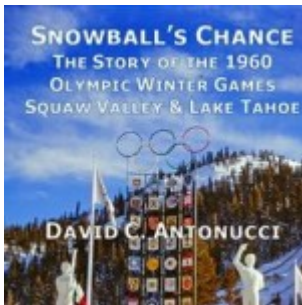


Author captures authentic history of 1960 Games

By Nancy Oliver Hayden



The idea of having the 1960 Olympic Winter Games at Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe began as a marketing ploy with no chance to succeed. It culminated with record performances and many firsts and put the Lake Tahoe region on the international map of world-class skiing.

In 1954 Alexander Cushing read a report in his morning paper about the Reno bid to secure the 1960 Winter Olympic Games. Cushing thought that a superior Squaw Valley could submit a credible bid and in the process gain wider public attention, even if the gambit ultimately failed.

However, rather than fail, the VIII Winter Games were an unqualified success and far exceeded the expectations of even the most jaded critics. For the winter sports industry, this was their catapult to stardom and the kick-start that alpine skiing received was immense.

In the Lake Tahoe region, a handful of struggling mom and pop ski parks exploded into a dozen major ski areas that gave the region the largest concentration of ski areas in North America.

The release of "Snowball's Chance" by David Antonucci coincides with the 50th anniversary of the VIII Winter Olympic Games, which took place Feb. 18-28, 1960. Thoroughly researched and carefully organized, the book covers the

history of the effort to win the Olympic bid, building the Olympic Village, designing and construction of the competition venues, and you-are-there accounts of all competition events.

The author's interest in the 1960 Winter Olympic Games started with his research on the source of what appeared to be abandoned trails near his home on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe. He determined that the trails were the remnants of the cross country ski courses of the 1960 Winter Olympics. Although most of the competitions were at Squaw Valley, the venue for the cross country events was 16 miles from Squaw at McKinney Creek on the West Shore, thus the trails near his home.

The 188-page paperback is full of interesting and little known facts. For example: when it became apparent that the Winter Games would require intense, but short-term demand for personnel and equipment, the Organizing Committee requested military assistance. With a mobilized force of 750, military personnel constructed drainage works for the temporary parking lot, laid communication wiring, constructed cross country courses and conducted snow removal operations. The most unusual use of the military workforce was the alpine course preparation crew. Officers marched 10 Marine platoons of 30 troops each in a V-formation down the alpine ski courses to boot-pack the snow. Skiing troops followed them to smooth the surface. This process occurred over 30 days in advance of the events to ensure the best possible conditions for high-level competition.

"Snowball's Chance" provides anyone who was fortunate enough to attend or be involved in the VIII Winter Olympic Games an opportunity to relive the spirit and excitement of the event. The rest of us have a ringside seat as we vicariously participate in the pageantry created by Walt Disney and thrill to the heat of competition.

Of the 85 photos and illustrations that appear throughout the

book, most are by official Olympic photographer Bill Briner and many appear here for the first time. At the end of each chapter, under the heading Epilogue, Antonucci includes interesting facts about what has happened to many of the planners, officials and athletes mentioned in that chapter.

Among the athletic highlights at the VIII Olympic Winter Games are: the American ice hockey team won its first gold medal, Americans Carol Heiss and David Jenkins swept the individual figure skating gold medals, and Norwegian speed skater Knut Johannesen set a world record for the 10,000-meter with a time of 15/46.6. Four other skaters broke the world record the same day.

The Olympic firsts included mechanized equipment used to compact and groom the snow surface, artificial ice created by mechanical refrigeration and Zamboni machines used to resurface ice rinks, athletes housed in a centralized facility, fully automated electric timing, a mainframe computer used to analyze and report results, extensive live TV coverage, and instant replay by videotape.

Antonucci has been a resident of the Lake Tahoe area for more than 35 years. He holds bachelor and master degrees in civil and environmental engineering and is a licensed professional civil engineer in California.

He founded the Olympic Trails Restoration Committee and worked closely with California State Parks and others to reopen the surviving trail system for public use. He also serves on the board of the Squaw Valley Olympic Museum Foundation and is a member of the 50th Anniversary Olympic Heritage Celebration Committee. An outdoor enthusiast, he enjoys skiing, snowshoeing, biking, skin diving, kayaking, golf, hiking and camping. He resides in Tahoma with wife Jenny and son Dominic.

"Snowball's Chance" is available for purchase at several local bookstores and retailers. For a complete list, visit

www.tahoefacts.com.

Nancy Oliver Hayden has been a journalist covering the South Shore of Lake Tahoe for more 20 years.

Publisher's note: *Terry Orr, Olympic team doctor from Lake Tahoe, will be featured Jan. 25.*