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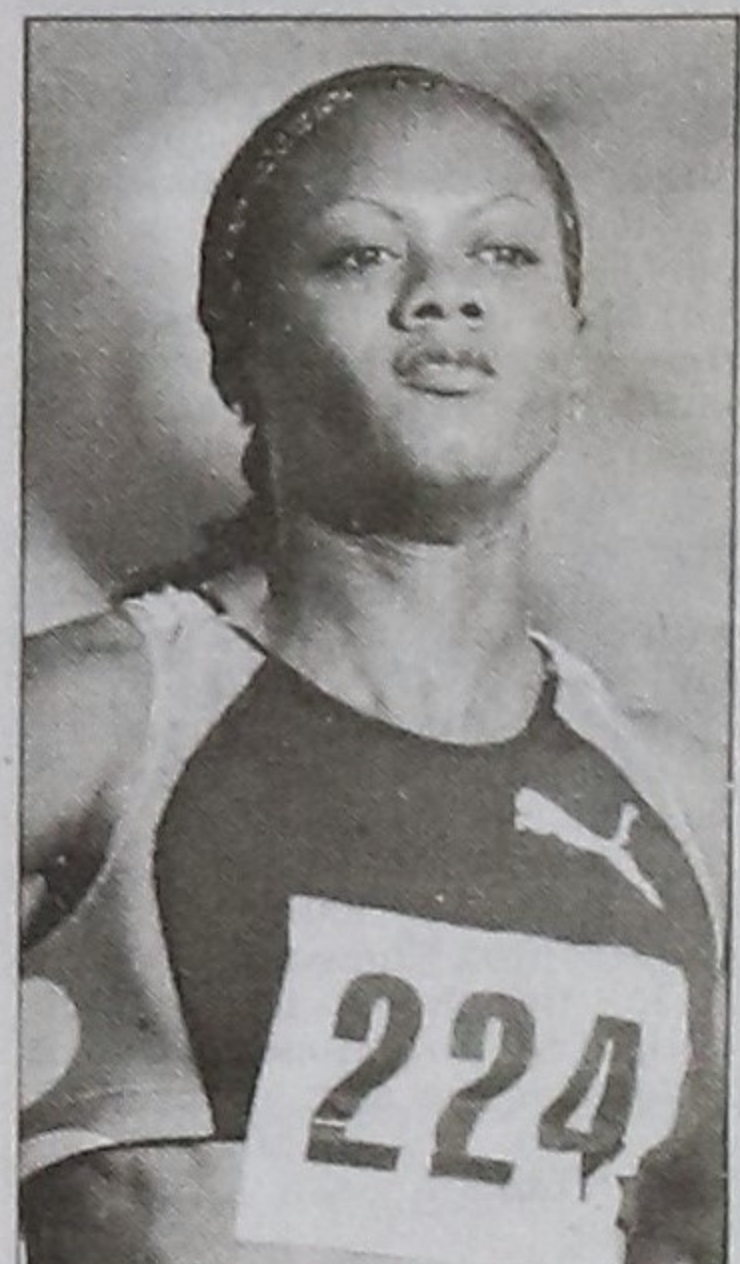
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Ottey's anxious 6 days

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Legendary Jamaican sprinter Merlene Ottey will not learn whether she will participate in the individual 100 metres here at the Olympics until September 20 — just two days before the opening heats — the team manager told AFP here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Warren Ulett, who is part of the selectors that will take the



decision, added that 40-year-old Ottey, winner of 34 medals at major championships since she made her Olympic debut in Moscow in 1980, could still make it into the event if one of the three athletes who beat her at the trials didn't meet their standards in training.

Ottey, a two-time world 200m champion and known as the 'Lion Queen' since she bestrode the 1997 world championships with a mane of golden hair, had said at the Zurich Golden League meeting on August 11 that she should be selected because she was one of the three best sprinters in Jamaica and that was how the selectors always played it.

However, Ulett said that the rules for selection were a bit stricter than how Ottey — who has only recently returned to the track after the arbitration commission of the sport's ruling body the IAAF quashed her two-year suspension for nandrolone because there was not

enough proof — had interpreted them.

"We will stick to our rules and will not break them for anybody," he said.

"Under those rules the first three in the trials qualify but if any of them turn up for the Olympics in worse shape than at the trials then we have the right to replace them with an alternate," he added.

Ottey, who was watching several of his athletes go through their paces at a meeting at the Sydney Olympic training track, made it clear that Beverly McDonald, national 200m champion and runner-up in the 100, whom Ottey has said had volunteered to step aside for her, would run in both events.

In a rather complex web of claim and counterclaim 30-year-old McDonald, who won 200m world silver last year, denied that she had ever made such an offer and in any case Ulett said it didn't matter who was telling the truth as McDonald was within her rights to change her mind.

"Beverly McDonald is not involved in this matter. She has qualified and that is that," he said.

"Merlene Ottey does not select the team, the selectors do," Ulett added.

Ottey, who said that Ottey was currently training alone so she could escape the press and would arrive in Sydney on September 17, made it clear that he wasn't very impressed with the veteran's behaviour over the issue.

"She's clearly overexerted at the moment," he said.

"She is probably the greatest athlete in history in terms of longevity and this has always been down to her being totally focused and hyped up which she clearly is now," he added.



RELAXING IN THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT! A youngster enjoying an ice cream at Bondi Beach in Sydney next to a flag bearing the Olympic rings and the Australian flag yesterday.

—AFP photo

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WELCOME TO SYDNEY: Local residents with Australian flags and balloons await the arrival of the Olympic flame at Gladesville on 13 September.

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 14 (AFP): Australia's Madame Butterfly Susie O'Neill will be using her two 100m events at the Sydney Games mostly to jump-start her gold medal bids in the 200m butterfly and freestyle.

O'Neill is seeded seventh in the 100m free and sixth in the 100m fly, but her coach Scott Volkner reckons she has only an outside chance of a minor medal in either.

Asked about O'Neill's prospects in the 100m fly when it kicks off on Saturday, Volkner joked: "Is that on? Is that an event?"

CATHY THE MAORI...

Australia's golden girl Cathy Freeman — an inspiration to women across the globe and arguably the most world's most famous Aborigine.

But the message had not quite got through to American broadcasters NBC until recently.

The Olympic television rights holders' website had described the 400-metres runner and gold medal favourite as an "Australian Maori" until somebody spotted the error.

BRAZILIAN BONDING

Tensions seem to be rising in the Brazilian triathlon camp, after two of their men's team were spotted brawling outside the Sydney Opera House following a training run.

One was seen knocking the lunch out of the other's hand, resulting in a full-blown scuffle in which kicks were aimed and abuse hurled.

A female Brazilian team member had to intervene in front of embarrassed onlookers.

"I was more shocked than anything that athletes could act like that in a public place," said one observer.

JUST DYING TO GO

British triathlete Sian Brice, who has been busting a gut to get herself in contention for Saturday's opening event, nearly became an unfortunate victim of the new EPO tests.

Selected to be tested after a final swim practice on Wednesday, there was insufficient time for the respective blood and urine samples to be collected before Brice was whisked off to a formal press conference under the Opera House.

Professing beforehand to be "dying to go", she was then

forced to sit patiently through the rambling affair before nature's call proved too much and she slipped away quietly from the top table before the end of proceedings to do her duty.

A JELLY GOOD SHOW

British triathlete Michelle Dillon fears that athletes could be stung by jellyfish during the swim section of Saturday's event in Sydney Harbour.

"I did notice a lot of jellyfish when I was coming back in from the final turn," she said after a practice swim. "If they are there on race day then a lot of people could get stung and that might affect the race."

GO-GO IN NAKED

Three-time Wimbledon runner-up Goran Ivanisevic received a 29th birthday surprise from cheeky Croatian teammates.

Ivanisevic, who was bundled out of the US Open in the first round last month, was getting a massage in the Homebush Bay athletes village on Wednesday when his teammates burst in wielding a tennis racket-shaped cake.

"We surprised him while he was on the massage table," said Croatian team spokesman Ante Drpic.

Ivanisevic, a bronze medalist in Barcelona, was naked at the time, but Drpic said he was allowed to dress before cutting the cake.

HEAVENLY WELCOME

US swimmers, used to toiling in obscurity, are thrilled to be in the Australian swimming spotlight.

"Australia is like swimming heaven," said five-time Olympic gold medalist Jenny Thompson.

"I love it because they really look at their distance swimming," chimed in Brooke Bennett, who is still snarling from the fact that none of her 1996 800m freestyle triumph was shown on US television.

Said defending 400m medley gold medalist Tom Dolan: "We had fun at training camp looking at the papers and seeing swimming not only on the front page of the sports section, but on the front page of the paper. We are going to be the number one show."

MR NICE GUY

Ian Thorpe's room mate Michael Klim has made sure the Australian swimming ace has come into early contact with his most dangerous 200m rival,

Dutch swimmer Pieter van der Hoogenband.

Van der Hoogenband was strolling around the village with fellow Dutch star Inge de Bruijn when Klim called de Bruijn on her mobile phone.

When they finished chatting, de Bruijn handed the phone to van der Hoogenband and Klim slipped his phone to his roommate — dual world record holder Thorpe.

"He's a super hero in Australia. But he's a just very nice guy," said van der Hoogenband, winner of six gold medals at last year's European champs.

ALL THAT GLISTERS

Souvenir hunters have pushed sales of commemorative Olympic coins to more than double the volume offloaded during the Atlanta Games period four years ago.

They have paid 131 million dollars (72 million US) for the mementoes, the Royal Australian Mint and Perth Mint — partners in the coin program — revealed Thursday.

Five million Sydney 2000 coins had been sold by the end of August, compared with 2.4 million for the entire Atlanta Games period.

Of the 53 various medal designs, several of the limited editions have sold out and are trading through dealers for four times their initial purchase price, a spokesman said.

IN QUEST OF A MAIDEN

Record breaking Dutch swim star Inge de Bruijn, searching for an Olympic medal after a remarkable eight world records this year, has revealed she's very superstitious before her races.

"I always get my nails done before big races," said de Bruijn, an exception among swimmers with her long painted finger nails.

It brings to mind the late US athlete Florence Griffith Joyner, who won three gold medals and a silver in the 1988 Seoul Games, and also had a penchant for polished fingernails.

LOGO A NO-GO

As if an Olympic shooting course isn't tricky enough, organisers have painted the logo of a Games sponsor on the grass in the direct line of sight of the clay target shooters.

The clay targets are a bright orange and the logo is mostly yellow and red, causing concern in a sport where picking up the target by eye quickly is the critical factor.

IAAF lawyer

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Lawsuit-happy athletes have forced the world governing body to hire its first in-house lawyer to ensure that their suspensions stick, it was revealed here on Thursday, reports AFP.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) spent an estimated 500,000 dollars in the past year on defending arbitration cases against athletes who had tested positive for banned performance-enhancing drugs.

"Until now we have always used a firm of lawyers," a senior IAAF source told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Now we are looking at hiring an in-house lawyer for the first time to help to save on legal costs."

The IAAF's 1998 arbitration case against Dennis Mitchell, the American sprinter who was eventually banned by the IAAF despite his explanation that his abnormal testosterone levels were due to a session of sex and beer with his wife, was said to have cost the international federation 125,000 dollars in legal costs.

Uzbek hauled in

SYDNEY, Sept 14: An Uzbekistani trainer allegedly caught with 15 vials of human growth hormone (HGH) at Sydney Airport will appear in court charged with attempting to import a prohibited substance into the country, reports AFP.

However, a Greek triple jumper snared at Perth airport with another banned drug will not be prosecuted, authorities said.

Australian Customs Minister Amanda Vanstone said a summons had been served on Uzbeki Sergei Voynov in the athletes' village late Wednesday and the 45-year-old was scheduled to appear in court next Tuesday.

He faces penalties of up to 100,000 dollars (57,000 US), or a five-year prison sentence.

Greek triple jump champion Stamatis Lenis, 22, and coach Stavrou Zougouridis, though have escaped punishment.

Greece's National Olympic Committee said the pair were stopped by customs officers on Saturday after trying to enter Australia with the natural Russian drug Ekdisten.

Koreans at ease

SYDNEY, Sept 14: North and South Korean athletes and officials will mix freely and wear identical uniforms when they march together at the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony on Friday in a gesture of peace and reconciliation, reports AFP.

"Nobody will be able to distinguish who is from the North and who is from the South," Ryu Song-Il, general secretary of North Korea's Olympic Committee, said Thursday.

"That's the main reason for the joint march. To show to the world that Korea is one," Ryu told AFP about the symbolic move between the two Koreas, which have remained technically at war since their bitter conflict of 1950-53.

There are no special rules and regulations. They will mix freely," he said, describing the mood in the North Korean camp as "wonderful" as the ceremony neared.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) provided the uniforms — dark blue jackets and trousers or skirts in beige — to the 90 delegates each from both sides.

The IOC, which once failed to have the Stalinist north share some of the 1988 Summer Games hosted by the south, played a key role in persuading the two Koreas to march together at the ceremony behind a joint flag representing the entire peninsula.

The arrangement followed a historic inter-Korean summit in June in Pyongyang between South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong-Il.

The two leaders pledged to move towards reconciliation and eventual reunification with the South helping the North's economic rehabilitation. Sport was identified as an area where cooperation and exchanges could be promoted.

Ryu and Park Pil-Soon, a spokesman for the South Korean Olympic committee, confirmed that the flag, following the placard reading simply "Korea", would feature the shape of the whole peninsula in light blue on a white background.

"The similar mascot peninsula will be attached to the uniform jackets," Park said.

The flag will jointly carried by two athletes — one from the North and one from the South. Female basketball star Chung

Eun-Soon will represent South Korea while judo coach Pak Chon-Chul, the 1987 world 86kg silver medalist, will hold the flag for North Korea.

The North Korean athletes and officials here total only 61 so other staff including trainers, assistant trainers and masseurs are expected to be mobilised in order to ensure both sides are equally represented.

By contrast, South Korea needs to choose among its 398 athletes and officials here.

Attempts at mixed Korean sporting links have met with varying degrees of success in the past.

At the 1991 FIFA World Youth Football Championships, a joint side was fielded but the experiment failed off the pitch with players from the two nations divided.

Meanwhile, the community of 35,000 Korean residents in Sydney is preparing cheering squads to the Games for both Koreas. There are only a few hundred supporters from the North.

About 300 Korean residents were expected to attend the opening ceremony at the Olympic Stadium, joined by about 1,000 tourists from South Korea.

Chelsea comes

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Chelsea Clinton flew into Australia Thursday on her first overseas trip as a representative of her father, United States President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

Wearing a black pantsuit, blue blouse and black open-toe shoes, Clinton smiled and tried to come to terms with a harsh Australian sun after stepping off the Gulfstream jet which brought members of the US delegation to Sydney.

Donna E. Shalala, the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, said the president and wife Hillary had wanted to be in Sydney.

"But they couldn't make it because we're having our own competition back in the United States, it's the Presidential election," Shalala said.

"But they did ask us to deliver to the people of Australia their best wishes for a successful Olympic Games," she said.



GET SET FOR THORPEDO'S THUNDER: Australian swimming ace Ian Thorpe (top) preparing to dive while countryman Michael Klim looks on during a practice session at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre.

—AFP photo

Dressed for success

SYDNEY, Sept 14 (AFP): The Sydney Olympics will double as a flashy fashion show with athletes dressing for gold in specially designed, high-performance outfits which cost millions to develop.

The designs, created by the innovation departments of the world's leading sports clothing firms, are aimed at making athletes feel good and perform better.

The super-slick bodysuit, which Australian swim sensation Ian Thorpe has worn in world record-breaking efforts, head-to-toe wear for runners, recently favoured by Aussie 400 metre queen Cathy Freeman, and energy-retaining outfits for burly weightlifters will catch the eye at the Games.

The grunge look which has characterised the heavy metal world of weightlifting for decades — with competitors wearing cheap T-shirts under their bare-shouldered vests — is out as is minimalist wear for swimmers.

You dress to go into the water these days with some female swimmers taking up to 15 minutes to squeeze their bodies

inch-by-inch into suits that are two sizes too small.

Sports clothing mega firms pay athletes huge sums to wear their brands and constantly search for new ways to help their sportsmen maximise performances.

"We cannot make an athlete perform above his or her potential," Armin Bohm, who heads a worldwide innovation team of 40 people for Adidas, told AFP.

"We develop sports wear, using new fibres, that helps maintain energy. With the sprinting suit we can save the athletes hundredths of a second which could be the difference between an Olympic medal and nothing."

"We work with the athletes to develop suits and shoes that they feel comfortable with and help save energy. If an athlete feels good with what he is wearing there is a better chance he will perform well."

Some innovations, like the body suit worn by Ian Thorpe, has caused controversy within the sports. But we try to avoid this by keeping the sports bod-

ies informed of what we are doing."

The Court of Arbitration for Sport has cleared Olympic swimmers to wear the body suits after ruling that swimming's world governing body, FINA, had not breached its own guidelines by sanctioning "performance-enhancing equipment."

Thorpe, nicknamed "Thorpedo", will wear the suit which was custom made for him by Adidas but the brand name will be blacked out as the Australian Olympic team is sponsored by Nike.

"The request by Thorpe to wear the suit was completely his own and the company would have supported him and honoured their contractual agreement to him regardless of his choice," said a spokesman for Adidas.

While Thorpe's slick swim wear and Freeman's body hugging running suit are common sights, weightlifting will move into a new fashion era at the Sydney Games.

"I feel good in the suit, which I helped develop, and it gives me an added edge," said Dimas.



THE COLOURS OF AUSTRALIA: Two fans of the Olyroos — the Australian Olympic football team — colour up at Canberra yesterday.

—AFP photo

Thorpedo to hit

SYDNEY, Sept 14: Ian Thorpe is poised to add another chapter to his burgeoning legend as Australia's almost supernatural swimming sensation makes his Olympic debut in his hometown of Sydney in the first Games of the new Millennium, reports AFP.

The remarkably self-possessed young man, still a month shy of his 18th birthday, has already tried to shrug off the tag of swimmer of the century bestowed by Australian coach Don Talbot.

But there's no doubt that Thorpe will cement his place in Australia's sporting pantheon if he swims up to expectations at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre.

"I've competed at every major championship except the Olympic Games," said Thorpe, holder of the five fastest 200m freestyle times in history and the three fastest in the 400m.

"I'm pretty excited. I'm enjoying the village, enjoying training."

Thorpe is chasing four gold medals in the eight-day competition. But the amazingly self-possessed young man says medals are merely a by-product of his will to make the most of

his awesome talent.

"I'm determined to get the best out of myself," Thorpe said. "That's why I get up at four every morning. That's why I train and train. I really love what I do, and that's why I do it."

Thorpe has learned to accept the other by-product of his success, the fame that goes with swimming stardom in Australia.

He recalls giving his autograph for the first time — to a teacher — when he was a 12-year-old at the 1996 Olympic Trials.

He remembers the first time he was recognised on the street — when he was 14 — and admits that he sometimes wishes he had his life more to himself.

"The best and worst are actually the same," Thorpe said of the pros and cons of fame. "Being recognised everywhere you go. It's fantastic to have that kind of support, but it also can be daunting. Especially when you're not having your best day and you just want to kind of be on your own."

"I don't get a chance to rest, because I'm always 'Ian See page 19"