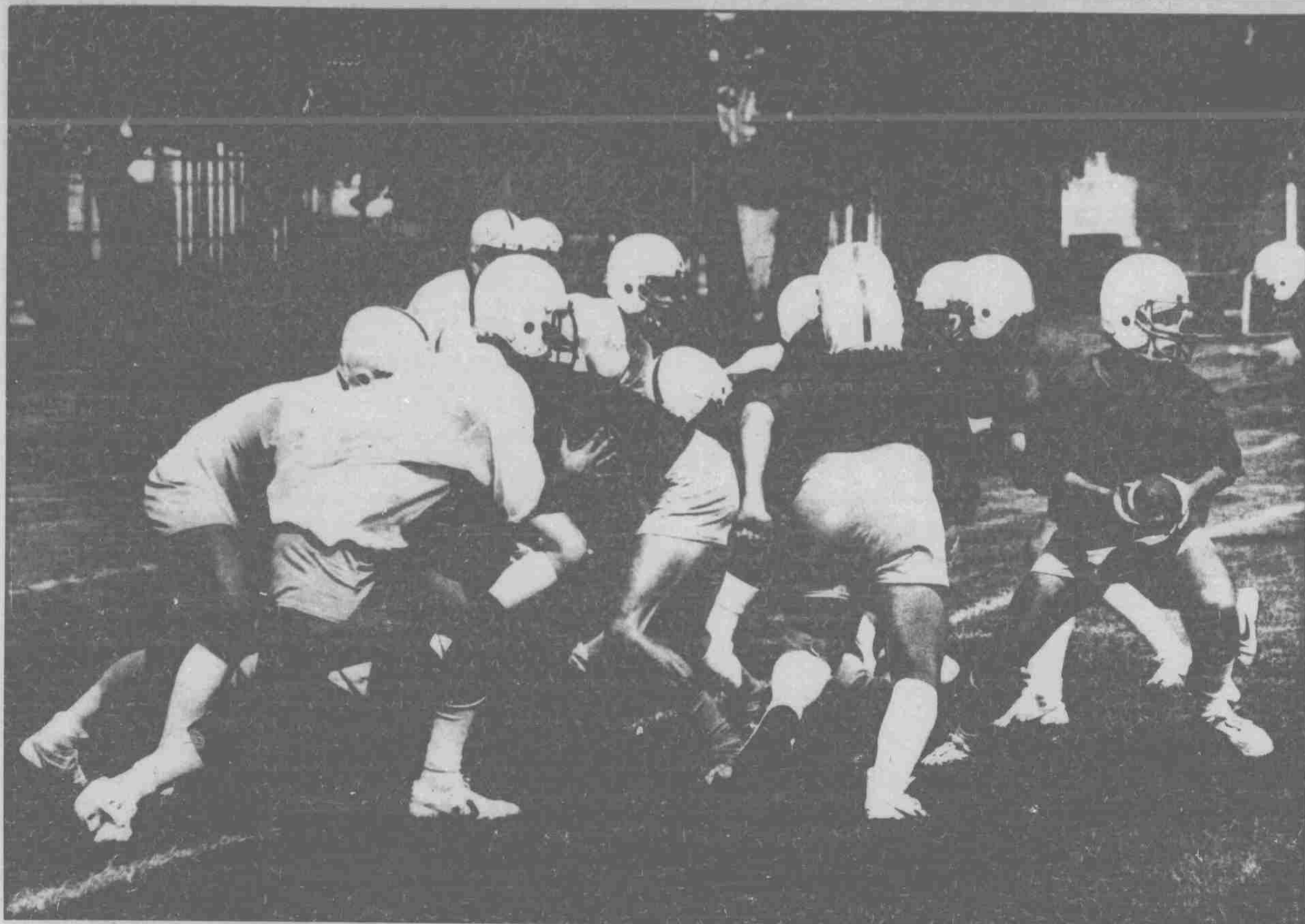


# Sports



David Trouba/Daily Nebraskan

The UNL Freshman football team began their first two-a-days Monday.

## Olympic coverage pro-American, melodramatic

Opinion by Chris Burbach

Two weeks and 172 television hours after Rafer Johnson lit the Olympic torch, the Games of the XXIII Olympiad are over. Thank God, Yahweh, Buddha, Allah et al.

In July, U.S. triple jumper Willie Banks predicted that the Games would not be a sports contest. He said they would be a television show. Banks said everyone just wanted to see Carl Lewis and Edwin Moses, and ABC would cater to that desire. Banks was wrong. From a television program point of view, ABC did much worse.

Jim McKay was near the forefront of the Olympic television malaise. That commentator has had his moments, but this year, his work resembled Muhammad Ali climbing back into the ring just one too many times. Like Ali, McKay stumbled and slurred.

Time and again the veteran sportscaster defied the laws, letter and spirit, of English grammar while striving to rescue sentences, or facsimiles thereof, which were garbled from their first syllable. His enunciation was muddier than the Mississippi, and he was as alert as Yogi Bear in mid-winter.

The only thing McKay had going for him was his recognition factor as the man who has covered a lot of Olympics. One too many Olympics.

After McKay, ABC's coverage went downhill. And that wasn't easy. Of the myriad of laughably mediocre facets of the Olympic television show, two stand out — the disgustingly pro-American raving of most commentators, and the melodrama.

Nowhere were the commentators worse than in their gymnastics coverage. And no one among that group was worse than Cathy Rigby-McCoy. While the audience cheered good efforts by members of all teams, Rigby-McCoy cheered only for the Americans. She goaded "the competition" on to failure. McCoy's excitement peaked not when the American men captured the gold, not when Koji Gushiken of Japan rallied from way back to win the all-around, not when Mary Lou Retton nailed her victory vault. No, McCoy was more elated by gaffes committed by the Chinese men which opened the door for the Americans.

That type of advocacy commentary is inherent in sports journalism, and often is worse in interna-

tional competition. But in this Olympics, ABC hit bottom. In a showcase of world athletes, viewers saw almost exclusively Americans. All disputes, save some unarguably rotten boxing decisions, were seen from the American point of view. And viewers were inundated with that view, often "Up Close and Personal."

The "Up Close and Personal" features were on the cutting edge of Olympic melodrama. ABC could have foregone showing even shortened versions of its most popular soaps and merely directed soap opera addicts' attention to its Olympic coverage. All

that was missing from the "Up Close..." spots were audience cues saying "Cry" or "Feel Warm hearted." The melodrama reached its nadir with a feature on American boxer Mark Breland, whose face faded out to a roaring tiger as he described himself as an animal.

Worse than the hardship this type of malarkey caused to viewers was the effect it may have had on the athletes themselves. After all, they were trying to accomplish something, we were just watching. A prime example was American swimmer Rick Carey.

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