



By Bert Cass, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, via AP

## ed Gordon batters Florida

in Englewood, Fla., brace for a wave Sun- cane Gordon whips the state with rain hds. It was downgraded to a tropical thousands had fled low-lying areas. 4A.

## election bombshell stuns Peru

calls for new vote and says he won't run country's political future left in doubt. "I last night," one Peruvian said. 12A.

## debate: Education research

AY asks, "If the research (on vouchers) is cause it's backed by conservative philan- the education reports frequently is- thers' unions likewise be ignored because are liberal?" 14A.

ouchers) study glosses over so many facts hghshod over so much context, it is sur- thoughtful people take it seriously," says of the National Education Association. 14A.

## SBC working deal with Telia

second-largest local phone company is to sell European assets for \$6 billion. 1B. er Bunny thumps its way onto the Web. It ming soon to an e-mail near you. 7B. Is give AFLAC reason to crow. 13B.

## Atlanta-N.Y. going at it again

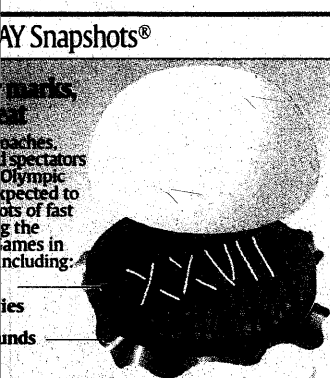
it let the Braves exhale in the NL East. Key series starts tonight. Baseball. 1, 4-6C. ion leads all 300 laps en route to win. 1C.

## ends honor 'Real World' star

hora died of AIDS just days after the last the MTV reality show aired in 1994. His d two of his housemates into action. 10D. ra on TV: "As dry, humorless and skeletal Robert Bianco's TV news & views. 4D. Film Fest turning heads in movieland. 6D.

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By Frank Pompa, USA TODAY

## Crossword

- Editorial/Opinion 11D
- Lotteries 14-15A
- Marketplace Today 15C
- State-by-state 11D
- TV listings 13A
- 12D

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By Jack Gruber for USA TODAY

Golden moment: Brooke Bennett of USA is hugged by silver winner Diana Munz (back) after winning 400-meter freestyle.

# Duel in the fast lanes

By Jill Lieber  
USA TODAY

SYDNEY — Every day, 17,500 fans pack the International Aquatic Center here and watch a Super Bowl break out.

No, it isn't the Green Bay Packers against the Denver Broncos, but it sure feels like it. All except for those meat pies at the concession stands, that is.

Indeed, it's the Aussies vs. the Yanks at the Sydney Games, a lap-by-lap show-down in which even world records take second place to national bragging rights.

And although after two days the USA leads the battle of the Olympic pool medals by a 9-2 bulge, there's still enough swimming left to keep this island nation cheering every stroke.

Completely packed to the gills with wild-eyed, blood-thirsty Australian swim-

## Impassioned Aussies battle USA for rule of the pool

### Cover story

ming fans, many of whom paid as much as \$455 a ticket to be a part of Olympic history (and Lord only knows how much more betting on the action at the local casinos), this \$100-million, state-of-the-art facility has clearly established itself as the

place to be during these Sydney Games. The place for "slippery water" and world records.

The place for bold heroes and flashy celebrities.

The place for The Wave (in the stands, not in the pool), and bizarre cheers such as "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie. Oi, Oi, Oi."

The place for the Aussies, the No. 4 team in the world, to try to restore their country's long, proud Olympic swimming heritage by bumping off those brash, supremely confident Yanks, who've dominated the sport since 1988.

Talk about a lane-by-lane battle. Australian spirits soared when Ian Thorpe, the 17-year-old phenomenon who's considered the Michael Jordan of Down Under, set a world record in the

Please see COVER STORY next page ►

# Taped Olympics lagging in the TV ratings

By Rudy Martzke  
USA TODAY

SYDNEY — NBC's broadcast of the Sydney Olympics isn't Saturday Night Live. Turns out it isn't Saturday Night Fever either.

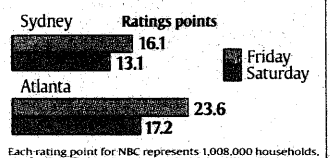
NBC's Saturday night rating in this tape-delayed Olympics was a disappointing 13.1, down 24% from the 17.2 rating for Atlanta's 1996 Games and below the average 16.1 NBC promised advertisers.

"Saturday night is the most difficult night to deliver a rating," said NBC sports chairman Dick Ebersol, adding that he wants to see more results before drawing a conclusion. "NBC averages a 5.2 on Saturday nights, so I think this is pretty impressive."

The 13.1 was off 16% from the 15.6 for Seoul in 1988, the last Summer Games held in a similar time zone as Sydney. Of consolation to NBC is that the 8-11 p.m.

## Atlanta beats Sydney

56 million people saw all or part of NBC's telecast of Friday's opening ceremonies, making it the most-watched of an overseas opening. On Saturday, viewership slipped on the first full day.



Each rating point for NBC represents 1,008,000 households, or 12 of the nation's estimated 100.8 million TV homes.

Source: A.C. Nielsen Co. By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

prime-time rating of 13.6 was 12% better than the 12.1 combined average of competing shows on Fox, CBS and ABC.

"The whole megillah is thrown into Sunday night anyway," Ebersol said. "I expect our ratings Sunday night to be a high

18 or 19 and do a 20 during the week. Ask me after Sunday."

Saturday night's low rating pulled down NBC's overall two-day prime time average to 14.5, down 30% from Atlanta's 20.5 and off 6% from Seoul's 15.4.

The cumulative average is key, as NBC projected a 17.5 average prime-time rating for Sydney. NBC has sold more than \$900 million in advertising, guaranteeing a profit on its \$705 million rights fee. But advertisers will be given make-good ads if the average rating falls below 16.1.

After two nights, NBC's average for Sydney is 10% under the 16.1 guarantee.

With Sydney 15 hours ahead of New York, results are available on the Internet, radio and competing television outlets long before NBC's taped prime-time show. Strong U.S. performances can attract viewers to taped shows.

► TV column, 3E

# Bush draws a plan for resurgence in 'contest of ideas'

## Trailing Gore in polls, GOP candidate will focus on his 'Blueprint for Middle Class

By Richard Benedetto  
and Judy Keen  
USA TODAY

George W. Bush tried Sunday to slow Al Gore's momentum and sharpen the contrasts between his policies and those of the vice president by releasing a 16-page booklet he will refer to repeatedly in coming days.

**Real Plans for Real People, Blueprint for the Middle Class** outlines Bush's proposals on education, taxes, Social Security and other issues, and compares them with Gore's.

"I want this to be a contest of policy, a contest of ideas," Bush

said Sunday in a telephone interview with USA TODAY.

The Gore camp dismissed Bush's "blueprint" as a compilation of already-announced positions that have proved unpopular.

"The Bush campaign is clearly struggling to figure out a way to connect with voters," Gore spokeswoman Kym Spell said.

The Republican presidential candidate's move comes amid more signs that a presidential race that was expected to stay tight all the way to Election Day, Nov. 7, is opening up in favor of Democrat Gore.

Over the past week, Gore has

built a lead over the Texas governor in several national polls and has pulled away in the Electoral College count.

► The latest USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Tracking Poll puts Gore ahead by 8 percentage points. He's held the lead over the past week. The poll of 728 likely voters has an error margin of +/- 4 percentage points.

► A new Newsweek poll of likely voters has Gore in the lead by 14 points, 52%-38%, the first time Gore has gone over 50% in any poll.

► In the critical state-by-state battle for Electoral College votes, Gore is ahead in enough

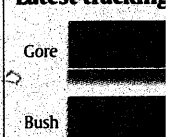
states that if the election were held today, he would get 214 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House.

A USA TODAY analysis shows Gore has moved in front in enough state polls to pick up 36 electoral votes in the past week.

Acknowledging that he's behind, Bush this week shifts from a five- to a six-day-a-week campaign schedule and will emphasize issues and his differences with Gore. He'll start today in Little Rock.

Bush's *Blueprint* will be on his Web site: [georgewebush.com](http://georgewebush.com). Gore's 191-page *Prosper-*

## Latest tracking



Source: USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup. Margin of error is +/- 4 percent.

ity for America's F which he outlines hi on various issues, is his Web site: [algor](http://algor)

► Electoral map, p