with Bugner is the fulfilment of a promise he made when he visited Malaysia in 1973 that he would defend his title here once.

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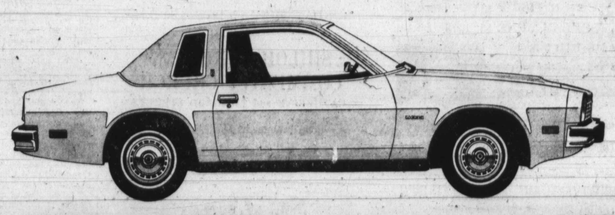

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