Xiaoping got in on the act and attributed the Chinese team's outstanding baptism at the Olympics to the Chinese Communist Party agenda of discipline, economic reform, and sticking to the socialist road. Nevertheless, one suspects that to Deng Xiaoping it did not matter whether his athletes wore red or blue so long as they captured the medals.

Similar sentiments prevailed in Australia. To our couch potatoes, winning medals was not simply a matter of life or death—it was much more important. Even our own Iron Maiden, Ros Kelly, on the mother of all junkets attending the Olympiad, made a nontoo-veiled threat that if our athletes did not measure up the funding to the Australian Institute of Sport would be cut. Paul Keating, who has a quiet contempt for competitive sport, immediately vetoed the sports minister's threat. Last year this funding amounted to the princely sum of $77 million. It has not, however, escaped their premise was that our dollar-driven athletes would pull out all the stops to land lucrative marketing contracts and media exposure to cushion their return to a recession-hit homeland.

Given that most of our medal-winners hail from Victoria, there seems some credibility to their hypothesis. This must be music to John Hewson's ears. He has often regaled the media with his spartan upbringing and how we must all be music to John Hewson's ears. This credibibility to their hypothesis. This...