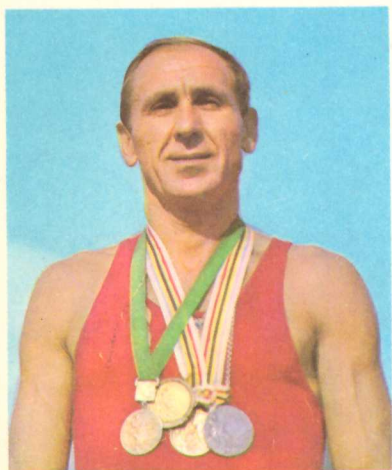


Olympic
Heroes



V. Golubnichy set his first world record in race walking in 1955, and his last twenty years later! He is now past forty but he still takes part in competitions and enthusiastically shares his rich experience with young people.

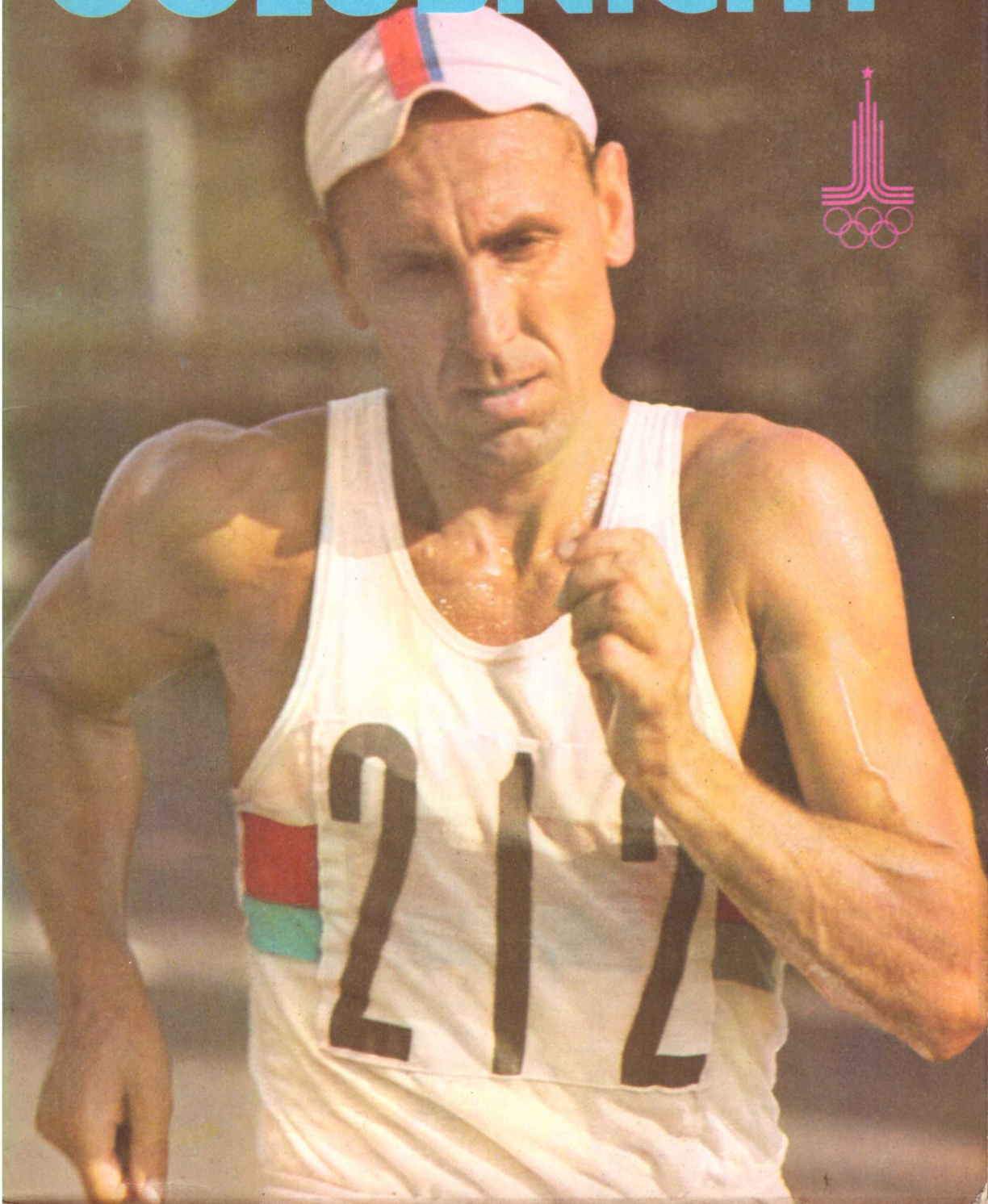
**Vladimir
GOLUBNICHY**



Progress Publishers
Moscow

Olympic
Heroes

Vladimir GOLUBNICHY



Vladimir GOLUBNICHY

Is it hard to become a top-class sportsman and famous champion? If you ask people who have won, they'll tell you that the wonderful moment of victory is always preceded by weeks, months and years of tremendous work. Vladimir Golubnichy, one of the best race walkers in world sports, knows the price of great victories. He has won the titles of champion of the USSR, Europe and the Olympic Games. He has won many of the largest international contests. Read this book and you'll understand why he gained success without ever changing his motto: "Per aspera ad astra!"

(на английском языке)

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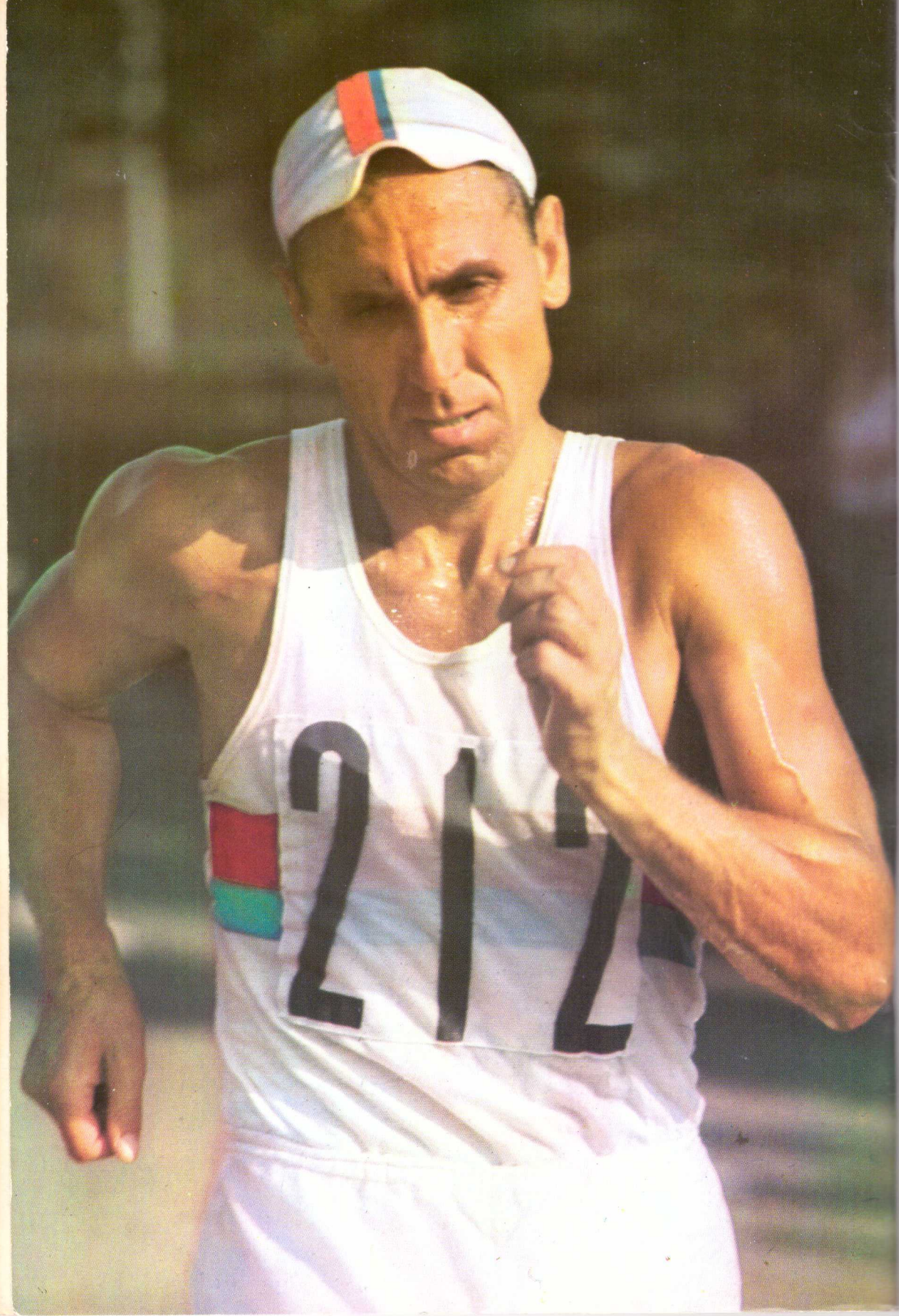
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TIM. ERICKSON





For very nearly a quarter of a century Vladimir Golubnichy has been in the vanguard of the world's top athletics. He is a great athlete, and a fine human being, and I bow before his devotion to his event, his courage, his patience, his fighting spirit and his ability to win.

Leonid Khomenkov, Vice-President of the International Amateur Athletic Federation

A tall, slim athlete wearing the red vest and white shorts of the USSR team strode along the Moscow-Simferopol highway in the cool early morning air. He walked with an economic springy gait, stepping forward easily and confidently, staring fixedly ahead, and apparently unaware of all around him, of the beautiful Crimean landscape, or the occasional car which shot past at high speeds.

But suddenly one of these cars braked and came to a stop about twenty metres further on. A tall, slightly corpulent figure got out of the car and hurried back to the walker.

"Volodya! Hey, great to see you! You know, you haven't changed. Time hasn't touched you. What, don't you recognise me?"

The walker, at first a bit non-plussed by this unexpected encounter, grinned and stuck out his hand:

"Hi, Robert! I just wasn't expecting to meet anyone I know, at this unearthly hour, especially not you. Let me see: as far as I know you're now head of Georgia's biggest sports school, and so busy with your work that you hardly ever attend any competitions. Listen, how long is it since we last saw each other?"

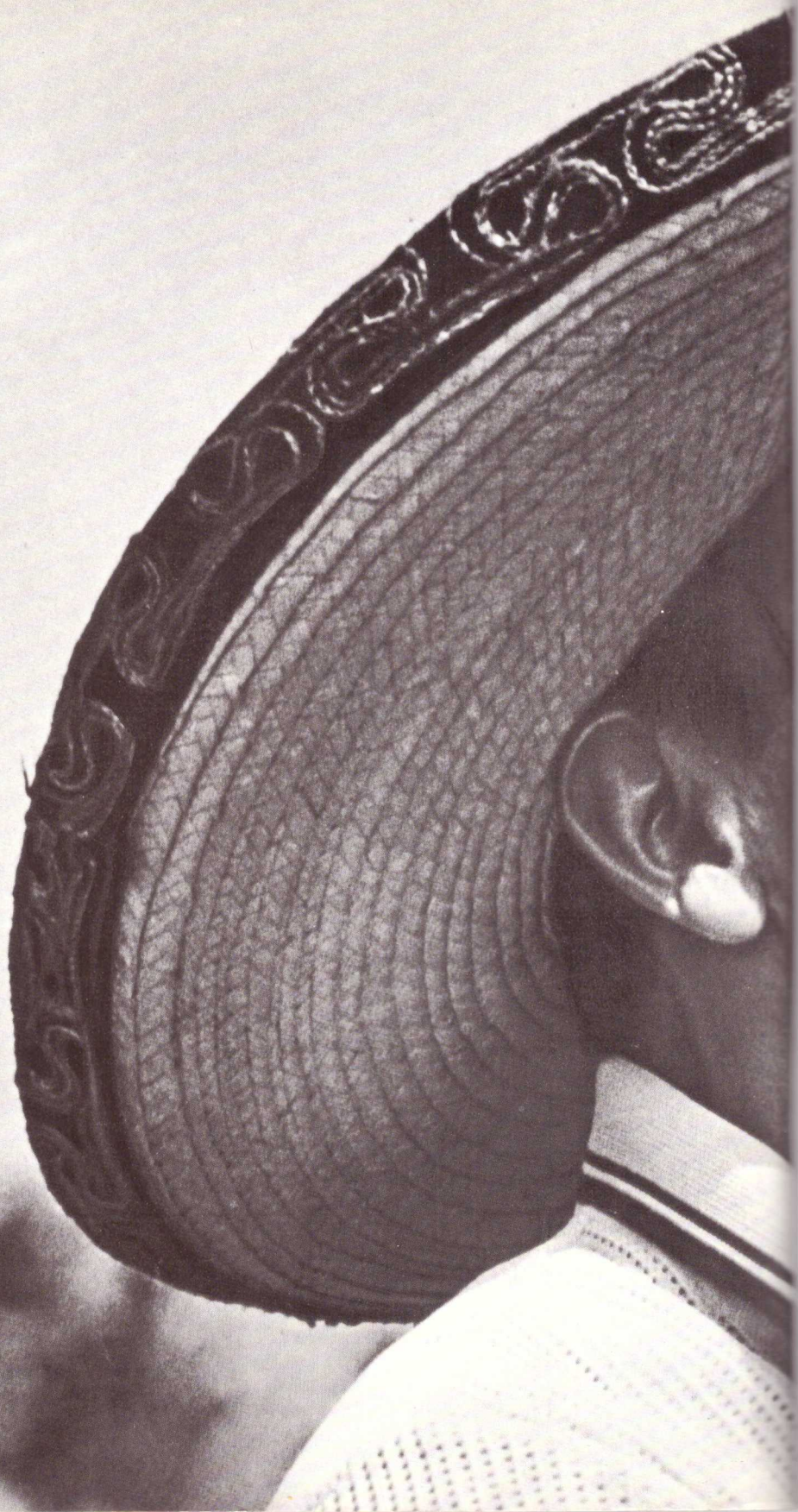
"Oho, a long time, Volodya! I haven't been competing now for twelve years, and you're still walking, still training, still taking away the prizes. You've done a tremendous job, I must say...."

"Hey, d'you remember...."

And off they went down memory lane. The two famous athletes—Robert Shavlakadze, Olympic high-jump champion, and Vladimir Golubnichy, Olympic walking champion, on this chance encounter on a Crimean road shortly before the Montreal Olympics, had a lot to recall. On many occasions had the two of them defended the honour of the Soviet team. In 1960 Shavlakadze and Golubnichy both became Olympic champions in Rome, and they performed well at the next Olympics, in Tokyo, as well. Since that time a lot of water has flown under the bridge. Shavlakadze has long been working as a trainer, while Golubnichy has remained in competitive sport. He is now the only



Medals from four Olympics

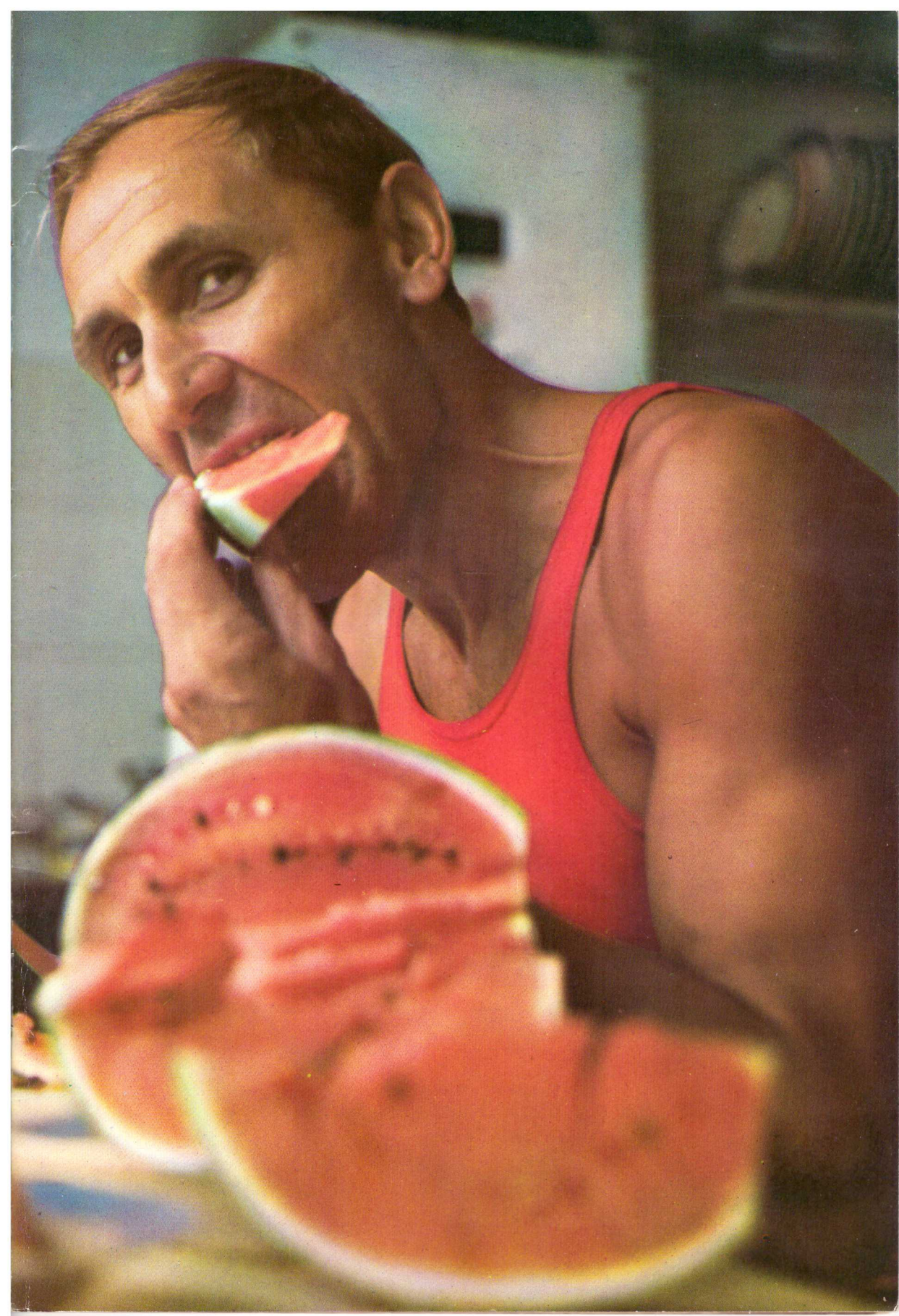


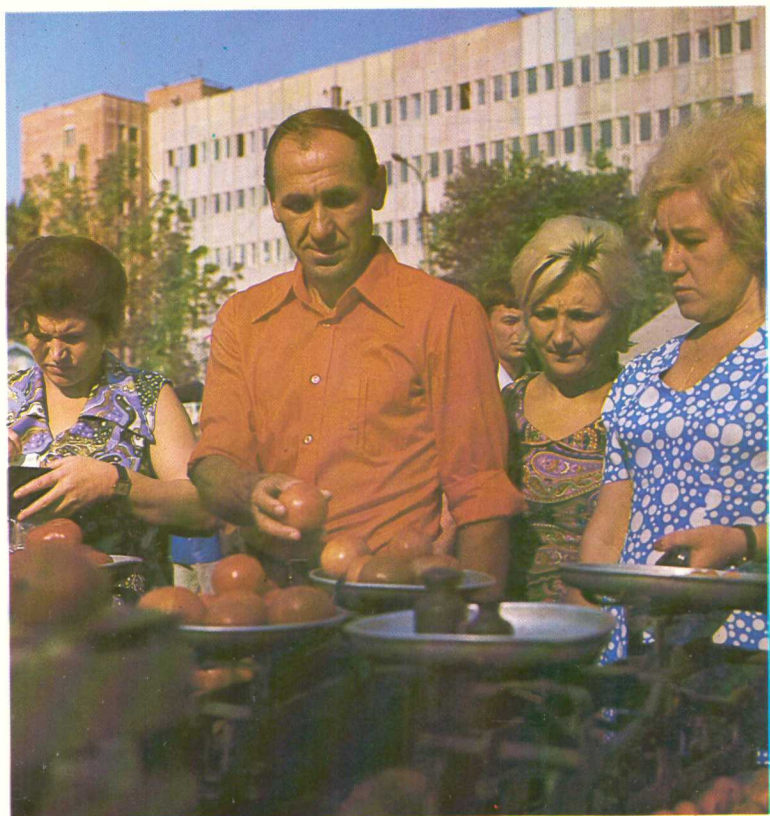






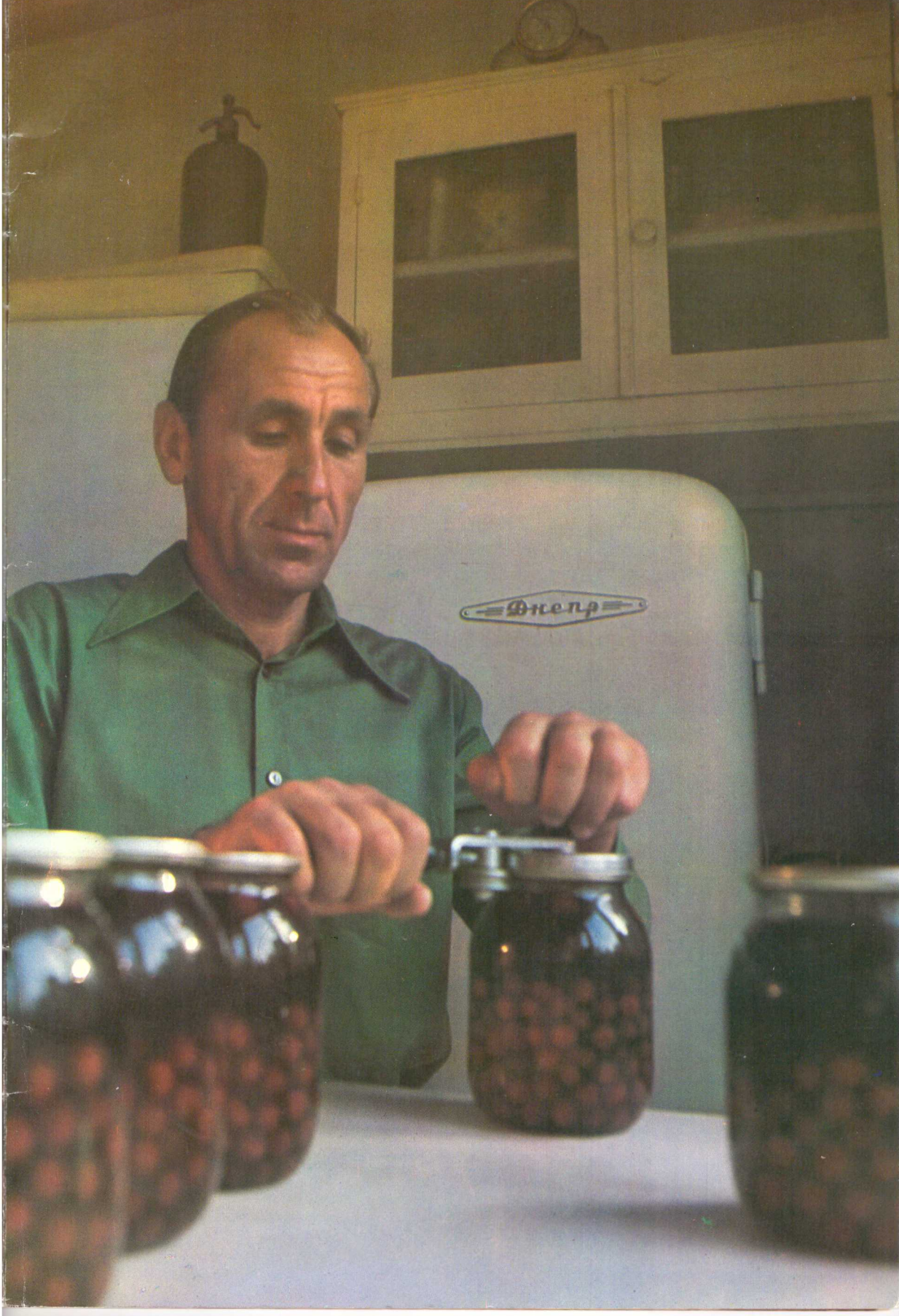






The family man --
Visiting his mother





representative in the Soviet team of the generation who brought home the first victories in the history of Soviet athletics.

Vladimir Golubnichy.... The name of this sportsman from the Ukrainian town of Sumy has long become truly legendary. Golubnichy owes his popularity above all to his extraordinary sporting longevity. No other athlete in the world could hope to compete with the stability of his performances over many many years of competition. It hardly seems credible that since 1955, when he set his first world record, until the present day Golubnichy has remained one of the acclaimed leaders amongst the world's walkers.

He has spent more than twenty years in big-time sport, and every one of them has been eventful and glorious.

He has participated in no less than five Olympics, and brought back medals from four of them. He won golds in Rome and Mexico, silver in Munich and a bronze in Tokyo. And these in the hardest event, the 20 kilometres, which costs its participants so much nervous energy and physical effort.

Golubnichy started his sporting career in the hard postwar years, when there was a shortage of trainers, of good sports facilities, and the wonderful modern stadiums which we now see in practically every town existed at the time only in people's dreams. The Soviet Union was engaged in the task of reconstructing its war-torn economy, and all its strength was concentrated in this area. But there has always been a place for sport in the country, and the difficult postwar years were no exception. The young lads of Sumy went in for football, gymnastics, athletics, skiing and other sports, and Vladimir was as keen as his friends.

In the fifth grade he was keen on skiing. But the winter season is short-lived in the Ukraine, and so for most of the year the Sumy skiers concentrated on general physical training. In his skiing section Gennady Kolchin, brother of the famous racer Pavel Kolchin, trained mostly adults.

Volodya Golubnichy and his mate Edik Tretyakov had a tough time: however hard they tried to keep up with their elders in a cross-country race they couldn't manage it. But when their trainer saw that the youngsters didn't have the strength to race, he let them transfer to walking. That was how Volodya was introduced to the sport that was to absorb so many years of his life. But at that time he did not know this, and still regarded skiing as his priority, followed by cross-country, and then walking, in all of them behind Edik. Edik even made it to the Ukrainian athletics championship, where he competed quite successfully in the walking. But Vladimir still preferred skiing. In the course of a year he completed the norm for the first sporting division: a great success for a seventh-grade lad.

Now he could start thinking seriously about achieving the ranking of Master of Sport. Like every Soviet boy, he dreamt about becoming the possessor of the Master's square silver badge.

Then something happened which was to cause an abrupt change in

**The Munich Olympics
the starter's gun will go
in a moment**







Golubnichy's sporting career. Shortly before the end of his seventh school year Vladimir and his pals came to "root" for their school team at the town's athletics championship. The competitions were coming to an end, and the question of which school was to win remained an open one.

Distracted by a walking event Volodya did not at once notice that his friend Edik was looking for him. But Edik, after running round the entire stadium, eventually found him.

"Hey, Volodya," he called, "you've got to help us out! Our second walker is sick. You'll have to replace him," he panted. Volodya tried to refuse, but there was no way he could talk his way round stubborn Edik! Brushing aside Volodya's objections, Edik went on: "We won't go too fast, and make it look as though we're challenging each other. First I'll go out in front, then you, then me again, and so on. That way it'll be easier, and we'll probably leave the others behind soon."

They did as they had agreed. The excitement on the stands was tremendous. Vladimir Golubnichy, making his all-time walking first appearance, was going neck-and-neck with Edward Tretyakov, up till now unchallenged by any other schoolboy in this event. The two friends, walking side by side, crossed the finishing line at the same moment.

They applied a similar tactics at the regional championship. Admittedly this time they had rather more opponents, and to get away from them they really had to work hard. But the moment Golubnichy and Tretyakov got ahead of the pack they put their little "game" into operation and once again broke the tape together.

Who would then have thought that this tactical method, which the two lads had hit upon quite by accident, would become Golubnichy's standard competition manoeuvre many years later? And on many an occasion this tactics has brought him success. After leaving school Golubnichy's and Tretyakov's ways parted. Vladimir started working in a factory, and Edik enrolled at the Kiev trainers' college. Vladimir devoted another year to skiing, before finally deciding to take up walking in earnest. He went to see the coach Vassily Polyakov and asked if he could train him. This was the start of a great partnership, which brought Soviet sport four Olympic medals.

Vladimir proved to be a capable walker. At 17 he easily won the Ukrainian adult championship in the 10-kilometre walk, leaving many well-known masters of the event behind. Then he set several Ukrainian records at various distances. Then, two years later in a match in Kiev, he became a world-record holder in the 20 kilometres. At the time, 1955, Golubnichy's time of 1 hour 30 minutes 2.8 seconds seemed superb, the more so because it was set by a 19-year-old lad. But 21 whole years later, and once again in Kiev, at the national championship which was to serve as the trials for the Montreal Olympics, Golubnichy turned in a time phenomenal by present-day standards: 1 hour 23 minutes 55.0 seconds. And once again everyone was stunned,



On the finishing straight

for incredible though it may seem, the man who performed this feat was shortly to celebrate his 40th birthday!

Vladimir looked forward to 1956 with particular excitement. As the leader of the Soviet walkers he dreamt of Olympic victory. But his dreams were not to come true on this occasion. Others went to Melbourne instead of him, as he fell seriously ill in 1956. Inflammation of the liver threatened to end his sporting career, but he fought the sickness manfully, and after a few months was back on the track. For the time being, of course, there could be no question of his doing any serious walking. In those recuperative months his activities were restricted to short runs, various jumping exercises, throwing medicine balls. And once again he fell the victim of the sickness. In October 1956, the very same days when the Melbourne Olympics were already in progress, a white ambulance drove up to the Central Stadium in Kiev and bore away to a hospital world record-holder Vladimir Golubnichy.

Once again the talented athlete had been put out of action by a serious complaint of the liver. And this time the doctors were categorical in their prohibitions: no training, no overloading his system.

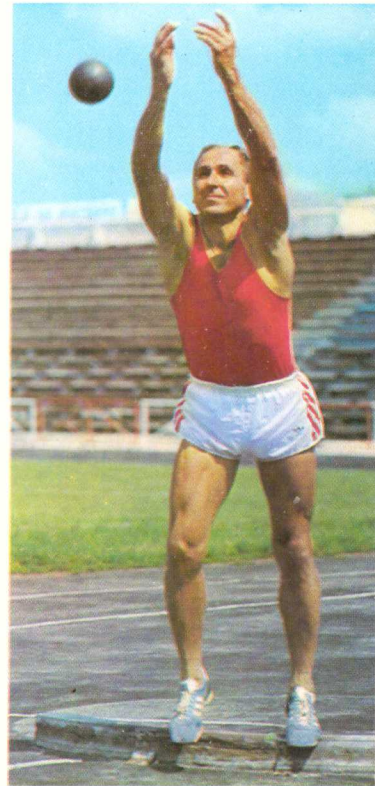
He just could not bring himself to accept this, even though in his heart of hearts he knew that the doctors were right. But he still had a tiny glimmer of hope. They were always two opposite tendencies at war within him: optimistic and pessimistic.

Here are some dialogues I found in his diary for that period: "Maresyev flew without any feet, and you're scared about some silly old liver," scoffed one half of him, and the other objected: "No one has ever succeeded in getting back into competitive shape after a sickness like that. Well, just suppose you do get well and take up walking again. You'll still never be a great champion again. At a decisive moment in the race you'll be sure to suddenly think about your liver, start sparing yourself and one defeat will follow the other. Is it worth returning to sport to become a mediocrity?"

He conducted dialogues like this with himself every day. And who knows how it would have ended if Golubnichy hadn't discovered Boris Rayevsky's book *Keep on Going!*, a book about the courage, extraordinary diligence and purposefulness of a swimmer Leonid Kochetkov, who, after being seriously wounded in the wartime, succeeded not only in returning to the pool, but even in becoming a world record-holder. Vladimir found out that Kochetkov's prototype was the famous Soviet sportsman Leonid Meshkov.

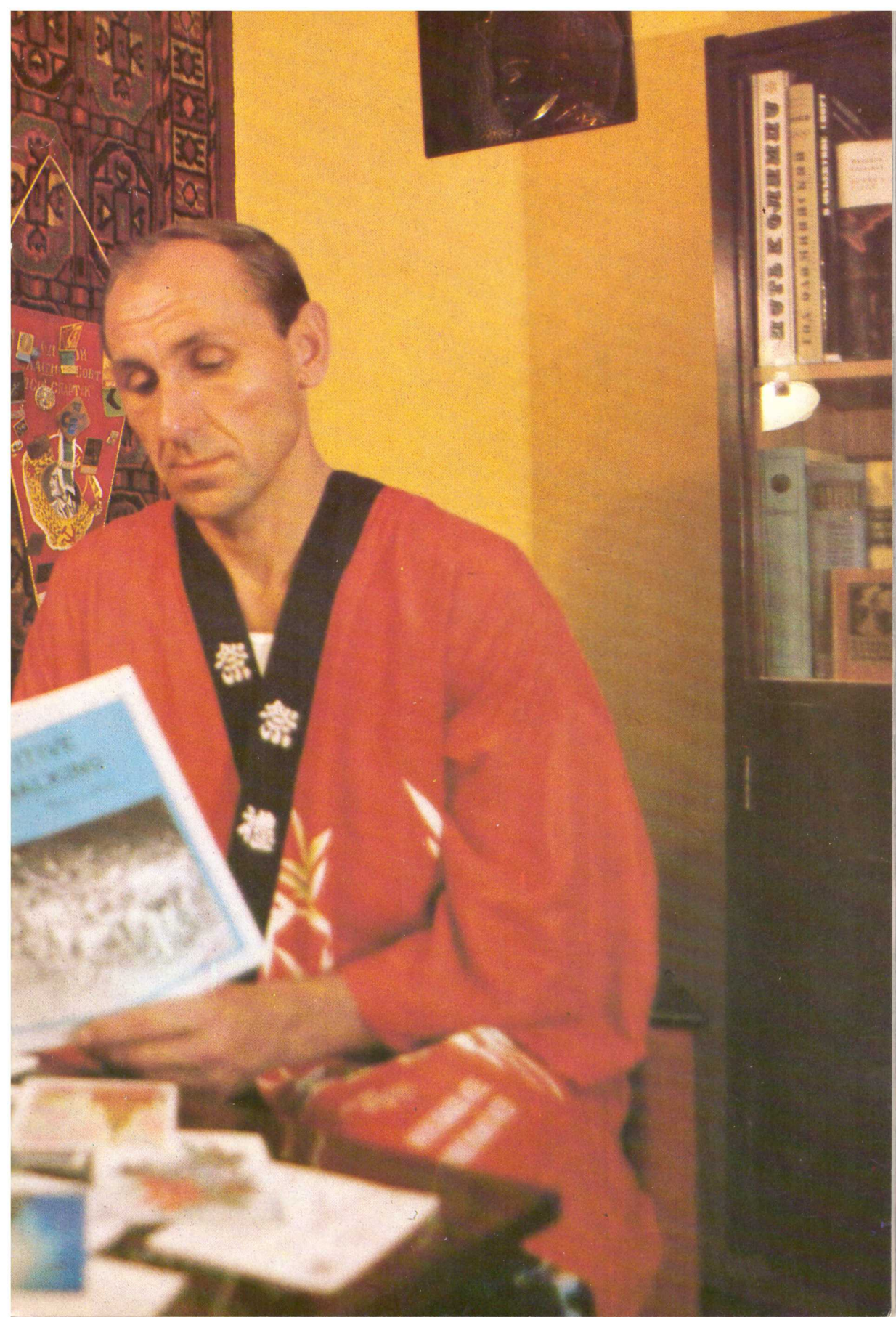
We find the following entry in Golubnichy's diary:

"The doctors told Kochetkov essentially the same things as they told me: 'You may be able to hold a spoon with this hand, but as for swimming—no!' And he went and defied them all, and swam. How am I any worse than him? His case was exceptional, but his condition didn't break his willpower. And so what that at his first training session after recovery he was overtaken by small



**The harder it is in training
the easier it will be in
competition**









boys still learning to swim? Maybe the same will happen to me at first. But I'll take as my motto the popular saying: 'Hard work and stubbornness will overcome any obstacle', and will definitely get back on my feet again. Then just you wait, fellow walkers! We'll see who wins then! "

Keep on Going! became Golubnichy's bible. It gave him his confidence back and his hope for a quick return to sport. He was careful to observe the doctors' instructions to the letter. He kept to a strict regime. Soon he started to feel improvements and to forget his sickness. Of course he was helped by medicines, his diet, his regime. But above all it was his mighty willpower, his overwhelming desire to return to sport that pulled him through.

The moment the pain let up Vladimir enrolled at the trainers' college and started working gradually.

For three long years he fought his illness, and every time he went out onto the track for a race he could not be sure he would make it to the finish. But victory favours the persistent, and in the end he overcame his illness and once again found himself among the world's top walkers. He scored great victories and earned wide acclaim.

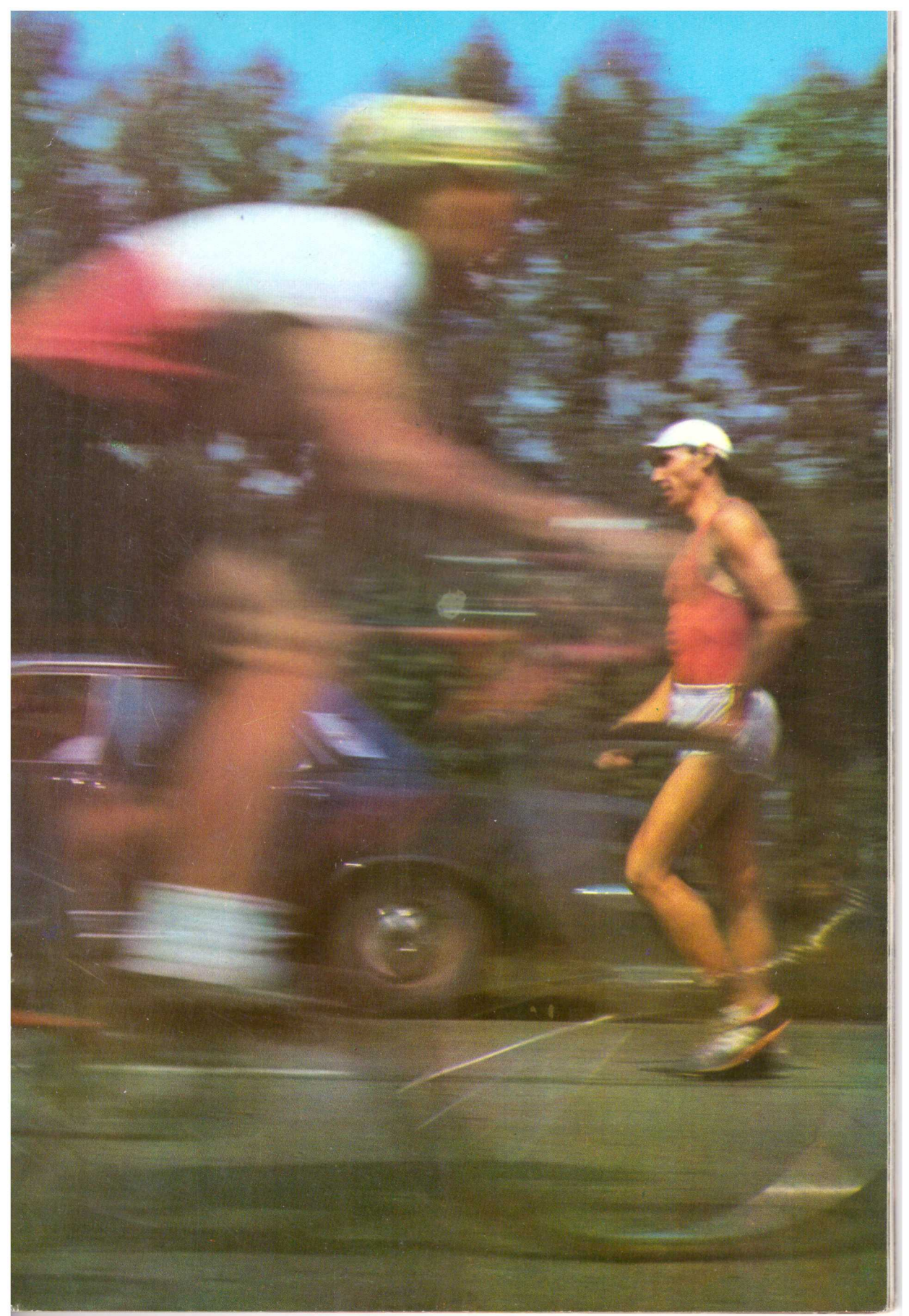
Courage is often quiet and imperceptible. Just imagine how much strength and energy are required at the end of an incredibly long race to make a burst and break away from your opponents. This was what happened at the Olympics in Rome and Mexico, when after the race's long, stiflingly hot, and enervating kilometres he broke away at the very finish. It was precisely in the most important, most responsible competitions that he experienced that third wind, which only champions know about.

When did he develop his steel character? Perhaps it was long before, back in his childhood days.... One day Volodya and his schoolmates were lying on a beach on the Psel River. Nearby workmen were dumping sand on a pontoon. They asked the boys to give a hand. The youngsters agreed, and after the end of that day the workers asked their assistants to come the next day. But at the agreed time only Vladimir turned up at the beach.

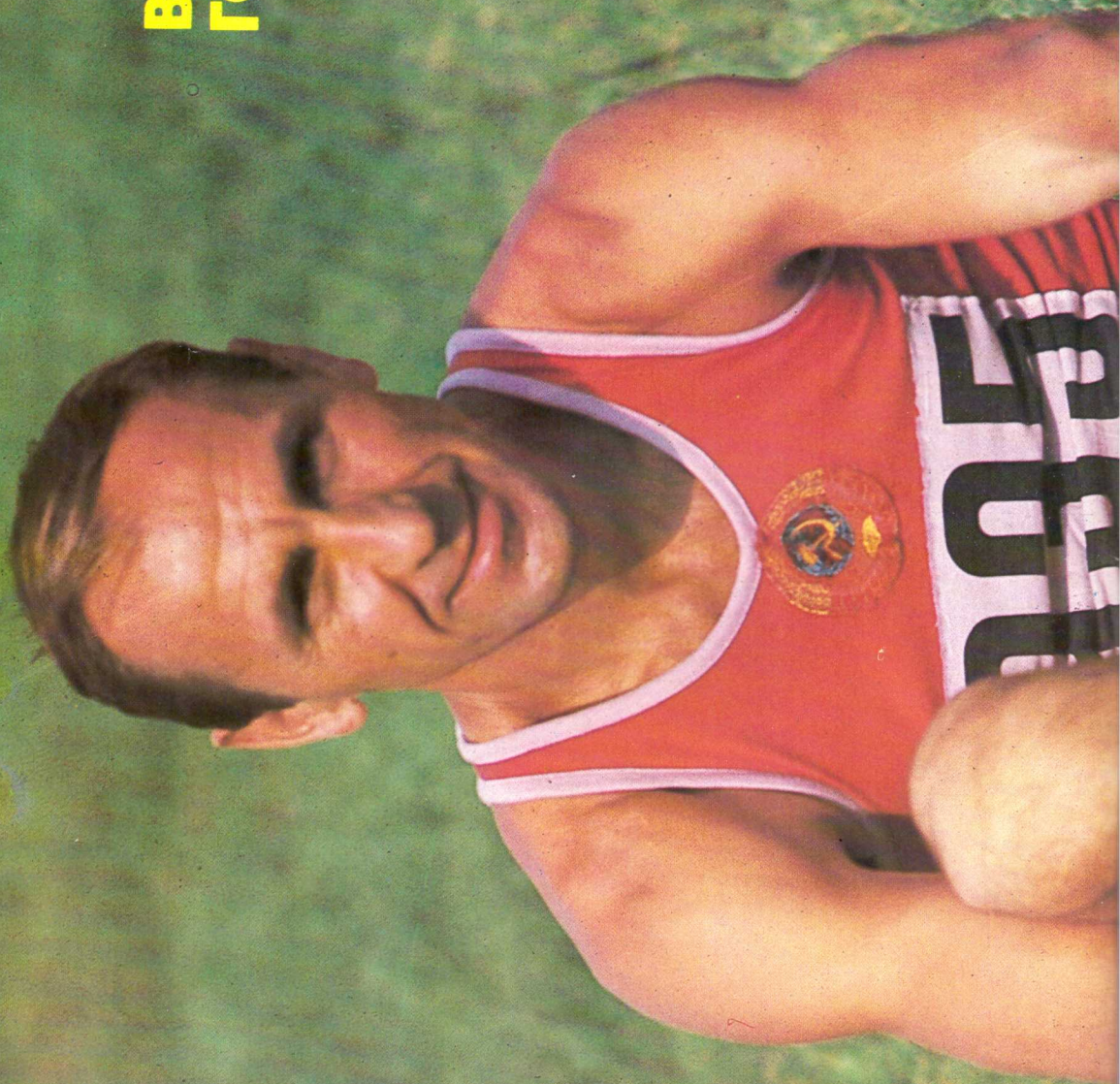
As the days passed the amount of work increased. Some boys he didn't know, who watched him at work, tried to persuade him to chuck it in. He wouldn't. Golubnichy worked there dumping and shifting sand for nine whole days, until the job was finished.

Or perhaps his character was strengthened in his fight with illness and in his toughest competitions? Or perhaps it was the famous USA-USSR match in the sweltering heat of Philadelphia? A lot has been written about this match, and particularly about the crippling 10,000 metres, about the last agonising metres of this race which were covered by Hubert Pärnakivi by a sheer miracle, thanks to some hidden resources of superhuman strength. But almost no one has written about the walkers who had to compete in the same murderous heat, and their task was perhaps even harder: their distance was three times longer than the runners'.





**Владимир
ГОЛУБНИЧИЙ**





There were three kilometres to go to the stadium. In the front strode an athlete in a red vest stepping with none too confident a gait. That was Golubnichy. As he stepped onto a bridge he started to stagger. His mouth had completely dried up. Hot air burned his throat. His heart seemed about to burst out of his chest....

He stopped, removed his white cap, wiped his brow, tried to take a deep breath a few times, and made himself go on. Vladimir didn't remember too clearly how he finished. Only one thing is certain: no one managed to catch him. When he came round afterwards he discovered that the doctors had pronounced him suffering from heat stroke. By no means every walker would have been able to finish the distance in such a state, to say nothing of winning. But this conceals the main secret of sport: it is the true fighters who become champions!

Or perhaps he forged his fighting spirit at the Rome Olympics, when he entered the stadium after 19 and a half blistering kilometres under the Italian sun, and realised that he was an Olympic champion a full circuit before breaking the tape? He had little strength left, no more than the tiniest drop. That was perhaps why, as he entered the stadium, he cut down his speed. Also by his calculations he should be followed into the stadium by his teammate Gennady Solodov, and this meant that the gold and the silver would be secured by the Soviet team. But what Vladimir didn't know was that Solodov had been disqualified from the race literally at the entrance to the stadium for violation of the walking rules, and he could have had no idea of what was in for him in the last metres of the race.

...He walked along happily, greeting the spectators. And they hailed and cheered the Soviet athlete. Suddenly he heard a ripple of excitement run through the crowd, and the fans started shouting more loudly. Vladimir did not realise what was going on at first, and continued walking at a measured gait to the tape. Then he just happened to notice his teammate Grigory Klimov on the stands. Klimov waved frantically, shouting something. Suddenly Golubnichy made out the word "Look round!" above the din of the crowd. He turned round to see, no more than two paces behind him, an unknown opponent. After the finish Vladimir discovered that the Australian Noel Freeman had made a valiant attempt to catch him in the last metres of the race. But at that moment he did not stop to think who it was he had to fight. As Golubnichy related afterwards, he had to resolve the following dilemma: if he continued at that pace his opponent would overtake him, and if he put on a burst of speed he would risk disqualification because the judges disqualify without warning in the last kilometre.

He started to put on speed very smoothly, very carefully. Where did he get the strength for this last finishing burst! He would not let Freeman pass him and broke the tape first. Thus did he win his first Olympic victory.

Golubnichy's path to victory was always thorny and hard. But

even when victory was denied him Golubnichy would fight to the finish, demonstrating heroic pluck. This was the case in the Tokyo Olympics. Shortly before his arrival in Japan Vladimir realised that he had overtrained. The 1964 season proved, unfortunately, to have been overloaded for the Soviet Union's top athletes. Frequent competitions, and a long period spent in peak competitive form well before the Olympics doomed the Soviet walkers and long-distance runners to the role of outsiders at the Olympics.

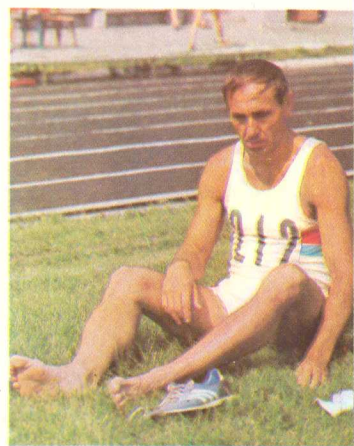
It was maddening to think that he had been preparing for four years and he was going to lose. He was aware that on this occasion he could hardly win. And still he came out onto the starting line hoping to bring his team valuable points. In the third kilometre the London clerk Kenneth Matthews easily moved away from the other walkers and, as if on wings, glided to victory. Golubnichy's attempts to catch the leader were unsuccessful. Moreover he received a warning, and gradually started to fall behind. With every step it became harder to walk, his eyes became clouded over, and his feet literally clung to the asphalt. In the end he actually lost his balance and fell. A judges' car drew up alongside and the occupants carefully studied the walker. Vladimir pulled himself to his feet and walked on unhurriedly, trying to walk as technically as possible, realising that the judges were keeping a careful eye on him. And then, when he at last came round properly, he shifted into "top gear" and started to catch up what he had lost. He overtook one opponent after the other, but was only third at the finish. And yet the bronze medal which he won in Tokyo is particularly dear to Vladimir. Partly because it cost him so much to win it, and partly because it represents his victory over himself, his ability to reveal and use hitherto unknown resources of strength.

He returned from Japan fully confident of his own strength. This confidence was to become one of the major preconditions of his future victories.

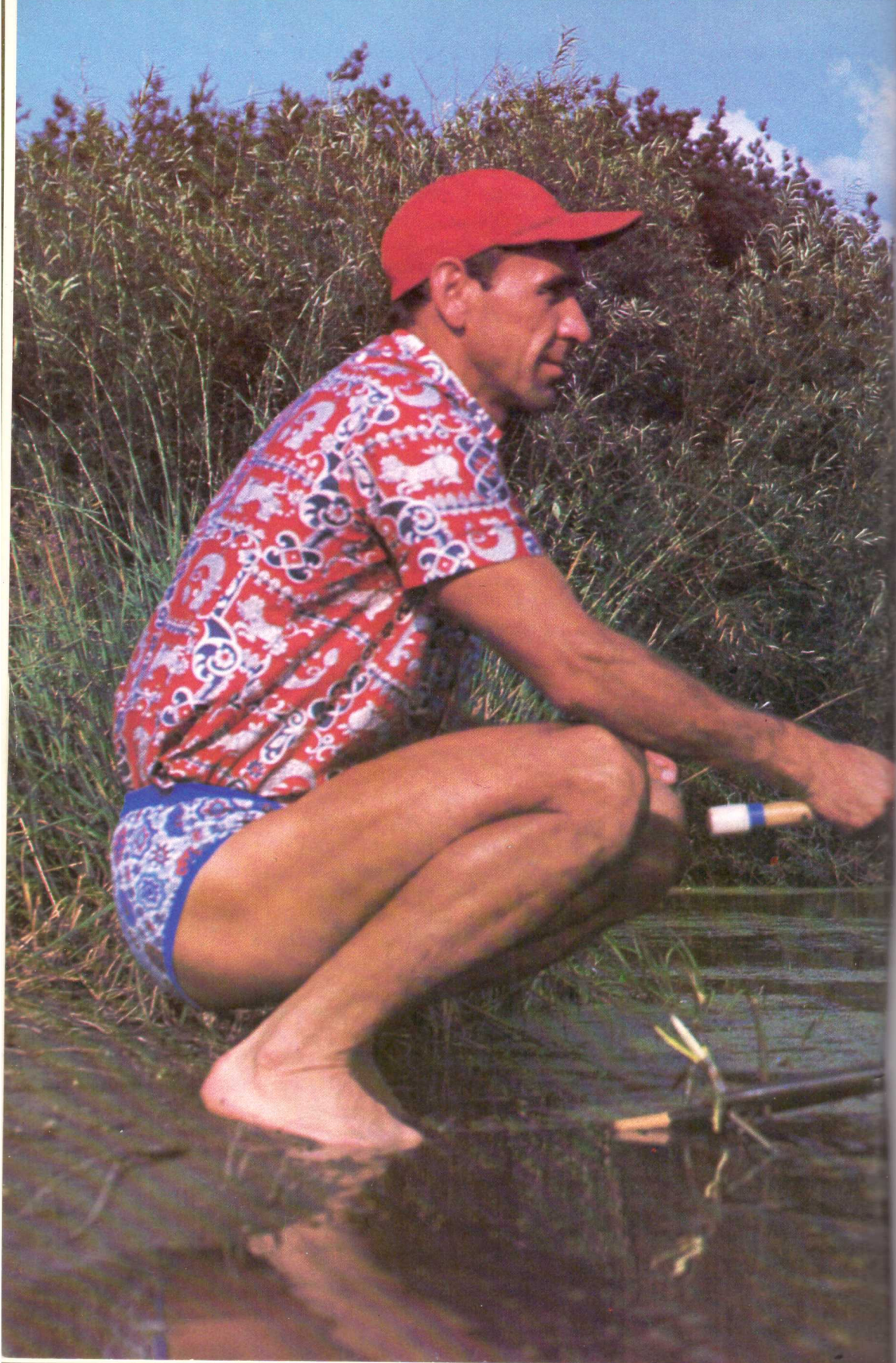
For fully twenty five years now Vladimir Golubnichy has been training on roads and tracks, in heat and frost, accumulating his enormous totals of kilometres. His purposefulness, his fanatic dedication to the event, and his enormous resources of diligence are the envy of each of us. These qualities have made him one of the most reliable athletes in the entire history of Soviet athletics. The coaches of the national team were always able to rely on him, they knew: Golubnichy won't let them down.

Before the Mexico Olympics, just as before the previous Games, he was the main hope of the Soviet walkers.

...The role of a favourite is a hard one, especially if you come to the town where you are to compete an entire month beforehand. The Soviet team flew to Mexico City more than thirty days before the opening of the Olympic Games, on the recommendation of the experts in sport medicine. They were



Fatigue creeps up un-
awares







concerned that the sportsmen should be properly acclimatised, but they didn't think about the psychological difficulties which the Soviet Olympians would have to face, so far from their homeland. You have to have iron nerves to meet your future opponents every day in the stadium, the canteen, the club, to give interviews, and read prognoses of your performance in the papers—and not burn up too soon.

The window of the room which Vladimir shared with his inseparable friend Nikolai Smaga looked out onto the stadium of the Olympic village. Without even leaving the hotel they could watch their opponents, and work out how well prepared each of them was. The biggest impression was made at this stage by the American Ron Laird, who covered circuit after circuit at a pace incredible for high-altitude Mexico. The two friends racked their brains for ways of neutralising this new danger. They agreed that they would begin the race at a fast pace and alternate the lead in order to maintain it. But they did not manage to put this plan into operation. First Vladimir fell ill. One morning he took his temperature and couldn't believe his eyes when he looked at the thermometer: 38.2°! He ran to the doctors. These decided that this temperature wasn't caused by a cold, but by a nervous disorder, i.e., the atmosphere of the Olympic village was affecting even this most experienced athlete.

And a few days later Nikolai fell ill too. He had a sore throat. His temperature soared to 38.0°. Nevertheless Smaga made a supreme effort of will, and turned out for the competition. He realised that he had no chance of winning, but he was going to fight: if not for his own victory, then for that of his friend Vladimir.

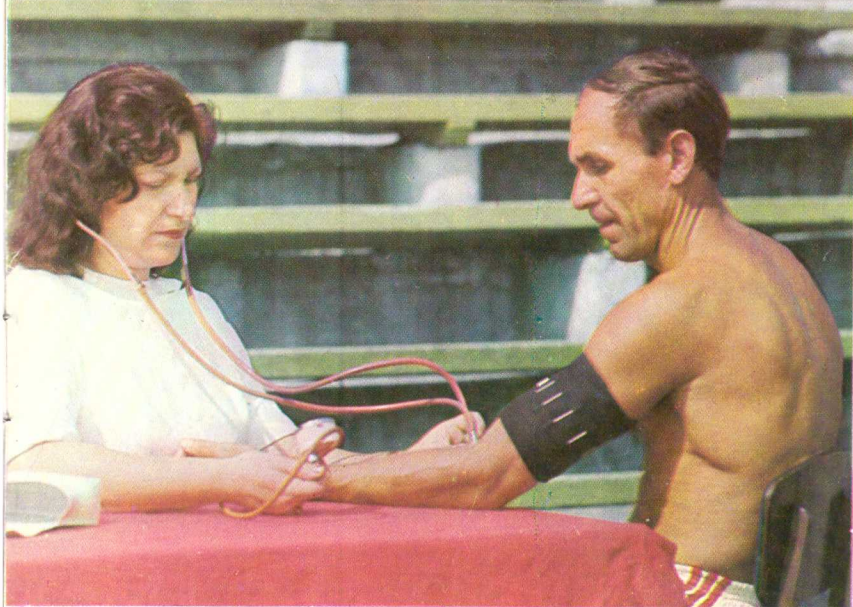
It only seems that athletics is a deeply individual sport. Team victories are also valued here. Many sportsmen compete for the sake of such victories alone, as their names are unlikely to figure in predictions of the victors. It is the ambition of many athletes to get a place in the Olympic final, and bring their team valuable points in the unofficial team competition. Of course, somewhere deep down they dream of the big one, of having a lucky race and winning. But this does not often happen. And for all that they may not often be written about, by comparison with the champions and medallists, their place in the final may be sometimes as important as someone else's victory.

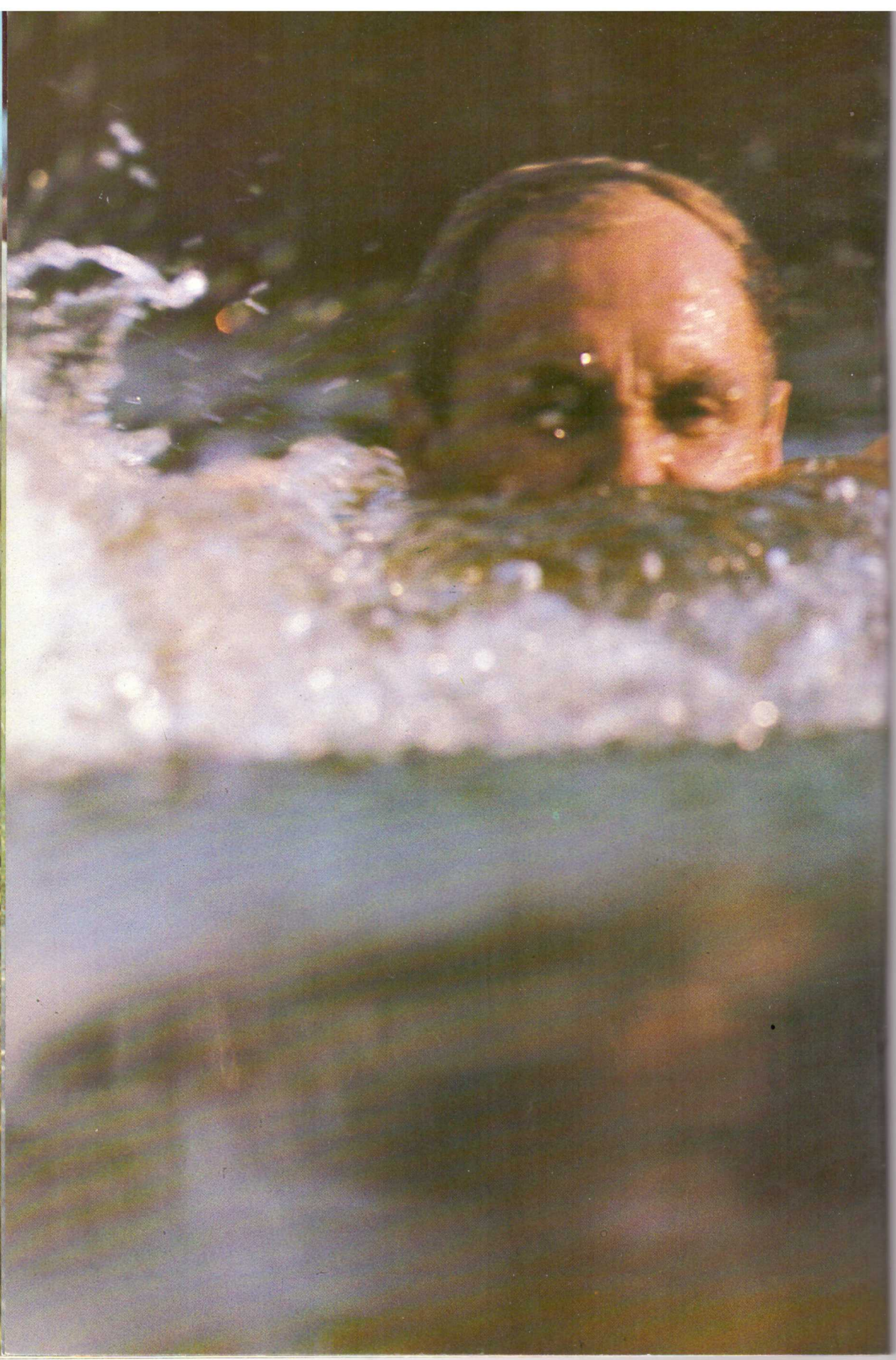
Smaga did not return from Mexico without a medal. Moreover, the medal wasn't even the point. An Olympic medal is not of course the least of prizes. But other things are more highly valued: the qualities such as nobleness of spirit, self-sacrifice, camaraderie, which Smaga demonstrated in the heat of the Mexican sun. That is why, although he did not become a champion, he is one of the heroes of the 19th Olympic Games.

Golubnichy took the leadership after the very first metres of the race. The American Laird kept hard on his heels. Vladimir paused for a second and let his opponent past—it is always

**Will the fish soup turn out
all right or not?
It's all right!**









easier to follow than to lead. Golubnichy walked economically, without lifting his head, his eyes fixed on the heels of the American. Suddenly he heard a cry. He looked round and saw that the main bunch of walkers was racing past him. In other words, he had become so involved in his race with Laird that he had lost track of the pace and of his other opponents.

Finding themselves at the end of a long line of walkers Golubnichy and Laird put on as much speed as they could muster. They both quickly caught up with the leaders, but this burst of speed cost the American dear: he gradually started to fall behind. And Vladimir tucked in behind Smaga's back.

After this lengthy spurt Golubnichy lacked the strength to move ahead straight away. He slowly recovered his strength, leaving Smaga out in front all this time. His teammate accepted the role of leader without a murmur, although he would gladly have swapped places with Vladimir. But he understood: this might mean losing the race for Golubnichy. So Smaga kept out in front.

He led the pack for a good eighteen kilometres of this incredibly tough race. He helped his friend pull away from the bunch, helped him win, knowing that this is what it meant to be a true friend.

After Mexico they became known as brothers in sport. And it is true that this tough Olympic race in a way brought them even closer together. These two Communists, two true fighters from the Ukraine did all they could to ensure victory for the USSR team.

The millions of viewers who watched the Mexico Olympics will probably never forget the dramatic finish of this painstaking race. In the last kilometre the Mexican José Pedraza took advantage of the judges' laxity, and increasing his pace almost to a run, started to gain on his Soviet opponents. Before the eyes of the crowd in the stadium he overtook Nikolai Smaga and almost caught Golubnichy. The Mexican was in his elements here, and driven on by the frantic cheers of thousands of Mexican fans, while the Soviet athlete found every step difficult in the oxygen-starved atmosphere of high-altitude Mexico City, lying 2,240 metres above sea level. Whose victory was it to be?

In these hard minutes Golubnichy found the strength to increase his speed. He could not now let himself be beaten, because he was fighting not only for himself, but also for Nikolai and for his team. To re-phrase the great Russian physiologist Ivan Sechenov, we can say that the will is the acting side of the feelings. For feelings often perform the function of a stimulus to action. He ordered himself: "Forward!" and hurtled towards victory.

Gradually Golubnichy widened the gap between himself and the Mexican. Finally the latter realised that pursuit was futile and gave up the chase. At last, the tape! Victory was secure! Golubnichy's face was twisted with tension. The moment Smaga

crossed the line he collapsed and lost consciousness. He had given everything to the struggle, to his teammates' victory. Thus did the Soviet team win their first gold medal in Mexico. After Mexico Golubnichy earned unusual popularity, for previously the representatives of this event were seldom acclaimed as heroes. Perhaps it was because the fans, who had long been indifferent to this section of the athletics programme, at last realised what a victory in a walking race costs, and that an Olympic walking champion is a champion among all of us.

Are there many people in the world who can throw the hammer, pole-vault, or ski jump? Of course not. But any of us could take part in a walking race with only a minimum amount of preparation. After all, we all have the opportunity to train for this event every day of our lives. We hurry to work and increase our speed, see a trolleybus approaching the stop in the distance and move into a fast walk.

All this leads one to the thought that, say, a hammer champion is the best in the world amongst a limited group of his colleagues, a sabre champion—the best of a small number of fencers, while an Olympic walking champion is a champion amongst us all. Such a champion is Golubnichy!

After Mexico there was Munich. The silver medal which he won at the age of 36 at the 20th Olympics might, it seemed to many, nicely round off his sporting career. But he thought otherwise.

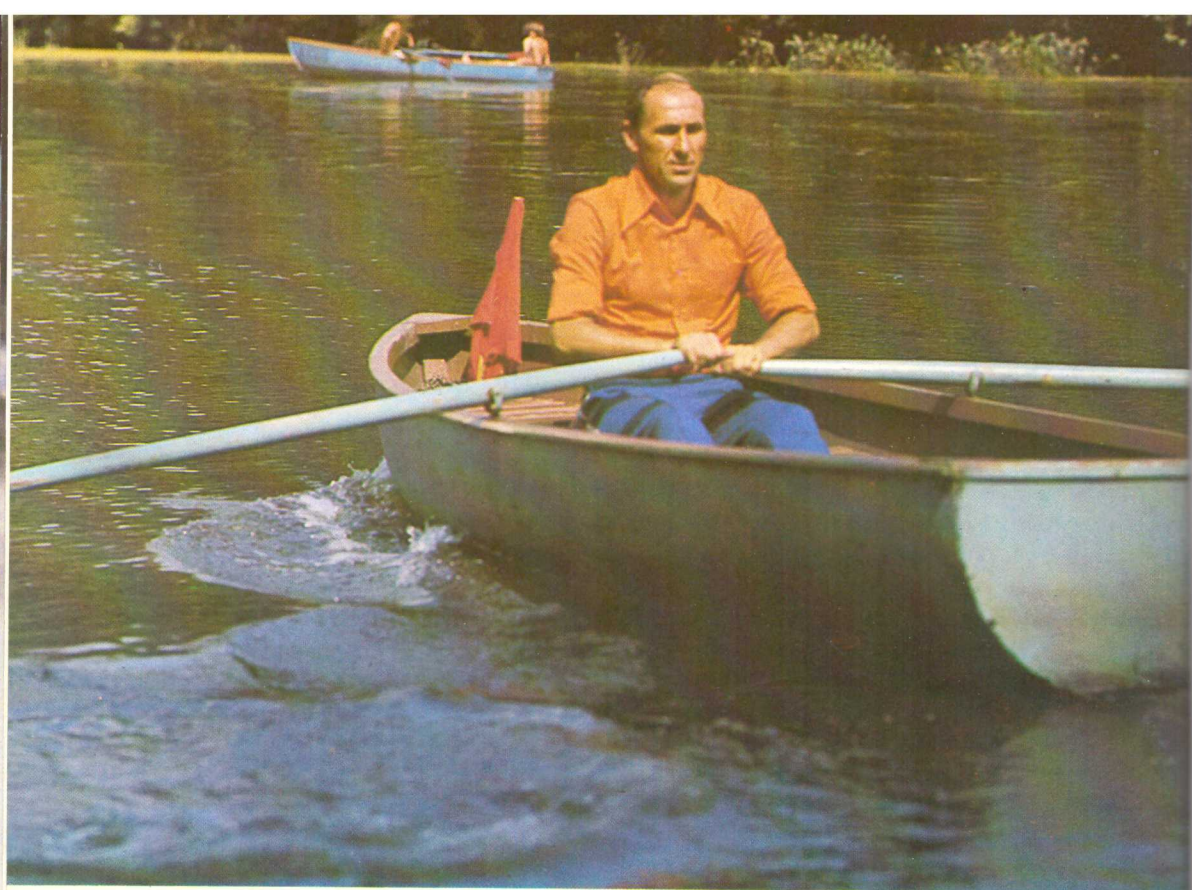
"Right after the medal ceremony I went up the stands to our fans and coaches," wrote Golubnichy in his diary, "and I was congratulated, my hand shook. And suddenly I heard someone say, I'm sure without any malice, 'Congratulations, old boy, you've made a fine finish to your sporting career!'

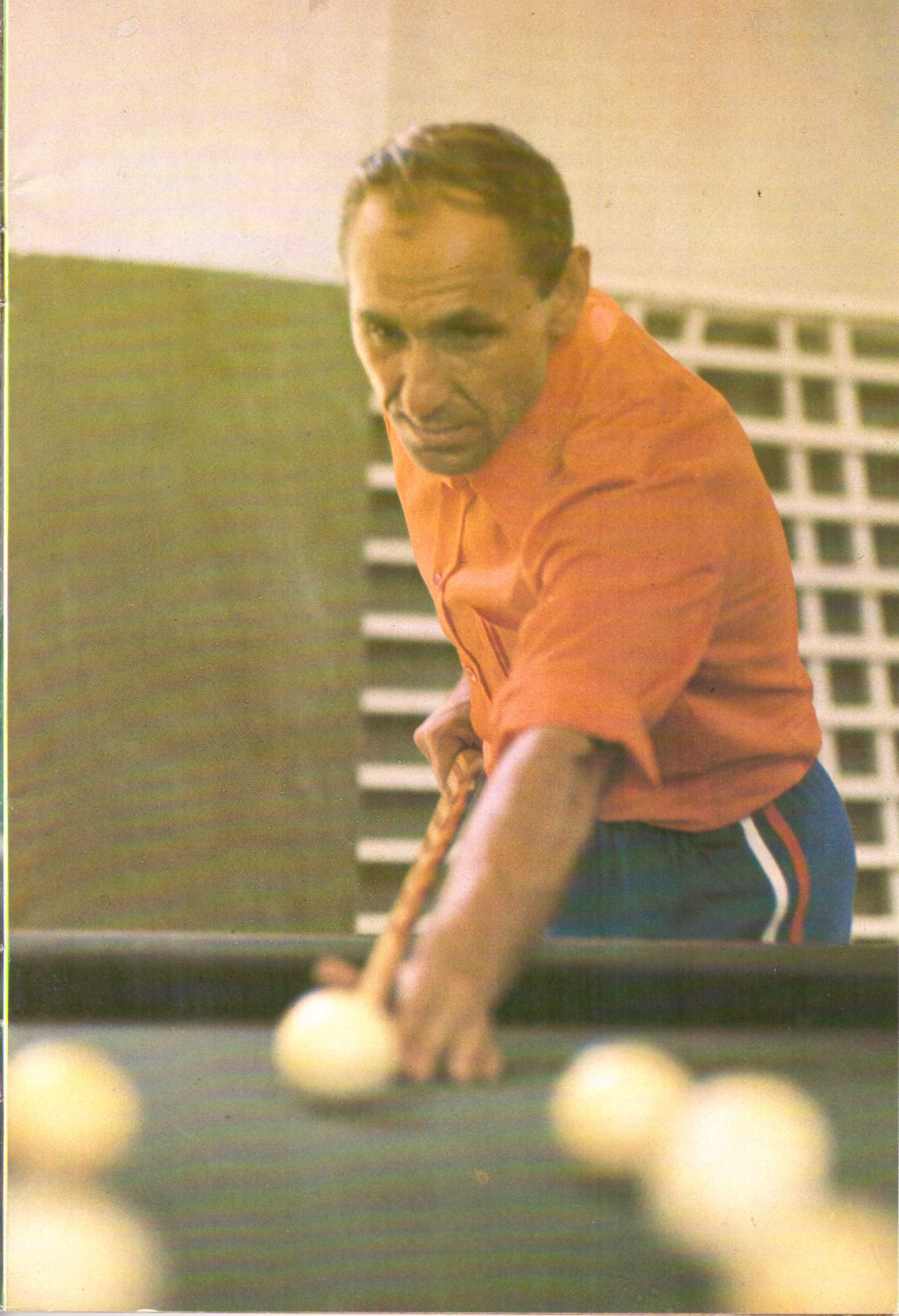
"Was this really to be the end? Were there to be no more tussles, no more fierce competition, no more long kilometres, burning wind, was I never again to see my comrades beside me, the lads with whom I've travelled half way round the world, was I never again to cover those last kilometres of the race, the kilometres for which you start the race—for it is right here that, as you gain control over yourself, you start to feel a real man—were there to be no more medals? Although these are worthless in themselves. They represent the footslogging, the hard work of trainers, doctors, masseurs, my comrades who revealed the secrets of sport before me and together with me, and revealed to me many of their own secrets. They represent my own toil.

"You read in the memoirs of some veterans that in sport they mostly valued the colour, the pleasure it gave them and will give them throughout their lives. This is certainly important, there's no question, but I think that they aren't being entirely honest with themselves. At any rate I have never met a sportsman for whom the words 'sport' and 'victory' weren't synonymous. Looking at my young opponents in Munich I really envied them. Victories were much more of a reality for them than for me, 'old boy' that I am. But although I realised this, I still felt



His opponents are nearly twice as younger, but Golubnichy is their equal in a race





that I continue to dream of victory, to believe in success....

And when I understood the significance of that I said to myself: 'It's still not time to retire.' "

Two years passed. Golubnichy continued to compete although he didn't turn in particularly outstanding results. Before the European championship in Rome his best result of the season was passed by 16 other walkers. It didn't seem as though there was point in his dreaming about victory now. But Golubnichy wouldn't be Golubnichy if he didn't enter a race without believing in his chance of success.

In Rome he at once set an exceptionally fast pace and throughout the entire race dictated his own conditions to his opponents.

Never ceding the front position to any other walker he was first back into the stadium. He covered the final metres easily, with an easy-going, even cocky gait. And a few hours after the race Golubnichy, usually not at all forthcoming when anyone enquires into the difficulties he has experienced, confessed that at one point around the 17-kilometre mark his legs started to give way, his vision started to cloud over and he could hear terrible drumming in his ears. But Vladimir alone knows how he managed to pull through this crisis.

Italian newspapers wrote that the 38-year-old champion set an unusual record by winning this race 14 years after his first Olympic victory in the very same stadium, and that Golubnichy refuted all the scientists' calculations about life-expectancy in top-class sport.

What is the secret of his extraordinary sporting longevity? I have asked myself this question on many an occasion, and put it to Vladimir himself. He is convinced that he owes his long years of sporting prowess to his strict, measured life style and the regime he has kept to for many years. Till this day he has never even tasted tobacco. Neither does he touch booze. On big holidays, and even then only if they fall in the inter-season lull, he might have a drop of dry wine.

One of the main factors for his long life in sport he sees in the support of his family. His mother, his wife, and his children Alexander and Yelena are his most faithful and devoted fans. And as for Alexander he has literally followed in his father's footsteps, by taking up walking. With considerable success, too. Who knows, perhaps in a few years he will also become a member of the Olympic team.

But Golubnichy has another secret besides. This is ability to see far ahead, to take a philosophical approach to competitions, drawing a clear distinction between them in respect of their importance. It is worth having a closer look at his competition strategy.

At first he used to try and win in all competitions. Then he realised that this is practically impossible, and he started differentiating between main and secondary contests. He always regarded the Olympics as the main competition. He also trained hard for the national championships which preceded the Olympics. Here Golubnichy would test his preparedness, always fighting to win, but at the same time never throwing himself entirely into the race, keeping untouched store of strength in reserve.

He would compete differently in races during the inter-Olympic



Skis are like Golubnichy's first love. Even in summer he trains on improvised skis

cycle, experimenting a lot and looking for improvements to his technique and tactics. And it would happen that he often lost. When a champion loses it is always a sensation for sports lovers. Often they will not forgive their idol his losses. Let us recall how the crowd whistled Valery Borzov in the Minsk stadium when he lost to tough opposition in the USA-USSR match. Golubnichy was never whistled. Even when he finished sixth in the USSR championship in 1977 the stadium greeted him with wild applause. Of course this is tribute to his seniority, and also perhaps to his principles. "In order to be able to win, you have to be able to lose." This is one of the truths of which he became aware after long years in sport, and which he never tried to hide from anyone.

This does not by any means imply that Vladimir would sometimes go into a race without enthusiasm, having already ceded victory to one of his opponents. Golubnichy does not have the sort of character that would let him refuse to take up a challenge. He would always enter every race determined to fight to the finish, but he prepared for each race in a different way. Before what he regarded as secondary events he would not lessen his training load, looking at them as a preparation for more responsible races. And if there should happen to be a better-prepared walker in the race he would be quite likely to beat Golubnichy. But he would prepare quite differently for a big event. He would subordinate his entire regime, his entire training schedule to one goal: victory. And this goal he would frequently attain. Golubnichy was an expert at finding the golden mean between the romantic and the calculating approach and learnt to find the proper measure of his strength, sparing his nervous and physical energy so as to be able to achieve the best competitive form in time for each Olympics. And only once in his career, at the Montreal Olympics, was he unable to carry his plan out to the end. I put this failure down to, above all, his cold. In Quebec, where the Soviet athletes went to acclimatise, and where they stayed right up till the start of the Games, Golubnichy caught a bad cold. The doctors naturally tried to get him back into shape. But the antibiotics took their toll: they lowered his temperature and reduced his strength. He entered the race knowing that he had nothing to fight his opponents with. But to come seventh in an Olympics at the age of 40 is no small achievement. All the same seventh place was a great disappointment for him.

"The place to make my excuses is on the track," Golubnichy told me shortly before leaving Montreal for the USA, where he was to compete in the traditional match with the American team. After he had scored a victory in this match Golubnichy decided once again that he wouldn't quit sport just yet.

In his life Golubnichy more than once experienced glory and fame. His sporting achievements have been highly rewarded by the nation, which has conferred on him the orders of the Red Banner of Labour and of the Badge of Honour, the Lenin Jubilee Medal "For Valour in Labour", the medal "For Distinction in Labour", and the badge of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League "For Sporting Distinction". His fellow countrymen have paid him the honour of electing him deputy of the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies. But the best thing of all is that



More training!





this has in no way changed Golubnichy. He has remained the same modest man he was at the dawn of his sporting career.

After all five Olympics in which Golubnichy took part he always returned to his native town of Sumy, although he was constantly invited to move to one of the major cities. Where some of his friends proved less resistant to such blandishments and left their home towns in search of a better life and better coaches, Vladimir was never in any two minds about it. Surely he would have liked to train on modern stadiums or have an indoor track just down the road? Of course he would. But he remembered the faces of the people who always greeted him after his victories with their traditional hospitality, who were so concerned about him when he fell ill.... No, he had no right to leave his native town!

Vladimir and his trainer Vassily Polyakov were at one time fellow-students in the coaches' college. Then Golubnichy went on to an institute while Polyakov never received a degree of higher education. There have been people who have asked how Golubnichy could hope to learn something from a man without much education. Vladimir would take such provocative questions by their horns, so to speak. He properly believed, and believes, that it is not the qualifications on paper that count.

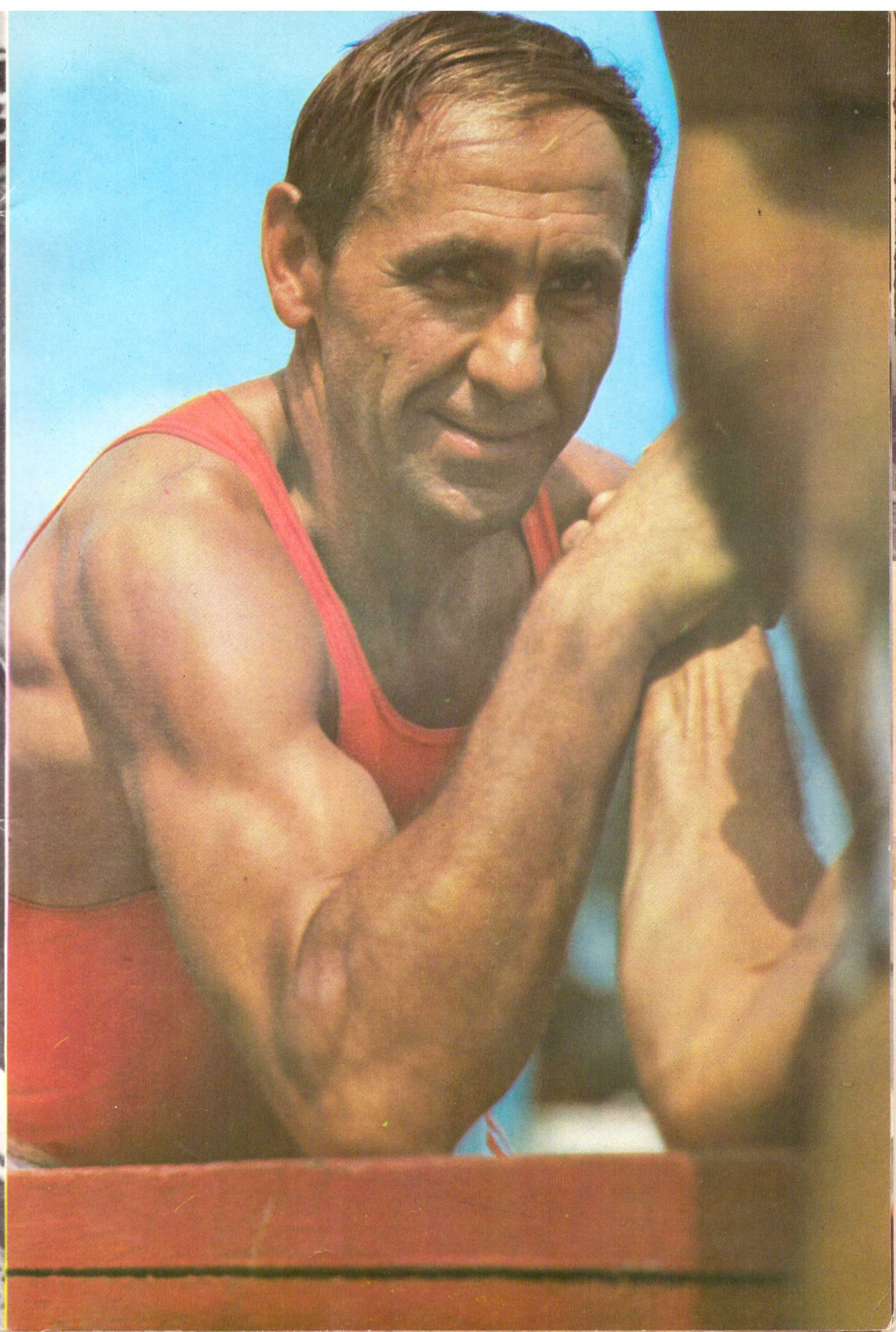
Without Polyakov's support, without his goodness, without his participation Golubnichy cannot imagine how he would have got anywhere. And he remains true to his first sporting teacher, just as he does to the national team coach Anatoly Fruktov, under whom he has been training now for 25 years.

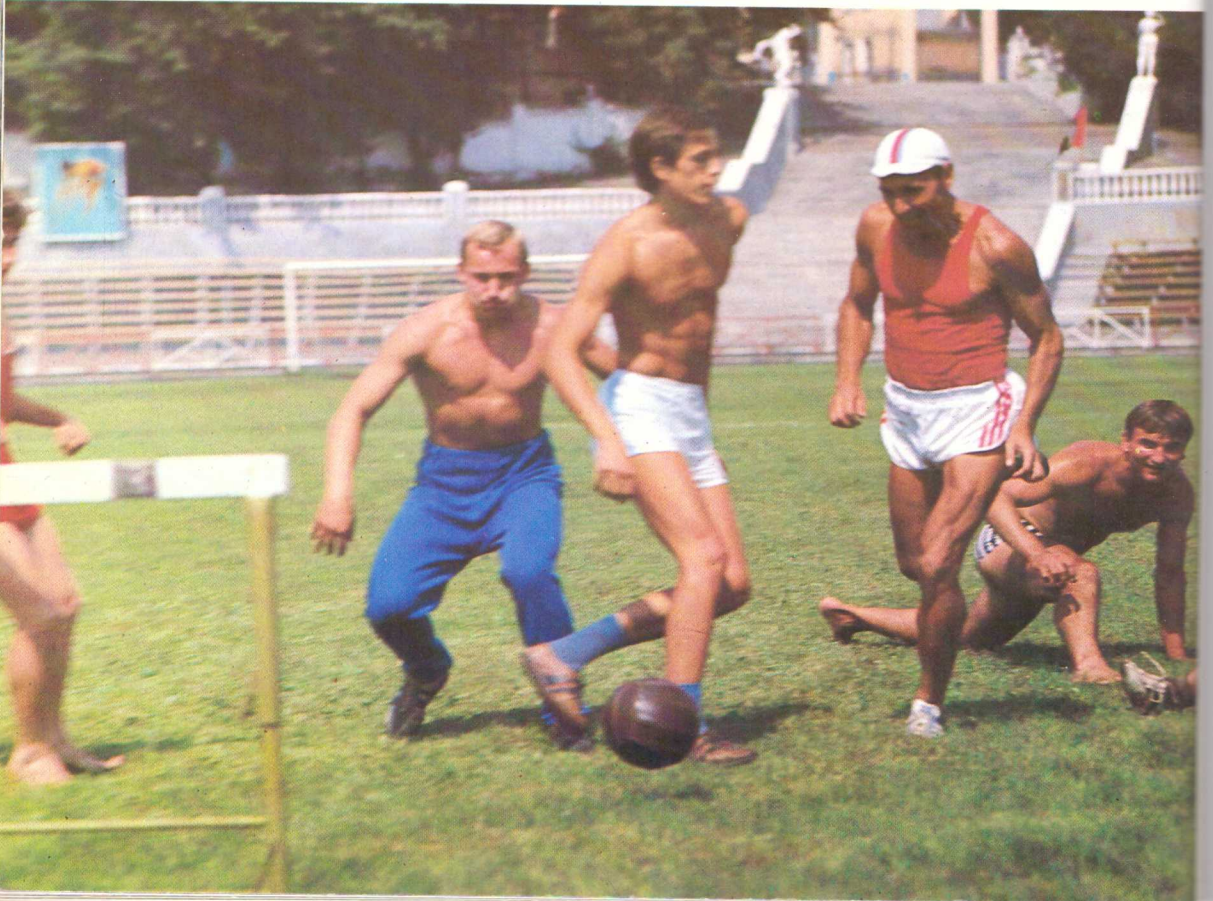
He always dreamed of victory. The thirst to win was the perpetuum mobile in his system, which would never let him stop. And, as he admitted to me himself, at the age of 41 he still hasn't quenched this thirst. "I will remain in competition so long as the team needs me, I hope to hand over my rich store of experience to our young walkers. I hope also that Soviet walkers will experience another 'golden age' at the Moscow Olympics." I would like to think that the great veteran's hopes will be fulfilled.

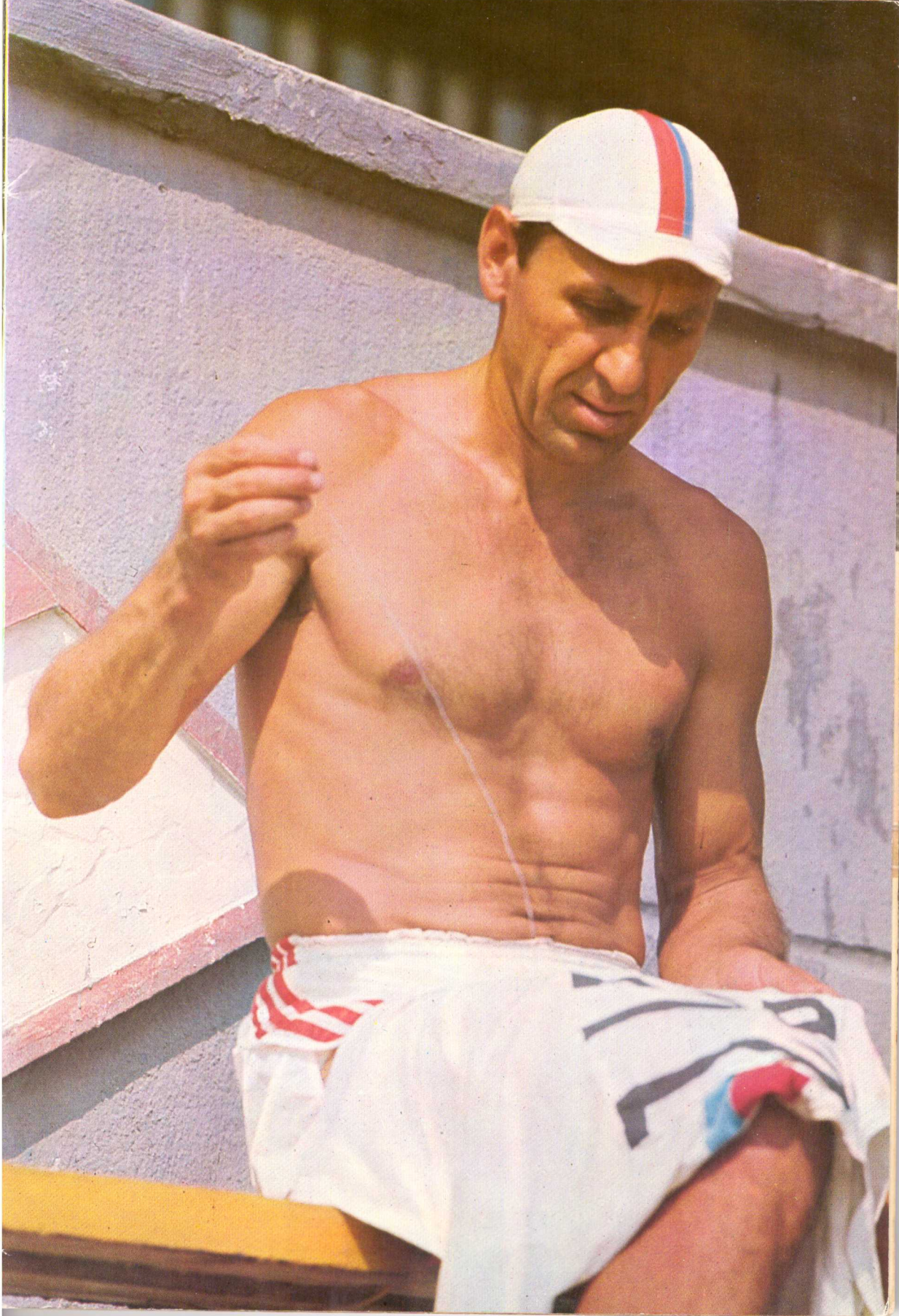
Golubnichy continues to stride confidently along the road of life and sport.

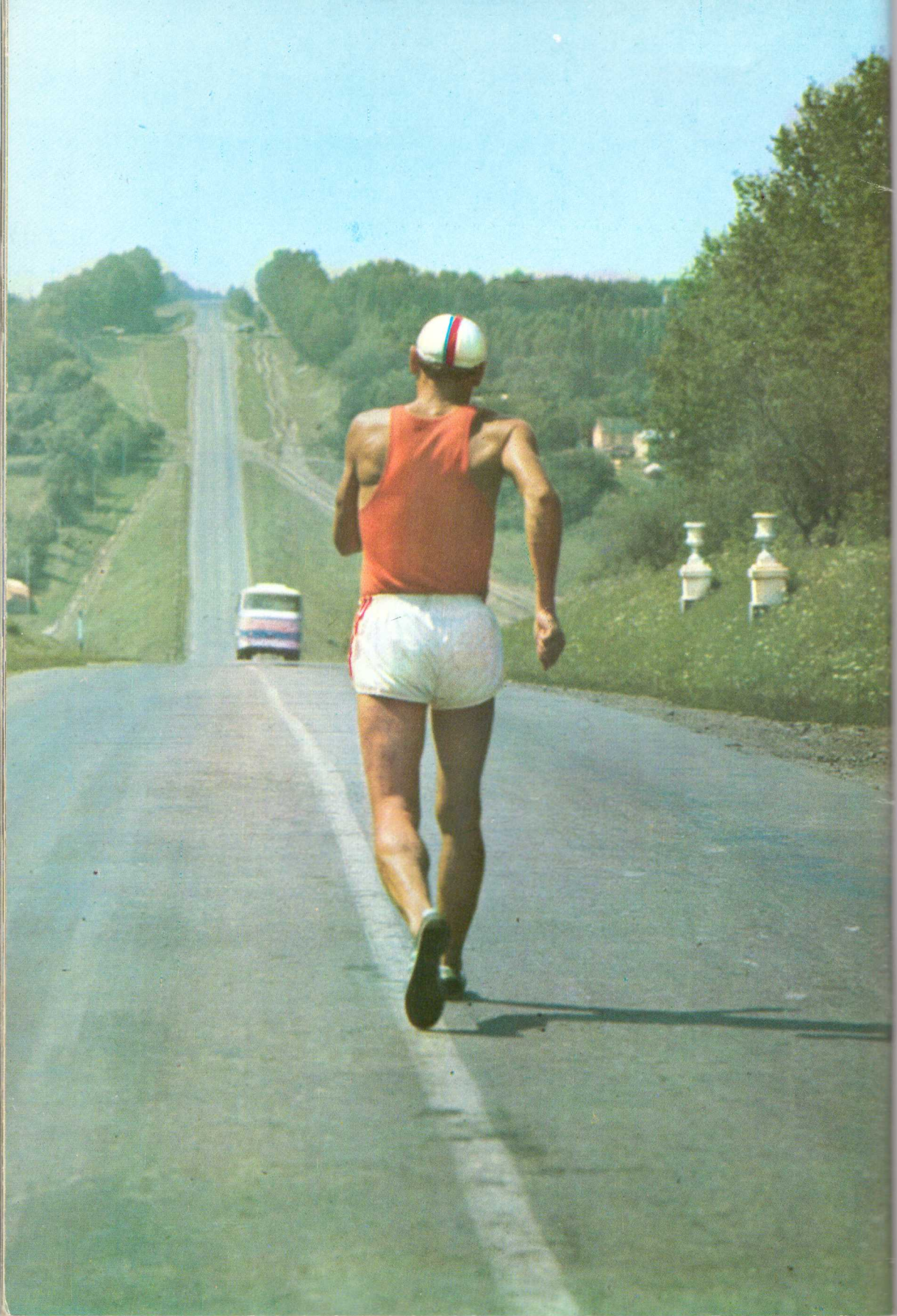
Golubnichy continues to advance just as resolutely as ever in his two parallel careers inside and outside sport. Every morning he is met by his pupils in neat rows in their class in the Sumy "Spartak" School where he works. His duties are not restricted to teaching the boys and girls in his charge the ABC of athletics. Above all he is concerned to convey to them his enthusiasm and dedication to sport, teaching them to fight and win. All trainers dream of their pupils becoming champions, and Golubnichy is no exception. But he does not regard this as his principal task. "What matters most is that they become real people!" We feel that Vladimir is following the right road, and we wish him every success in his sport and his work!

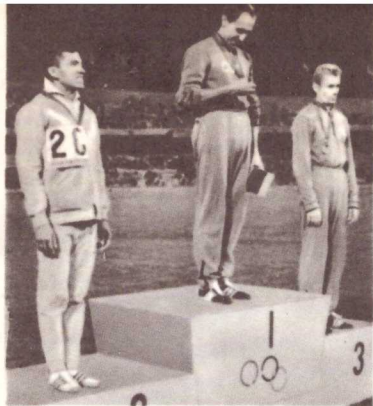






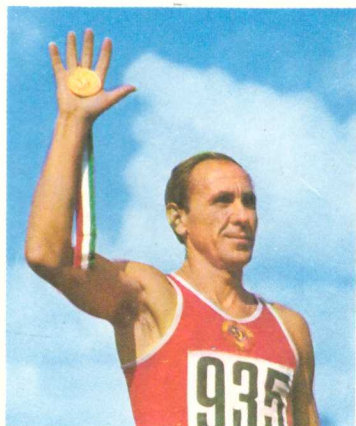






Our event, more perhaps than any other, gives you a chance to test your character and will power.... To make it to the finish you have to overcome your own limitations more than one time. And if you succeed in doing so you will feel unbelievably happy, and, I am sure, will catch the walking "fever"

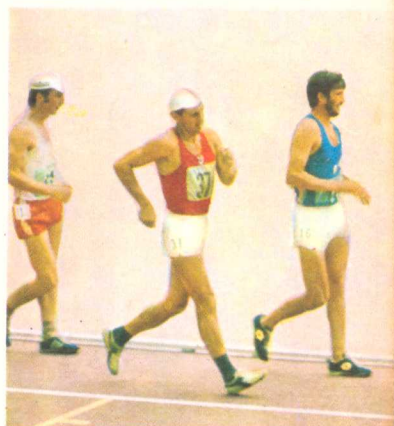
Vladimir Golubnichy



The Mexico Olympics. Golubnichy on the top step of the champions' pedestal

Two great walkers: Golubnichy and Smaga

The Munich Olympics. Golubnichy and his friends from the GDR



The Tokyo Olympics. The start of the 20 kilometre walk

How much does an Olympic medal weigh?

Golubnichy's fifth Olympics. Montreal, 1976