

Harmony

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The four-hour extravaganza drew on the Australian love of the ocean, beginning with the sea and returning to the harbour city after a journey through the history of the country.

Each segment was intertwined with a haunting Aboriginal spirituality — threaded together by two central characters — a small girl and Aboriginal dancer Djakapurra Munyarryun, symbolising unity and reconciliation.

Preceding it was a traditional "welcome to the country" ceremony which Aboriginal leaders said was an crucial breakthrough in awareness of indigenous custom.

"It would have been an insult to Aborigines if it had not happened," said Marjorie Anderson, Olympic Coordination Authority strategy manager.

Australia's Olympic flag bearer and team captain Andrew Gaze said the choice of Freeman and the indigenous content symbolised Australia's ability to settle its differences.

"I think that as a nation we've got a long way to go and we're doing our absolute best for that reconciliation process," he said.

"With Cathy's selection and the involvement of others (indigenous Australians) and just the theme of it, I think it was reflective of the nation's ability for that process to continue."

Lowitja O'Donnoghue, former chairman of the powerful indigenous group, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, "just loved" the opening ceremony, according to former Olympic champion runner Herb Elliott.

He spoke to O'Donnoghue in a hospitality suite at Stadium Australia after he led the Olympic torch into the stadium.

"She just absolutely loved the opening ceremony, she was exceptionally positive about it," he said.

New South Wales Premier Bob Carr said the ceremony "could well prove to be the greatest work of the imagination ever produced in Australia."

"It could in fact be the greatest single work of art produced by Australians."

IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch said it was "the most beautiful Olympic ceremony of my presidency".

Samba beat

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Sweden began defeating Italy's Lucia Perrotta and Daniela Gattelli 15-9.

A partisan Bondi Beach crowd cheered Gooley and Manser all the way and Gooley was delighted with the support.

"These guys (the crowd) put on an incredible show," said the 19-year-old. "It's a great feeling to be the first Australian team out here. We can't ask for anything better."

But a self-critical Gooley was less content with her game, saying: "Pauline made up for me on the serve. I'm not as strong as I could have been."

Gooley and Manser, although candidates for medals, are considered second strings behind Kerri Potthast and Natalie Cook for the host nation.

Potthast and Cook kicked off their campaign with a hard-fought 15-11 triumph over Mexico's Maria Teresa Galindo and Hilda Gaxiola Alvarez.

The third Australian team of Annette Huygens Tholen and Sarah Stratton came unstuck, though, although in fairness they were taking on tough opponents in America's Jennifer Johnson-Jordan and Annett Davis.

Johnson-Jordan, the daughter of 1960 Olympic decathlon champion Rafer Johnson, was inspired to become an Olympic athlete when her father was part of the torch relay team that took the last lap of the track in Atlanta in 1996 before the flame was handed to Muhammad Ali.

And she showed grit her father would be proud of when she and Davis saw off the Aussies 15-13.

The other American contenders Misty May and Holly McPeak had an easier passage, eclipsing Czech duo Martina Hudecova and Tereza Toblasova 15-5.

This is beach volleyball's second appearance in the Olympics after a successful debut in Atlanta — where the skimpy costumes of the competitors earned them the tag of "voley dollys".

Portuguese pair Maria-Jose Schuller and Ana Cristina Pereira were also impressive on day one, dispatching Xiong Zi and Chi Rong of China 15-5 while the most one-sided match of all saw Italian pair Laura Brusoni and Annamaria Solazzi drub Vasili Karadassion and Eftosimou Sifri of Greece.

German girls first into semis



FOOTBALL
SYDNEY, Sept 16: Germany beat Brazil 2-1 Saturday to become the first team to secure their place in the semi-finals of the Olympic women's football tournament, reports AFP.

Australia and Sweden fought out a 1-1 draw in Sydney in the other Group E match, leaving both sides with a chance of qualifying.

The win in Canberra left the Germans with an unassailable lead at the top of group E after a 3-0 win over Australia in their opening clash.

Each must now win their final group match on Tuesday -- Australia play Brazil, while Sweden meet the Germans -- and hope the other result goes to their way to qualify for the last four alongside the Germans.

GERMANY - 1, BRAZIL - 1

Two strikes from centre forward Birgit Prinz -- the first a spectacular volley from the edge of the area -- put the Germans in control of their match by half-time.

But they were forced to hold out against some late pressure after midfielder Raquel pulled one back for the Brazilians with a 30-yard drive 16 minutes from time.

Andresson was cut down inside the box by a clumsy challenge from Dianne Alagich and stepped up to earn her side a well deserved point.

It was Andersson, who came closest to breaking the deadlock in a scrappy first-half with a speculative cross-shot, which hit the crossbar, as the Swedes superior footballing skills were neutralised by the host nation's more physical approach.

Australia took the lead against the run of play with the first chance of the second period.

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