



A golden year in the world of sport

Millennium had us all watching

IT was The Year of Watching Wondrously. 2000: A Sports Odyssey. An annus mirabilis of athletic delight. A year of unprecedented pulsating sporting achievement. A year in which the hyperbolic pre-match billings were genuinely sustained by the subsequent performance realities.

The year of Denise Lewis and Lennox Lewis, of Jonathan Edwards, of Cracknell, Foster, Pinsent and Redgrave, of the Calcutta Cup Bravehearts, of Tiger. Of Australia.

The year, too, of the Hibe. The sustained resurgence of stylish, freshly impassioned, cosmopolitan Hibs, reawakening forgotten memories of former glories. The Fifties reincarnated.

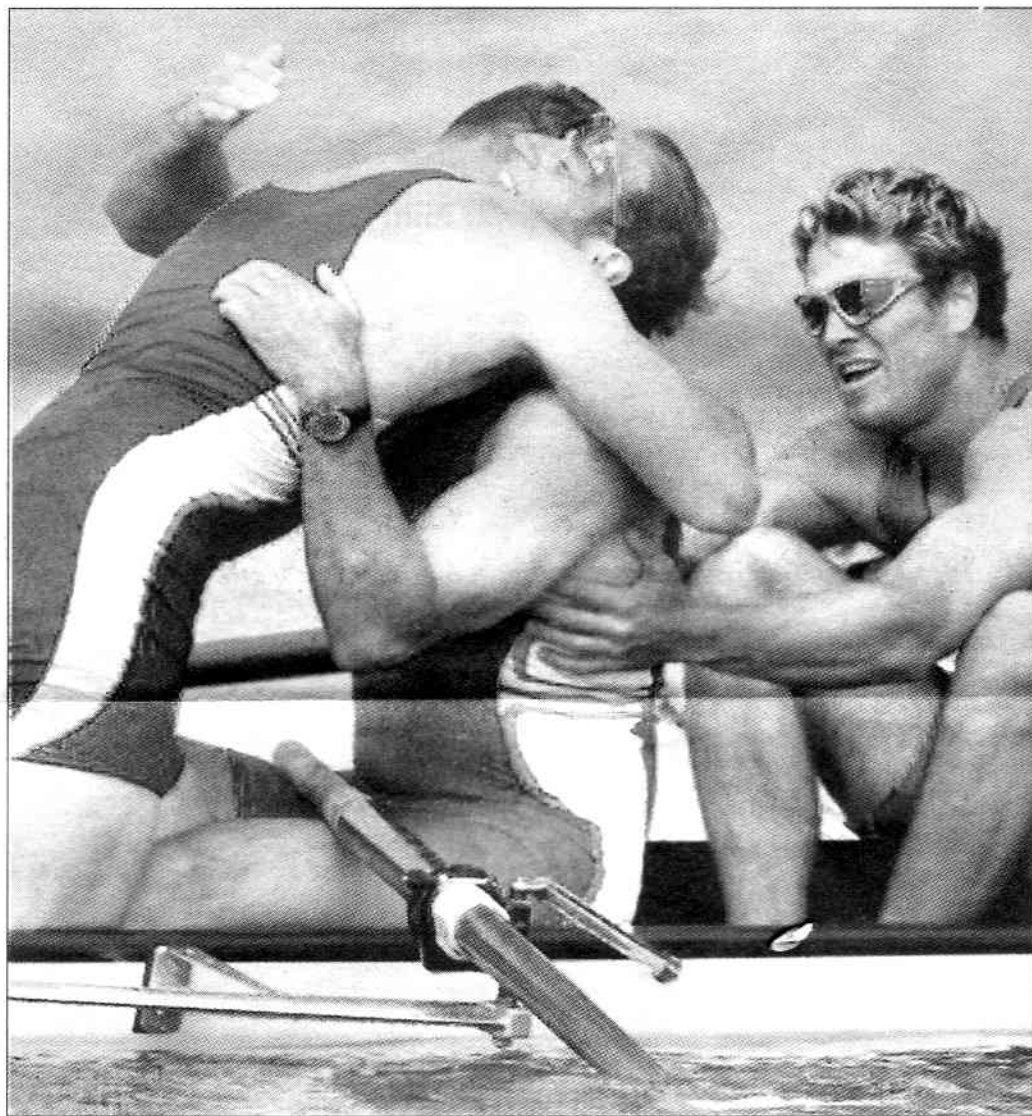
Ghosts

Tantalising ghosts of the European Cup semi-final, Rheims, 1956. They may have relatively few star turns – Latapy's silky guile, the pivotal Napoleonic authority of Sauzee, chic, unique, fantastique; Paatalainen's dogged bullishness part – but they have no fear of them. Sweat and toil allied to consistent selection, camaraderie, and realistic caution have solidly underwritten the Hibe progress as credible SPL title challengers.

It's a significantly resilient sum of parts which has pertinently survived a November form trough, and reassured itself. It's no chimera; Europe assuredly beckons once more.

Hearts have already rekindled the Euro appetite with that impassioned fight against VfB Stuttgart, only a Petric shot away from wild glory on a stirring Tynecastle night.

It was the Year of Australia. Utterly appropriate to that most aspirational of cultures still desperately craving to prove its man-



COLOSSUS: Great Britain hero Steve Redgrave celebrates collecting his historic fifth straight Olympic gold medal after defeating the Italians, the odds and a mountain of doubters

hood through sport, she took on the Millennial Olympics.

She promised the world that after 17 days everyone would walk away from the Sydney Games with spirits rejuvenated, with faith in sport, indeed in humanity itself, triumphantly restored. It was a big call, but she delivered. Magnificently.

Externally Australia's global domination of world sport continues. Simply the best. Aussie Rules OK. Epitomised this week by her crick-

eters, personified by the ebullient Adam Gilchrist. Exuberant, popular, refreshingly open and non-deferential, wicketkeeper-batsman Gilco is the quintessential Aussie sportsman.

Ludicrous Test record to date: played 13; won 13, including now as winning captain bringing home the Frank Worrell Trophy against the Windies. His spontaneous, infectious, delight was a joy to behold.

His team are a like-minded rugged crew with a totally focused

winning mindset, a marvellous blend of aggressive self-belief, ruthlessness and skill, all pursued to their limits.

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In the face of advancing years, dubious health, debatable form, and ferociously talented opposition, Redgrave's attempt at a fifth gold had always looked to be one bridge too far.

A gloriously romantic Don Quixote quest, but in the end inevitably destined to fail.

But Redgrave was rewriting the human script. In that 2000 metre stretch of straight water he was continuing to defy the normal rules constraining mortality as we generally know them.

It was, quite simply, the greatest sporting action ever.

So au revoir to a vintage sporting year of improbable Mount Olympus climbs.

When shall we see your likes again? Cue in 2001. And arise, Sir Steve Redgrave.