



THAT'S THE SPIRIT: Two-year old Britney (L) is in a joyous mood at Sydney's Circular Quay prior to the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympics yesterday. — AFP photo

Judgement Day for Olyroos, Eagles

SYDNEY. Sept 15: The medal dreams of either host nation Australia or champions Nigeria will almost certainly end for the loser on the first official day of Olympic competition at the Sydney Football Stadium on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Australia were beaten 1-0 by Italy in front of 93,252 fans when they opened their Group A campaign at Melbourne Cricket Ground on Wednesday.

And Nigeria only picked up one point in the same group from a 3-3 draw with outsiders Honduras — although with time running out they trailed 1-0 and looked like losing until they scored two late goals.

Now it's make-or-break for both teams in a match neither can afford to lose.

With Italy likely to take all three points off Honduras in Adelaide, both Australia and Nigeria must win to keep alive their hopes of at least finishing second in the group and advancing to the last eight.

Australian soccer coach Raul Blanco believes Nigeria are capable of almost anything — good or bad — and knows his side face a tough task on Saturday.

"Nigeria are the most unpredictable team I have ever seen, they were 3-1 down and will beaten and then they produced two world class goals to level, it was unbelievable," Blanco said.

"They do things on the ball that you do not see around the world and when you have to cover players like that it is a very tough assignment," he added.

Nigeria's Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere said: "You did not see the best of us on Wednesday. It think it will be a very different outcome on Saturday."

Chile and Spain, the top two teams in Group B, meet in what should be a lively match in Melbourne on Sunday and whatever the outcome, they should both get through to the quarter-finals.

Chile drubbed Morocco 4-1 while Spain crushed South Korea 3-0 in their opening games on Thursday.

Group C leaders Cameroon, who lived dangerously before beating Kuwait 3-2 in Brisbane on Wednesday, are likely to find the United States a tougher nut to crack in their match in Can-

berra on Saturday, while the Czech Republic play Kuwait in the same group in Brisbane.

American coach Clive Charles was disappointed his team only draw 2-2 with the Czechs after dominating — and Cameroon will have to be at their best to take the three points that would virtually guarantee them a place in the last eight.

An outstanding match is in prospect in Brisbane where gold medal favourites Brazil take on South Africa in Group D on Sunday.

Brazil were below-par despite their opening 3-1 win over Slovakia but their coach Wainerley Luxemburgo has promised a far better display against

the South Africans, who lost 2-1 to Japan in Canberra.

"It was the first game, so we were not playing at our best," said Luxemburgo. "But don't worry, just like the Olympics we will get better and better."

Japan have emerged as Brazil's chief rivals in the group and their French coach Philippe Troussier is confident his side can chalk up their 19th straight victory with another win over Slovakia in Canberra, which could seal their quarter-final place.

"After two years together, this team just gets better and better," he said. "I think we can prove that to move and more people as the competition goes on."

Organisers had to take extra measures to deal with recent transport problems.

"You are looking at 500,000 people coming into Sydney Olympic Park on a daily basis," SOCOG spokeswoman Liz Smylie said.

"It is always a mammoth task. We have accredited 150 extra drivers who are behind the wheel of the buses today and there are plans to accredit another 100 more drivers."

But he added: "We will have a postmortem as quickly as possible after the Sydney Games to see what is really the impact of these numbers."

"The media is 21,000 here. It was around 12,000 in Barcelona (at the 1992 Games). Everywhere there are increases and we have to watch that very closely and monitor it. The IOC will sit down and reconsider what we could possibly put some limits."

Triathlon, women's weightlifting and taekwondo will all be medal events for the first time in Sydney.

New sports boost the number of television staff involved in broadcasting the action, as well as increasing the number of reporters.

The expanding numbers

Hopeful hosts

SYDNEY. Sept 15: Host Australia expects to get off to a golden start on the opening day of the Sydney Olympics with swimmer Ian Thorpe and one of the trio of women's triathletes among those expected to climb the winner's rostrum, reports AFP.

Thorpe begins his campaign as the red-hot favourite in the men's 400m freestyle, in which he holds the three fastest times in history and is almost six seconds faster this year than his closest challengers, Klete Keller and Chad Carvin of the United States.

The 17-year-old sensation returns to the pool later that evening as part of the 4x100m relay team but gold could prove more elusive for the Australians.

The United States has never been beaten in the event at the Olympics since its introduction at Los Angeles sixteen years ago, while Russia has the fastest time for the event this year.

Japan's Yasuko Tajima is favourite for the women's 400m individual medley, ahead of European Champion Yana Klochikova of Ukraine and US youngster Kaitlin Sandeno — China's world champion Chen Yan is also in the field but is languishing outside the top 10 in the world rankings this year.

The United States, whose team includes Jenny Thompson, Dara Torres and Amy Van Dyken, are expected to win the 4x100m freestyle relay with Sweden, Germany and Australia in medal contention.

The host nation expects nothing less than gold in the women's triathlon — the first

event of the Games to begin.

Michelle Jones, ranked world number one, is the pre-race favourite but either of her team-mates, reigning world champion, Nicole Hackett or 1998 Goodwill Games gold medalist Loretta Harrop could pip her to provide the first home victory.

Some unabashedly partisan pundits are even predicting an Australian 1-2-3.

The first gold medal of the Games will be awarded to the winner of the women's 10m air rifle by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch.

Germany's Sonja Pfeilschifter, the reigning world champion, and 18-year-old Chinese shooter Zhao Yinghui are the leading contenders.

Following that is the men's event in the same category, with current world cup champion China's Wang Yifu — who won gold in Barcelona and silver in Atlanta — the favourite.

Two judo gold medals are at stake with Tamura Ryoko of Japan the favourite in the women's 48kg class and her compatriot Nomura Tadahiro expected to battle it out for the men's 60kg title with Manuel Poulot of Cuba.

The first fencing event to be decided is the men's individual epee and the gold medal could go to any one of four hopefuls — Arnd Schmitz of Germany, France's Eric Srecki, Angelo Mazzoni of Italy or the Russian Pavel Kolobkov.

Turkey's Halil Mutlu is clear favourite for the 56kg weight-lifting division, having set a new world record at last year's World Championships.

The host nation expects nothing less than gold in the women's triathlon — the first



TIME TO SMILE: Two delighted young ladies showing off their face paintings of the Olympic torch (L) and the Australian flag at the Olympic Park in Homebush Bay, Sydney yesterday. — AFP photo

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY. Sept 15 (AFP): Australian Olympic swimming icon Dawn Fraser was spotted at the Equestrian Centre at Horsley Park admiring the Three Day Event horses at the pre-competition fitness inspection on Friday.

"I'm very comfortable with horses as I have my own farm," said Fraser, who is revered at the Horsley Park admiring the Three Day Event horses at the pre-competition fitness inspection on Friday.

The Ansett flight from Melbourne to Sydney, with senior Australian Olympic Committee officials on board, was kept waiting on the tarmac while a search of the plane was carried out.

The cause was the sport pistols of the women's 25m world record holder, Irada Ashumova, who was concerned that they had not been transferred from a connecting flight en route from Azerbaijan.

Only when the guns were found on the plane was it able to proceed. Ashumova is among the favourites for gold in the women's sport pistol shooting.

NOT CRICKET
 The Melbourne Cricket Club is officially far from happy with the 2000 Olympics organisers, SOCOC.

Having accepted that various accredited Games personnel

will be able to wander round the famous Long Room in the Pavilion during the Olympic football matches taking place at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the club has been disappointed that SOCOC have insisted that the MCC shop at the MCG closes early on match days — before fans can enter the ground.

It may reduce the competition for Olympic merchandising outlets around the MCG, but the MCC are wondering how they will be able to sell their own stock of 2000 Games memorabilia.

HOME-GROWN GOLD
 The gold medals to be handed out to Olympic victors over the two weeks of competition will this year have the added distinction of having been produced from Australian gold.

Moreover, the precious metal has been mined by hand, in an old-fashioned operation reminiscent of goldrush tales from the 19th century.

After four and a half years of negotiations following the original bid, the Sydney Games organisers agreed for the gold medal metal to be supplied by Ophir from seams in the outback of western New South Wales. The medals are actually pure silver gilded with six grams of pure Ophir gold.

Just do it on track

SYDNEY. Sept 15 (AFP): They sing, they dance, they joke — although not to everyone's taste — and they win athletics titles.

Now the time is approaching when coach and former actor John Smith will want Maurice "Kansas Comet" Greene, Ato Boldon and Inger Miller to prove themselves on the biggest stage of all.

Add the other two Americans in the 100m, John "The Clown Prince" Drummond and Curtis Johnson to Greene and Trinidadian Boldon, and Smith could be looking at training an unprecedented first four home in the blue riband event.

Miller is the greatest threat

to deprive Marion Jones of gold on the track and ruining her dream of five Olympic titles.

Smith, the 440 yard world record holder, has the most high-profile stable in the sport. They are valued by meet directors as much for their showmanship and willingness to publicise athletics — which has had some rocky times in terms of television viewing figures — as for their ability on the track.

The lean-looking 50-year-old American, who missed an Olympic gold in 1972 when he pulled up in the 400 metres final with a hamstring injury, made his mark as a coach when Steve Lewis won the 400m final at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

It made him feel that the rough period he went through in the 70s was a price worth paying.

The burly Hudson, who is highly protective of his proteges and ensures they are largely kept out of the limelight during the lead-up to big championships, provides the financial brain to go with Smith's coaching ability.

Smith, who predicted a week before Greene ran in the Brussels Golden League meeting that he would run a time of 9.88sec which he did, is always open and ready to give an opinion on anything.

But he is a tough taskmaster to his troops and rarely satisfied.

"He is tough and no matter how we are feeling physically he pushes us through all the hoops until he is happy," Greene said.

It certainly has paid off as Greene has collected two world titles and the world record since he joined Smith following the Atlanta Olympics in a last desperate bid to make it in athletics, while Boldon and Miller both have a 200m world gold medal in their cabinets.

Boldon, the most articulate of the group, put Smith's standing in his eyes nicely when asked what he thought of all the helpful advice he was getting from his fellow Trinidadians about how to win Olympic gold.

Boldon, who says he learns a lot even when he beaten by unknowns from UCLA who Smith brings in during training runs, appears the most thoughtful of the stable, while Drummond and Greene indulge in the comedy side.

They are always clowning around, with Greene strutting his rapper style walk down the track and Drummond, who was born with spina bifida, taking the mickey out of him — Marx brothers it ain't but it brings some light entertainment to the show.



PATRIOTISM THRU HAIRDO: Michelle Stewart displaying her unique hair dressed with miniature Australian flags at the Olympic Park yesterday. Stewart's hair was done by her sister.

Gala gathering

SYDNEY. Sept 15 (AFP): Sydney's star-studded guest list is filling fast with the rich, powerful and famous flooding in for the greatest show on earth.

Chelsea Clinton grabbed the headlines on her arrival Thursday while Muhammad Ali's been courting the press at functions galore.

While Hollywood appears to be keeping a low profile, royalty abounds.

The King and Queen of Malaysia have been spotted as has Queen Sofia de Borbon of Spain.

Belgium's Crown Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde are here, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Crown Prince William Alexander from Holland.

European nobility is ably represented.

Royalty from Sweden is also expected while Prince Albert of Monaco and sister Princess Caroline have been busy on the

social circuit.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II should rightfully be opening the Games but the job has gone to her representative here Sir William Deane.

But her daughter Princess Anne, a member of the International Olympic Committee, is in town and was seen breaking bread with ex-King Constantine of Greece in a trendy Sydney restaurant.

Olympics Minister Michael Knight confirmed that Australia's adopted son Tom Cruise, who owns a house in Sydney with Australian wife Nicole Kidman, had jetted in.

But rumours that the likes of Jack Nicholson, Madonna and other such megastars are coming are just that — rumours.

After addressing the World Economic Forum in Melbourne he went to Malaysia and India for a holiday but will be back for the Games.

And let's not forget Juan Antonio Samaranch — the powerful IOC supremo who commands the ear of most of the above.

Oldest attendants

SYDNEY. Sept 15: Australia's two special guests at Friday night's Sydney 2000 Opening ceremony were the nation's oldest living female Olympian, Edith Payne (nee Robinson) and Charles Mance, the country's oldest living war veteran, reports AFP.

Shafiq, 30, recalled to a national squad last year after three years in the wilderness, has played only in short burst during Pakistan's warm-up matches.

Adding to Islahuddin's problems are niggling injuries to striker Kashif Javed, winger Samer Hussain and defender Tariq Imran.

Short of fit players, the 49-year-old Islahuddin was forced to take the field to make up the numbers during training sessions over the last two days.

"It's nice to play with the boys, but I would have preferred to supervise them from outside," he said.

"God willing, we will have a full team on Sunday because the injuries are not very serious."

It's fabulous that they've given me a seat at the Games," said Mance.