

VOLUME 29
 ISSUE 08

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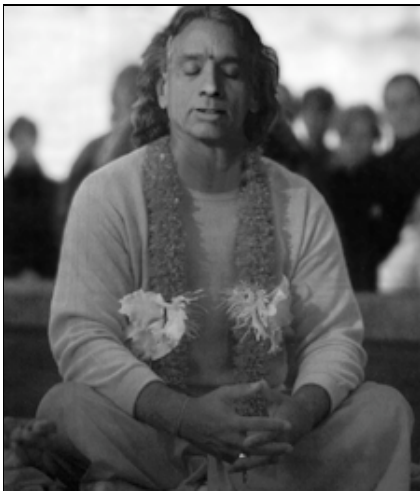
6 MARCH 1996

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SPORTS

Monk Gloats Over Yoga Championship

'I am the serenest!' he says

LHASA, TIBET—Employing the brash style that first brought him to prominence, Sri Dhananjai Bikram won the fifth annual International Yogi Competition yesterday with a world-record point total of 873.6.



Sri Dhananjai Bikram walked away with the World Yoga Championship after averaging 1.89 breaths per minute for two straight hours. "I'm blissful! You blissful?! I'm blissful!" he screamed repeatedly to the other yogis. blissful!" to the other yogis.

Bikram, 33, burst onto the international yoga scene with a gold-mandala performance at the 1994 Bhutan Invitational. At that competition he premiered his aggressive style, at one point in the flexibility event sticking his middle toes out at the other yogis. While no prohibition exists against such behavior, according to Yoga League Commissioner Swami Prabhupada, such behavior is generally considered "un-Buddhalike."

"I don't care what the critics say," Bikram said. "Sri Bikram is just gonna go out there and do Sri Bikram's own yoga thing."

Before the Bhutan meet, Bikram had never placed better than fourth. Many said he

"I am the serenest!" Bikram shouted to the estimated crowd of 20,000 yoga fans, vigorously pumping his fists. "No one is serener than Sri Dhananjai Bikram—I am the greatest monk of all time!"

Bikram averaged 1.89 breaths a minute during the two-hour competition, nearly .3 fewer than his nearest competitor, second-place finisher and two-time champion Sri Salil "The Hammer" Gupta.

The heavily favored Gupta was upset after the loss.

"I should be able to beat that guy with one lung tied," Gupta said. "I'm beside myself right now, and I don't mean trans-bodily."

Bikram got off to a fast start at the Lhasa meet, which like most major competitions, is a six-event affair. In the first event, he attained total consciousness (TC) in just 2 minutes, 34 seconds, and set the tone for the rest of the meet by repeatedly shouting, "I'm blissful! You blissful?! I'm

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had forsaken rigorous training for the celebrity status accorded by his Bhutan win, endorsing Nike's new line of prayer mats and supposedly dating the Hindu goddess Shakti. But his performance this week will regain for him the number one computer ranking and earn him new respect, as well as for his coach Mahananda Vasti, the controversial guru some have called Bikram's "guru."

"My special training diet for Bikram of one super-charged, carbo-loaded grain of rice per day was essential to his win," Vasti said.

The defeated Gupta denied that Bikram's taunting was a factor in his inability to attain TC.

"I just wasn't myself today," Gupta commented. "I wasn't any self today. I was an egoless particle of the universal no-soul."

In the second event, flexibility, Bikram maintained the lead by supporting himself on his index fingers for the entire 15 minutes while touching the back of his skull to his lower spine. The feat was matched by Gupta, who first used the position at the 1990 Tokyo Zen-Off.

"That's my meditative position of spiritual ecstasy, not his," remarked Gupta. "He stole my thunder."

Bikram denied the charge, saying, "Gupta's been talking like that ever since he was a 3rd century Egyptian slave-owner."

Nevertheless, a strong showing by Gupta in the third event, the shotput, placed him within a lotus petal of the lead at the competition's halfway point.

But event number four, the contemplation of unanswerable riddles known as koans, proved the key to victory for Bikram.

The koan had long been thought the weak point of his spiritual arsenal, but his response to today's riddle—"Show me the face you had before you were born"—was reportedly "extremely illuminative," according to Commissioner Prabhupada.

While koan answers are kept secret from the public for fear of exposing the uninitiated multitudes to the terror of universal truth, insiders claim his answer had Prabhupada and the two other judges "highly enlightened."

With the event victory, Bikram built himself a nearly insurmountable lead, one he sustained through the yak-milk churn and breathing events to come away with the upset victory.



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