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 none-too-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 notice. The economists based their forecasts on past evidence which showed our athletes always perform better in times of sluggish economic growth than when general affluence prevails. 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 credulity 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 can all emulate his 'can do' spirit. Even Deng

In any case, the playing fields of Barcelona were not as level as they seemed. Allegations flew thick and fast concerning the use of performance-enhancing drugs by some athletes. The hard-to-prove drugs scam is analogous to the non-tariff barriers that infiltrate international trade. It is hard to prove they exist, but the repetitive trade surpluses give the offenders away. So, too, bulging biceps and powerful pectorals give away steroid users. Speaking of bulk, Ben Johnson, silly enough to have got caught in Seoul, looked a mere shadow of himself, both literally and physically. In the heats for the 100m. final he appeared to slip on a discarded syringe left by some inconsiderate on the track. Marathon runner Lisa Ondieki was, according to her, drunk on self-worship and endless self-promotion, failed to make the grade. Bang goes that third book on Bringing up Bozo!

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, our own gruesome twosome could not resist metal metaphors. John Dawkins proclaimed our new inflation rate as "Gold, Gold, Gold for Australia!" One press scribe demurred, contending that it was actually a silver medal performance, since New Zealand's inflation rate was lower. In any case, the flagging Australian economy resembled De Castella after his marathon—on a saline drip and contemplating retirement. John Hewson, whose vision of the Olympic scoreboard resembles an array of economic indicators, stirred us up by claiming that New Zealand had won the gold medal in the economic reform decathlon. Possibly. But if New Zealand is having an economic boom at the moment it must be the worst one in history.