

Fu back with a bang

BEIJING, Mar 19: In a remarkable comeback, Chinese diver Fu Mingxia won her first competition after two years in retirement, taking a major step toward making Olympic history, sports officials said Friday, reports AP.

Fu, who won Olympic gold in 1992 and 1996, won the 3-metre springboard title Wednesday at a diving competition in southern China, qualifying for national championships next month, said Li Dazheng, a national diving official.

"She's good," said Li, who watched Fu dive at the competition in Nanning, capital of southern China's Guangxi region.

"She's wasn't as good as at the Olympics," he said. "But she's recovered well."

Fu led throughout the competition, scoring 508 points in the heats, 70 ahead of her nearest rival, and winning with 306.75 points in the finals, state media reported.

Diving officials, including national coach Zhou Jihong, said Fu needed to work on her entry into the water but were otherwise positive about her performance, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported from Nanning.

"She has made an amazing speedy recovery," Xinhua quoted diving judge Hu Demei as saying.

Fu, 21, retired after winning springboard and platform at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the first woman in 36 years to sweep both titles. She enrolled at university and she said in an interview last month, gained so much weight "I didn't want to put on a swimming costume."

But she had second thoughts last summer and, after two years without a single dive, resumed training. In last month's interview, Fu said she is considering competing at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, but added that she first has to completely recover her form.

Fu's longtime coach, Yu Fen, was less circumspect, saying: "Her goal, of course, is to pursue Olympic gold."

Fu also won platform gold at the Barcelona games in 1992, aged just 13. If she competes in

platform-springboard tomorrow, she would become the first diver to win five Olympic golds.

2002 Olympics

Mascot to be unveiled on May 15

SALT LAKE CITY, Mar 19: The mascot for the 2002 Olympics will debut on May 15, beginning Salt Lake's 1,000-day countdown to a Winter Games stained by scandal, reports AP.

The mascot, which the Salt Lake Organising Committee had once considered unveiling at the end of last year's Olympics in Nagano, Japan, was shelved this winter as scandal enveloped Salt Lake and the Olympic world.

The SLOC had to cancel a Feb 8 debut, which would have been exactly three years before the Games' opening ceremonies.

Mitt Romney, president of the Salt Lake Organising Committee, on Thursday declined to say whether the mascot is one or more characters. But he suggested that rather than cute and cuddly, as were Nagano's snowlets, the mascot "embodies the spirit of the American West and Utah."

The mascot is to be launched during an evening community celebration, with the countdown starting at midnight.

The SLOC has budgeted to get \$2 million dollars in revenue from licensed products, a big chunk of which are clothes, trinkets, pins and toys bearing the image of the mascot.

The announcement came during a press conference when Romney returned from Lausanne, Switzerland, where he met Tuesday with leaders of the International Olympic Committee dealing with the worst corruption crisis in Olympic history.

The IOC voted to oust six members who accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts, cash and freebies from the Salt Lake bid committee. Four members signed earlier in the year.

Romney said he didn't "blurt out the truth" that the SLOC plans to cut back on what it spends to host the IOC in 2002. "They're going to find out we can be frugal and still hospitable."

What he did cover was the urgent need for the IOC, working with the SLOC, to sign up a computer hardware sponsor to work with Sema, the European consortium managing information technology for the 2002 Winter Games, Romney said.

He also sought the IOC's help in identifying how the SLOC can make cutbacks in its 1.5 billion dollar budget and asked for prompt, thorough reform that will satisfy sponsors skittish about the value of the scandal-tarnished Olympic rings. The SLOC needs to raise \$28 million dollars more from sponsors to finance its budget.

Romney lauded the reforms approved by the IOC on Thursday, a change in the selection process for the 2006 Winter Games and special commissions to police members and reform the IOC -- and said he hopes to see more.

But, he noted, "My opinion does not matter as much as sponsors' and the public's."

Romney predicted Utah companies that "believe we've turned the corner," will be the first to sign up as new sponsors.

The top two executives of the SLOC resigned in January, and the former president who had led the bid committee was stripped of his pension. In February, the committee hired to expand community representation and endorsed policies for more open records, meetings and ethics.

Gibbs cracks another ton

SA poised for a big lead



WELLINGTON, Mar 19 (AP/Reuters): A five-wicket burst by Shaun Pollock and a brilliant century by Herschelle Gibbs put South Africa in control of the third cricket Test at the Basin Reserve on Friday.

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The only other casualty of the afternoon was Jacques Kallis (17) who top edged an attempted hook off Dion Nash to a well-judged catch.

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