USC’s John Naber ’77 (second from right) was the swimming star of the 1976 Montreal Olympics, winning four gold medals — with three in world-record time — and a silver medal. From left to right: Joe Bottom ’77, Bruce Furniss ’79, Naber and Scott Findorff ’78.
The world had become an uneasy place by the early 1970s. The Vietnam War, fighting in the Middle East and the space race had a major subtext behind them: the decades-long frosty relationship that had developed between the United States and the Soviet Union. With this international polarization as a backdrop, the new International Olympic Committee president, Lord Killanin, aimed to avoid the Olympics’ use as a political pawn. Cities in both nations — Los Angeles and Moscow — submitted bids, but as a compromise, Montreal was selected as the site of the XXIst Olympiad. Yet the Games had their challenges. Even though rugby was not an Olympic sport, that game would throw a political football into Montreal. Twenty-two countries boycotted the Games to protest contests played by New Zealand’s rugby team in South Africa — a nation excluded from the Olympics for its sanctioned racism. Taiwan did not participate, either, because it was not allowed to compete under the name Republic of China. The 1976 Games would also come to be known for the domination of East German female swimmers later shown to have used performance-enhancing drugs. Despite the controversy, the Games had a colorful character and hoopla, as well. Joined by several members of the Royal Family, Canada’s monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, formally opened the Games. A rainstorm extinguished the Olympic flame a few days after the opening ceremonies, and a helpful official reignited the cauldron using his cigarette lighter. Embarrassed, organizers quickly put out the flame and relit it using a more appropriate source: a backup of the original flame. Four nations made their first Summer Olympics appearances in Montreal: Andorra, which had made its Olympic debut a few months earlier at the Winter Games in Innsbruck; Antigua and Barbuda; Cayman Islands; and Papua New Guinea. Among the memorable moments in Montreal were the seven perfect 10.0s scored by 14-year-old Romanian gymnast Nadia Comăneci, who won three gold medals, including one for the individual all-around competition. She also won a silver and bronze for the first five of her nine career Olympic medals. For the second consecutive Olympics, Finland’s Lasse Virén won gold on the track in the 5,000-meter and 10,000-meter events. American boxers achieved stellar success in their competitions, with five — Sugar Ray Leonard, Leon Spinks, Michael Spinks, Leo Randolph and Howard Davis Jr. — winning gold medals. Athletes with ties to USC had a strong showing in Montreal, with 28 competitors accounting for 18 medals won. Besides USC athletes’ dominant performances in swimming, USC’s Don Quarrie — later a USC sprint coach — took a gold in one of track’s premier events, the 200 meters.
If perseverance were an Olympic sport, perhaps few athletes would have won more gold medals than Jamaican sprinter Donald Quarrie ’74, MPA ’77.

Quarrie qualified in the 100-meter dash for the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City as a 17 year old, but was unable to compete after he got injured in training. He received a scholarship to attend the University of Nebraska, but after a cold Midwestern winter, he decided to transfer to USC with the encouragement of USC alumnus and Olympic medalist Lennox Miller ’69, DDS ’73.

The sunshine seemed to help, as he just kept getting faster during his training with the Trojan track squad. At the 1970 Commonwealth Games, Quarrie won gold in both the 100-meter and 200-meter events, and anchored Jamaica’s 4x100-meter relay to victory. More wins followed at the Pan American Games in 1971. Experts considered him a favorite at the 1972 Olympics, but once again he was thwarted — this time when a pulled hamstring forced him to withdraw.

Quarrie refused to give up. His coveted Olympic medal finally came in Montreal after a thrilling finish in the 100 meters. With 25 meters to go, Quarrie passed the frontrunner, but he wound up losing the gold by just one-hundredth of a second. He finally got his gold medal at those Games, though, decisively winning the 200-meter event.

At the 1980 Moscow Olympics, he was eliminated in the 100-meter semifinals. He tried to defend his title in the 200 meters, but earned a bronze medal in the event — a notable feat after recovering from a car accident the year before.

In 1984, Quarrie became the first Jamaican sprinter to qualify for five Olympics. Although he was he no longer ranked among the world’s top sprinters, he won a fourth Olympic medal in Los Angeles — a silver — with the Jamaican 4x100-meter relay team.

His successes earned Quarrie recognition both on and off the track, and he’s become a legend in Jamaica. A high school in his home country bears his name, and a statue of him stands at Jamaica’s National Stadium. In true Jamaican style, musicians have composed reggae songs about him. Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, who has been called the fastest man ever, cites Quarrie as one of his idols.

Quarrie has remained active in the sporting world since his competitive days ended. He coached Jamaica’s multiple-medal-winning team at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and managed Inger Miller ’95, Lennox Miller’s daughter and Quarrie’s goddaughter, who won a gold medal in the 4x100-meter relay at the 1996 Games in Atlanta.

Quarrie has a Trojan Family of his own. He met his wife, Yulanda Davis-Quarrie ’75, when they were students at USC. Their daughters, Tara ’07 and Kira ’11, not only graduated from the university, but both followed in their father’s footsteps and joined the Trojan track team.
As he was beginning his competitive swimming career, Bruce Furniss ’79 first found inspiration in the gold-medal-winning performances of American star Don Schollander, a 10-time world-record holder in the 200-meter freestyle. But in time, Furniss realized he only needed to look across the dinner table for true motivation — and competition.

His brother Steve ’76 had emerged as the family’s top swimmer, competing at the 1972 Games in Munich. After Steve suffered an ankle injury, it was Bruce who rose up to take top honors in the family. By 1976, though, Steve was back in fine form ahead of the Olympic Trials and, according to a Sports Illustrated story from June of that year, he warned his brother over dinner one night, “I’m big, bad and I’m back.”

Bruce’s response: “I’m mean, lean and it remains to be seen if I’m too green.”

Although Bruce Furniss originally specialized in
the individual medley, he became best known for his prowess in the freestyle events. He proved that he was ready for the main stage at the 1976 Olympic Trials when he edged out USC teammate John Naber to win the 200-meter freestyle in world-record time. After Bruce Furniss’ victory in the 200-meter freestyle in the 1976 Olympics, seven Summer Games would pass before another American won Olympic gold in the event. He earned a second gold as a member of the 4x200-meter freestyle relay team, which set yet another world record. His brother Steve also earned a spot on the 1976 Olympic team in the 400-meter individual medley, putting the brothers among a small group of siblings in any sport to make the same Olympic squad.

Over the course of his illustrious 17-year swimming career, Bruce Furniss broke 10 world and 19 American records and won nine AAU and six individual NCAA titles. He broke the 200-meter freestyle record four times, including twice in one day.

At USC, he led the Trojan swim team to two championships in 1976 and 1977 and four Pac-10 titles from 1976 to 1979. Although he remains one of USC’s most successful swimmers, he is also fondly remembered at the university as one of the founders of Swim with Mike, which was originally meant to be a one-time fundraiser for Mike Nyeholt, who became paralyzed due to a motorcycle accident in 1981. It has become a beloved annual event that raises scholarship funds for physically challenged athletes.

Bruce Furniss’ success in swimming was made even more remarkable by the fact that he battled a crippling arthritic disease, ankylosing spondylitis, beginning at age 16. He was named to the United States Swimming Team of the Century in 2000 and inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1987. USC elected him to its Athletic Hall of Fame in 2001.
John Naber ’77 dreamed of making it to the Games from the day he visited Olympia in Greece as a boy. A native of Evanston, Ill., he grew up in Europe before moving to Northern California’s Bay Area for his teenage years. He had his swimming breakthrough at the 1973 World Championships in Belgrade, where he won bronze in the 200-meter backstroke. He was 17.

At USC, Naber established himself as a rising star in the sport. Undefeated in the backstroke in four years of NCAA competition, he captured a record 10 NCAA individual titles and five relay titles and led USC to four consecutive national swimming championships. In 1977, he capped his collegiate career with the James E. Sullivan Award as the nation’s top amateur athlete.

He was going into his senior year at USC when he shot to fame at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, where he finished with four gold medals and one silver medal. He was America’s most decorated athlete at the competition.

With a gold in the 100-meter backstroke and a silver in the 200-meter freestyle he became the first swimmer in history to win two individual medals on the same day. Waged only an hour after the 100-meter backstroke, the 200-meter freestyle final brought two Trojans, Naber and Bruce Furniss ’79, head to head, with Furniss taking gold. Because of drug testing requirements and post-race interviews, neither swimmer was able to warm down properly after the event. When they returned to the pool, they were alone in the stadium and began their swims. After a few minutes, their “warm downs” turned into a race between the two athletes, as if they were back at practice.

Naber set world records to win all four of his gold medals, and he set two records for the 100-meter backstroke in less than 24 hours. Naber was also the first swimmer ever to break the 2-minute barrier in the 200-meter backstroke. His Olympic records in the backstroke events stood for seven years.

After serving as a board member on the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, he was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1984. The three-time Olympic torchbearer worked as a marketing representative for Disney Productions as well as in television. In his more than 25 years as a broadcaster, he covered more than 35 different sports and eight Olympic Games for both television and radio. In 2012, Naber became the second Trojan, behind USC Athletic Director Pat Haden ’75, chosen for the Capital One Academic All-America Hall of Fame.
In 1976, USC won the National NCAA title for a third consecutive time, and many of the swimmers immediately turned our attention and training to the upcoming Olympic Games.

The Olympic Team Trials were held in Long Beach, Calif., so the crowd was both partisan and patriotic. Five Trojans made the U.S. men’s team that year, and three Trojans made the women’s team. Joe Bottom was entered in the butterfly and freestyle sprints, Rod Strachan and Steve Furniss in the individual medleys, Bruce Furniss in the 200-meter freestyle and 800-meter free relay, and I had qualified to swim the backstrokes and 200-meter freestyle. Lauri Siering qualified in the breaststroke and Miriam Smith swam the backstroke.

After a four-week training camp in Canton, Ohio, the men’s team arrived in Montreal in three minivans, having driven two hours from Plattsburgh, N.Y., where each Olympian had been outfitted in polyester parade uniforms and red, white and blue Awards Ceremony sweatsuits.

Twenty-seven men comprised the U.S. swim team, with entries in the 13 races on the Olympic calendar. That year, each country was allowed up to three entries per event, and in most events, two or three Americans were vying for the same gold medal. I sensed tension around the cafeteria training table until our head Olympic coach, Doc Counsilman, challenged the men’s team to win every race and more medals than all other countries combined.

As if by magic, it suddenly became important to the backstrokers how well the butterfliers swam. The breaststrokers encouraged the freestylers. The sprinters started cheering for the distance specialists. And the medley swimmers rooted for the relay teams.

By the end of the meet, the U.S. men only missed winning one of the individual gold medals, one of the individual silver medals and six of the individual bronzes. We so dominated those Games that the international governing body of swimming changed the rules at the following Games to limit each country to two entries per event.

I earned a handful of medals, Bruce Furniss won two golds, Rod Strachan one gold, and Joe Bottom gold and silver medals (and would have earned another gold had the events at the 1972 Games been included in 1976). Lauri Siering swam on the silver-medal-winning relay. Among others at those Games, Canadian swimmer Steve Pickell and Jamaican sprinter Don Quarrie earned medals for both their country and USC.

One of my favorite memories of those Games occurred 45 minutes after I had earned my first gold medal in the 100-meter backstroke. Bruce Furniss and I were standing on the awards stand to receive our medals in the 200-meter freestyle when I saw USC Head Swim Coach Peter Daland in the stands. Though he was not a part of the official U.S. delegation, Coach had traveled to Montreal at his own expense to watch his swimmers. Coach Daland was on his feet, holding up two fingers. Was he celebrating my second medal, or the fact that two Trojans were being honored simultaneously? Neither, of course. He was signaling the Trojan “Fight On” symbol with both pride and happiness.
“Coach had traveled to Montreal at his own expense to watch his swimmers. Coach Daland was on his feet, holding up two fingers. Was he celebrating my second medal, or the fact that two Trojans were being honored simultaneously? Neither, of course. He was signaling the Trojan ‘Fight On’ symbol with both pride and happiness.”
**THE ROYAL TOUCH**

PRINCESS ANNE, DAUGHTER OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II, COMPETED ON THE BRITISH EQUESTRIAN TEAM. SHE RODE THE QUEEN’S HORSE, GOODWILL.

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**ROBIN CORSIGLIA ’84**

In her first major international competition, Robin Corsiglia won a bronze medal for Canada at the Montreal Olympics as a member of the 4x100-meter medley relay team. Now going by Robin Scholefield, she is a sports psychologist at USC’s Engemann Student Health Center.

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**JOE BOTTOM ’77**

Joe Bottom, a USC All-American from 1974 to 1977, won silver in the 100-meter butterfly in Montreal. Bottom later became the first man to break 20 seconds in the 50-yard freestyle and set a USC record that stood until 2007.

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**STEVE PICKELL ’81**

A two-time swim team captain for the Trojans, Steve Pickell won a silver medal as a part of Canada’s 4x100-meter medley relay team in 1976.

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**IT TAKES TWO**

THE OLYMPIC FLAME WAS IGNITED BY A PAIR OF TEENAGE TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF CANADA. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT TWO PEOPLE LIT THE OLYMPIC CAULDRON TOGETHER, EMPHASIZING UNITY BETWEEN THE NATION’S TWO LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGES: FRENCH AND ENGLISH.
LIGHT THE FLAME

THE OLYMPIC FLAME GOT TO CANADA FROM GREECE IN AN UNUSUAL WAY: AN ELECTRONIC PULSE FROM THE FLAME WAS SENT BY SATELLITE TO THE CANADIAN CAPITAL OF OTTAWA, WHERE ORGANIZERS USED IT TO FIRE A LASER THAT LIT THE FLAME ANEW.

TROJAN VICTORIES
AND HIGHLIGHTS OF
THE 1976 MONTREAL GAMES

USC OLYMPIANS: 29  GOLD: 8  SILVER: 6  BRONZE: 4

NANCY GARAPICK
Nancy Garapick was only 14 when she won bronze medals in the 100-meter and 200-meter backstroke events at the 1976 Olympics. During qualifying heats for the 100-meter backstroke, she set an Olympic record. She later swam for USC.

RODNEY STRACHAN ’77, MD ’81
American Rodney Strachan won a gold medal and set a new world record in the 400-meter individual medley at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. He would go on to medical school at USC and become a physician.

LAURA SIERING
USC’s Laura Siering earned a silver medal as part of the U.S. team in the women’s 4x100-meter medley relay at the 1976 Olympics. She also swam in the 100-meter breaststroke and 200-meter breaststroke events.

MEDAL COUNT
WHILE CANADIAN ATHLETES EARNED 11 MEDALS OVERALL, THE 1976 MONTREAL OLYMPICS WERE THE FIRST IN WHICH THE HOME COUNTRY WON NO GOLDS.