

SUNDAY BUSINESS

PATRIOT GAMES

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Roots puts less 'USA' on Olympic uniforms

Business EXCLUSIVE

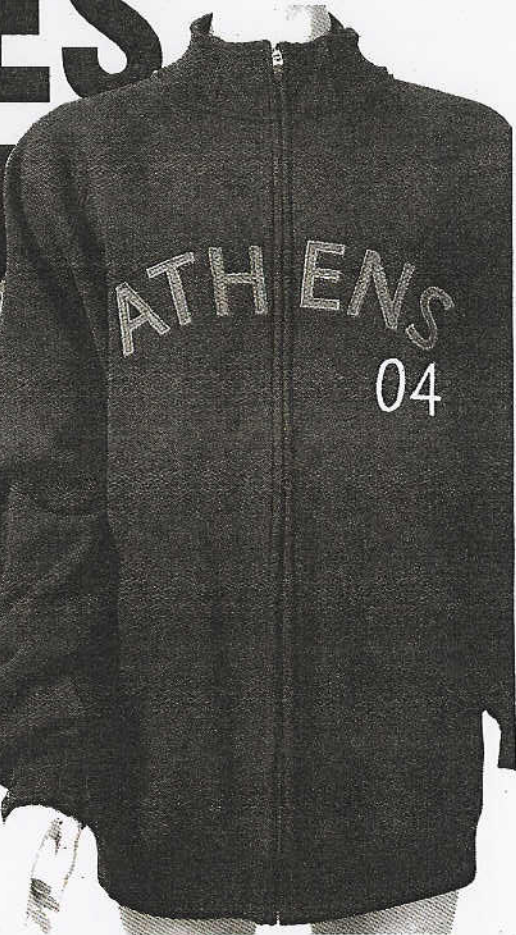
By HILARY KRAMER

Olympic clothing for the U.S. team, traditionally a star-spangled affair, will be somber this year — reducing the size of "USA" logos and American flags to mere postscripts.

The changes were urged by the U.S. Olympic Committee, which wants American athletes to keep a low profile in the wake of the Iraq war and not invite jeers during the Athens opening ceremonies.

"The logo was created by the U.S. Olympic Committee. It's tastefully done because Americans are worried about their image throughout the world," said Michael Budman, co-founder of Roots, the official parade uniform outfitter for the United States. "The athletes will be proud."

Roots unveiled its consumer lines in New York three years ago, and the focus was on the slogan "Athens '04." Unlike the



over the breast or back of the neck.

Only the Canadian-based Roots and the U.S. Olympic Committee know what American athletes will actually wear at the Games. Roots intends to keep the U.S. Olympic team parade outfit a secret until the opening ceremonies, in order to maintain an element of surprise.

Roots officials say the uniform changes actually date back to the 2000 Olympics.

During those games, some members of the international media sniped about "jingoism" among American athletes who

In 2000, Olympians were decked out in red, white and blue (above). But this year, the U.S. opted for a more subtle look (right).

Lizzie Sullivan/Getty Images

Olympic Village, and for diplomacy on the playing field.

"We consider it more appropriate than subtle," a Roots company spokesman says of the new uniforms.

"It is tastefully done and appropriate. The direction for the appropriateness came from the USOC. It came even before 9/11. The U.S. Olympic Committee wanted the clothing to be wearable and their decision was not politically driven, it was a style decision."

for the berets' sudden popularity that the company had to scramble in order to fill requests — which translated into approximately 1 million units sold in 2002.

The beret's success helped propel the privately-held company to nearly \$200 million in sales that year and created an international reputation that drove sales to an estimated \$250 million in 2003.

currently has 120 retail stores in Canada and another 20 in Asia, it fully expects revenue growth to come from the U.S.

And Roots has a willing teammate in this competition for American retail customers.

The U.S. Olympic Committee will receive a portion of the profits.

The nonprofit organization al-