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Correspondents are urged to write briefly so that readers may be offered as wide a selection of letters as possible. So many are being received that the omission of some is inevitable. Letters should be signed personally by all their authors.

## Who's going to win the Olympics?

SIR,—The USA has dominated the Olympic Games on most of the 18 occasions since their revival in 1896 by winning the largest number of medals. The USSR entered the competitions in a modest way in 1956, seriously challenged the supremacy of the USA in 1968 (USA 107 medals; USSR 91), and replaced the Ameri-

cans as the champions of the games by winning 99 medals to the USA's 93 in 1972. A detailed analysis of the failure of the USA to maintain its leading position at Munich will be reported next year.

The accompanying table lists the categories of events for males in decreasing order of medals

won by the USA in Munich in 1972. For example the USA dominated the swimming events by winning 61% of the 39 medals (60% of maximum points). Of the total 126 points won by the USA, 82 (65%) were derived from swimming, athletics, and field events. But these events contributed only 26% of the 798 maximum points. In contrast, the USA did not win any points in cycling, fencing, gymnastics, judo, weight-lifting, or Graeco-Roman wrestling, which together yield a total of 114 medals or 228 points (28.6% of total points). The table shows that the USSR's achievements were distributed far more evenly.

Age and height are related to performance; in general, younger age and greater height are advantageous factors. The USA male medalists were both younger and taller than the Soviet medalists, their mean age ( $\pm$ SD) being  $24.5 \pm 5.8$  years compared with  $27.0 \pm 4.6$  years for the Russians and their mean height  $183.8 \pm 7.5$  cm compared with  $177.6 \pm 10.2$  cm. The mean height of the general male population of the USA is  $174.2 \pm 6.9$  cm and in the USSR it is of the same order or lower. The finding that the USA lost her lead to the USSR despite the seemingly advantageous factors arising from younger age and greater height needs explanation. Champion swimmers are both young and tall. The overwhelming domination by the USA in the swimming events is reflected in the younger mean age and greater mean height of her champions. Because height and weight are positively correlated, lightweight champions from many of the 46 weight-graded events (wrestling, weight-lifting, etc) are of average or less than average height,<sup>1,2</sup> and in 24 of these events the USA failed to win any medals. To regain

Male Medallists from USA and USSR, Munich 1972

Category*	No of medals	Maximum points†	USA		USSR	
			Medals won	Points won	Medals won	Points won
Swimming .. .. .	(13)	39	24	47	2	4
Athletics and field .. .. .	(22)	66	18	35	12	29
Wrestling (free style) .. .. .	(11)	33	5	13	9	23
Shooting .. .. .	(8)	24	4	10	1	8
Boxing .. .. .	(11)	33	4	6	1	3
Yachting .. .. .	(6)	18	3	5	2	4
Archery .. .. .	(1)	3	1	3	0	0
Equestrian .. .. .	(3)	9	2	2	1	2
Rowing .. .. .	(7)	21	1	2	2	6
Team events .. .. .	(6)	18	1	2	3	6
Canoeing .. .. .	(7)	21	1	1	4	12
Cycling .. .. .	(6)	18	0	0	2	4
Fencing .. .. .	(3)	9	0	0	2	4
Gymnastics .. .. .	(5)	15	0	0	5	11
Judo .. .. .	(5)	15	0	0	4	7
Weight-lifting .. .. .	(9)	27	0	0	5	12
Wrestling (Graeco-Roman) .. .. .	(10)	30	0	0	6	16
All events .. .. .	(133)	399	64	126	64	151

Data collated from three separate volumes published by the organising committee for the Games of the XXth Olympiad, Munich 1972. Over 80% of the reported medals are accounted for in the present analysis; theme dals unaccounted for do not introduce any bias in the overall findings.

\*Numbers of events are given in parentheses.

†Three points for gold, 2 for silver, 1 for bronze.