

'Herculean' flop

WEIGHTLIFTING

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: In the end it was an Olympics too far for the man they call "Pocket Hercules".

Turkish weightlifter Naim Suleymanoglu, Olympic gold medalist in 1988, 1992 and 1996, failed with all three opening attempts in the snatch event of the 62kg division Sunday and was eliminated, reports AFP.

His three-lift failure left him unable to earn a final placing and out of the competition.

The golden boy of world weightlifting had been looking for an unprecedented fourth consecutive gold at the Sydney Convention Centre.

Suleymanoglu, a super hero in Turkey, failed to respond to the urging of noisy, flag-waving Turkish supporters.

He could not hoist the bar over his head in his first two attempts at 145kgs and the crowd was poised for one, last supreme effort. Suleymanoglu did not disappoint.

With his mouth wide open in the style which characterised his years at the top, he lifted the mighty weight skywards, tottered, made a few faltering steps forward ... and dropped

Atlanta four years ago may have taken its toll.

The temptation, of fame and fortune proved too much for Suleymanoglu, who spent years partying in top Turkish nightclubs following his 1996 gold win.

But after nearly three years of the high life, the diminutive Suleymanoglu heard the call of Sydney, and set out to join Satoru Endo of Denmark, American discus thrower Al Oerter and the great Carl Lewis, as Olympians who have won four consecutive gold in an individual event.

"It is history that I have been training for," he said on returning from his absence. "I know all about Carl Lewis and Al Oerter. I think a lot about them."

Suleymanoglu is arguably Turkey's best known and best loved athlete and an estimated million people greeted him at Ankara airport on his return from winning his first gold medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

The joy was heightened as Suleymanoglu was Bulgarian by birth and had defected to Turkey two years earlier during a crackdown on ethnic Turks like the young lifter.

The Bulgarian Government only gave their permission for Suleymanoglu to represent Turkey in 1988 after they were reportedly paid one million dollars in compensation by the Turkish authorities.

Suleymanoglu proved himself a fiercely patriotic competitor and his three consecutive Olympic gold medals elevated him to superstar status in Turkey and saw him collect the unofficial title of "lifter of the century."

When he retired from competition after Atlanta and headed for the clubs of Ankara, several sensational stories started to emerge about the weightlifter but he has remained a hero of the country.

Shrugging off the lurid tales, Suleymanoglu returned to strict training about 16 months ago and slowly regained the form which made him almost unbeatable on the world stage for a decade.

He competed at the European Championships in Sofia in April and came away with a bronze medal behind winner Nikolay Peshalov of Croatia, further edging open the door to his bid.

But in Sydney on Sunday night the door was slammed shut.



the bar.

The 33-year-old sat, head bowed and in deep thought, on the stage for several seconds before acknowledging the sympathetic cheers of the crowd.

He touched his heart, stripped off the top half of his vest and walked bare chested into final retirement.

It appears the break he took following a thrilling victory in



ZERO GRAVITY: Russia's Svetlana Khorkina is airborne during her uneven bars routine at the SuperDome yesterday.

--AFP photo

ABSORBING ANECDOTES

SYDNEY, Sept. 17 (AFP) Quotes of the day Sunday from the Olympic Games:

"We've got to believe there's a way to beat him. Maybe not yesterday or today, but there will be a way." — American swimmer Josh Davis on Australian swim star Ian Thorpe.

"The Olympics are the kind of event that maybe favour players that are capable of finding some extra intensity or adrenaline. And I am definitely that kind of player." — US tennis star Michael Chang on his Olympic hopes.

"As I came to the finish I was thinking you've got to want it, you've got to want it, you've got to want it." — Canada's Simon Whitfield on the closing moments of his triumphant triathlon run.

"What the president has asked us to do in his absence is

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept. 17 (AFP): Not content just to win Olympic medals and break records at home the Australians are now spreading their swim know-how further afield.

Former Australian coach Graeme Carroll took over the Bolivian Olympic swimming squad just over two weeks ago and has already helped Games competitor Katherine Moreno Maser break the national record and knock two seconds off her best time in Sunday's women's 100m breaststroke heats here.

"She set a national record. After two and a half weeks that's not bad," said Carroll. "It's pretty unbelievable. I nearly cried. I had to teach her how to dive, to turn and start."

Maser's time of 1:16.15sec was not enough to qualify for Sunday night's semi-finals, but Carroll is hoping to improve on that, and will be travelling to Bolivia to train the national team.

A delighted Maser, 26, said: "I can't believe it. I didn't feel like dying during the race."

SIXSMITH TO GO

British hockey star Jane Sixsmith will end her illustrious career after the Sydney Olympics.

Sixsmith, nicknamed 'Carrots' because of her ginger hair, is a veteran of four Olympic Games and pondered quitting after the Atlanta Games only to reconsider.

But this time the Sutton Coldfield player is serious. "None is going to talk me into carrying on with Britain or England," she said.

MAY'S BABY DREAM

Italian long jumper Fiona May is planning to quit after next year's world championships in Edmonton, Canada to start a family.

And May, formerly a Great Britain international, has it all mapped out.

"If it's a girl she will probably be extroverted like (husband) Gianni (pachino). If it's a boy I imagine she will be quiet like me."

MEDALS AWAY

Australia's individual pursuit bronze medal-winning cyclist Brad McGee could not wait to get rid of his medal.

As soon as the medal cere-

mony had finished McGee cycled over to his relatives in the crowd and hung the newly-won accolade around his mother's neck.

McGee promptly cycled off without his going.

WEEPING TOURNAUNT

French cyclist Arnaud Tournant was also unorthodox in his reaction to a medal-winning performance.

Tournant was part of the victorious French team in the Olympic team sprint men's final.

With victory clinched Tournant climbed off his bike and sat down looking sombre for

several minutes. The weeping champion looked inconsolable just minutes before he received the gold medal but recovered his composure when the Marseille was played at the presentation.

ITALY'S POOL GLORY

Italy may produce great footballers, skiers and Formula One teams but success in the Olympic swimming pool has eluded them — until now.

Domenico Fioravanti's victory in the men's 100m breaststroke final was the first gold medal in the Olympic swimming pool for any Italian swimmer.

Sorry, Samaranch

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: The flag at Stadium Australia flew at half-mast Sunday following the death of Juan Antonio Samaranch's wife, but the IOC supreme has vowed to return for the closing ceremony, reports AFP.

Samaranch, 80, left on Saturday by private jet to be by her bedside in Barcelona — the first time he had departed a Summer Games before it had ended in his 20-year tenure as head of the world's biggest sports organisation.

But Maria Teresa Salisachs-Rowe, 68, known as 'Bibi', died from cancer before he arrived. She is understood to have been rushed to hospital just hours after the Olympic opening ceremony.

As a mark of respect, the flag will remain at half-mast until noon Monday. Flags in the three hotels where IOC officials are staying and IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, have also been lowered.

IOC director general Franco Carrard said a private funeral was being arranged for Sunday or Monday in Barcelona. A mass will be held in Sydney on Monday.

"Mr. Samaranch is now resting in Barcelona," he told a news conference. "He heard the news on the plane. His plan is to come back, but we don't know when."

IOC vice-president Dirk Pund and Australian IOC vice president Kevin Gosper said they expected him for the closing ceremony on October 1.



A DAY OF GRIEF: The Olympic flag at the Sydney Olympic Stadium flying at half mast yesterday following the death of International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch's wife Maria Teresa Salisachs-Rowe.

--AFP photo

Korean carnival

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: The Olympic judo contest turned into a Korean party Sunday as supporters from Seoul cheered for both North and South Korean medal hopefuls, reflecting a growing mood of reconciliation on the divided peninsula.

A group of about 400 South Koreans, some of them clad in traditional costume or Western-style cheerleaders' outfits, roared on for Korean judokas, particularly Atlanta under-48kg bantamweight gold medalist Kye Sun-Hui from the North.

Kye, who has stepped up to the women's under-52kg division after beating Japan's world champion Ryoko Tamura in the Atlanta Games final, made the semi-finals by late afternoon.

All the while, the cheering squad beat drums and waved joint Korean flags showing the shape of the Korean peninsula in blue on a white background.

The song such songs as "Our Wish is Reunification", a hymn sung for decades on both sides of the peninsula since it was divided at the end of World War II.

During a one-hour break before the judo semi-finals, they played and danced in a

plaza by the judo venue, the Sydney Exhibition Centre.

The flag was used when North and South Korean athletes and officials marched together at the Sydney Games opening ceremony on Friday, in an unprecedented move brokered by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The group of Korean supporters, wearing T-shirts and caps reading "Korea is one", has been organised by the South Korean Internet firm donga.com and sponsored by the state-run Korean Telecom Corp.

They were on a five-day trip here to support medal hopefuls from North and South Korea, said Sue Jin, a donga.com official. "Every body wishes for the reunification. I think it will come soon in five to 10 years," she said.

The Koreans are still technically at war, having never signed a peace accord after the 1950-1953 Korean War.

But ever since a June summit between the South's President Kim Dae-Jung and the North's supreme leader Kim Jong-il, the two Koreas have been progressing slowly towards peace and reunification.

Dragneva the trail-blazer

WEIGHTLIFTING

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: Officials said hello with flowers and Bulgaria's Izhabela Dragneva showed just how women's weightlifting had flowered by lifting the first ever Olympic gold on Sunday, reports AFP.

Dragneva, a top competitor for more than a decade with 17 world championship medals to her credit, lined her trophy cupboard with Games gold by taking full advantage of a massive bout of nerves from compatriot and pre-tournament favourite Donka Mincheva.

Reigning world champion Mincheva failed three times in the opening snatch category to open the door wide for Dragneva. She won the 48kg division with a total of 190kgs (85kg and 105kg).

"What a moment," said 27-year-old Dragneva as she was submerged by flag-waving supporters.

American Tara Nott, who switched from gymnastics to football before finally settling on weightlifting, took the silver medal on 185kg (82.5kg and 102.5kg).

She edged 19-year-old Indonesian Raema Lisa Rumbewas to the silver on lower body weight. Rumbewas also lifted 185kg (80kg and 105kg).

Dragneva needed just two lifts in the concluding clean and jerk, her success at 105kg putting her out of sight.

The occasion was dubbed "Women's Day of Weightlifting" and Olympic officials, including IOC member Anita De Frantz who heads the Women and Sport Working Group, presented a single flower to all 12 weightlifters and all female members of the audience.

The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) gave the green light to women's weightlifting at their Congress in 1983 and the first World Championships were held in 1987.

Ten lifters from 12 countries, ranging in age from sweet

16 to 43, qualified to compete in the history making first event. Dika Totia of Papua New Guinea was the youngest and Brazil's Maria Jorge, a former washerwoman who took up the sport nine years ago after someone spotted her potential as she wolfed down a pizza, the oldest.

Toua and Jorge, separated in age by more than 27 years, were placed last and second last respectively of the finishers. But, as their cheery wave to the crowd showed, it was the taking part that counted.

"It was fun, great fun," said Toua. "I am happy to have made three successful lifts in the first Olympic competition (for women)."

There was a major surprise in the opening snatch as Mincheva crashed out of the competition.

Mincheva, the surprise winner of the world title in Athens last year, failed at her opening two attempts at 80kg and went for broke by attempting 82.5kg. Again, she missed out.

Countrywoman Dragneva, recreated the form which saw her finish second in the 1998 World Championships with a lift of 85kg to take a narrow 2.5kg lead over Indonesia's Indriyani after the snatch.

Asylum-seekers take notice

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: Australian government officials said Sunday they would adopt a tough attitude to any Olympic athlete or official seeking asylum at the Sydney Games, reports AFP.

A spokesman for Australia's department of foreign affairs told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper that athletes who wished to stay as refugees would need to show they have a fear of persecution in their home countries.

Aussies, Indians romp

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: Spectacular goals by first-time Olympians Samer Dad of India and James Elmer of Australia inspired their teams to easy wins in the men's hockey competition here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Dad, 21, scored once in each half as eight-time champions India put aside the nightmare of the Atlanta Games four years ago to carve out a 3-0 win over Argentina.

Elmer, a 29-year-old carpenter from Melbourne, also netted twice as hosts Australia blanked Poland 4-0 before a sell-out home crowd of 15,000 at the State Hockey Centre.

The wins gave India and Australia three points each in group B, two more than their main challengers Spain and South Korea, who played out a 1-1 draw on Saturday.

Goalkeeper Jude Menezes clipped in with a dazzling display as the Indians prevented a repeat of the 1996 Atlanta Games when they lost to Argentina 1-0 in the opening match.

It was India's only defeat in the league then, but ensured the eight-time Olympic champions did not qualify for the semifinals.

There were, however, no hiccups this time as Vasudevan Bhaskaran's men launched a fierce attack on Argentina, a late inclusion at South Africa's expense.

India took the lead in the 25th minute following its first penalty corner when Dad pounced on a waist-high ball and pulled it, cricket style, into the net.

A few seconds before half-time the Indians produced their second goal when Mukesh Kumar took a pass from Baljit Dhillon at the top of the circle and smashed home past Argentine goalkeeper Pablo Moreira.

Argentina forced seven penalty corners in the second-half but failed to get past Menezes. India sealed Argentina's fate 10 minutes before the end when Dad, a former junior World Cup star, swooped on Dhillon's pass and scored from the top of the circle.

Argentina, who took seventh place at the Olympic qualifiers in March, made it to Sydney only because the South African government pulled the men's team out citing the absence of black players in the team.

A victory under his belt, Indian coach Bhaskaran warned rivals the team's best was yet to

come.

"It's good we won, but I am not entirely happy with the way the team played," Bhaskaran said.

"We gave away too many loose balls and it was only the good work by Jude (Menezes) that prevented Argentina from scoring."

"My team can play better than what they did today. We can't afford to make the same mistakes again," he said.

Dad, 21, who helped India to second place at the junior World Cup in Milton Keynes, England in 1997, was ecstatic.

"It seems like a dream," he said. "I was impatient to play at the Olympics and here I am with two goals against my name."

The Aussies, looking for

their first Olympic gold despite a top-four finish in seven of their last eight appearances, went on the rampage against Poland after a sluggish start.

Elmer, one of the nine Australians making their Olympic debut, opened the floodgates a few minutes before the interval with a stinging reverse flick that put Australia ahead.

Jay Stacy, playing in his fourth and final Olympics, increased the margin soon after the break with a penalty corner.

Elmer and Michael Brennan clipped in with two more goals as the Australians raided the Polish defence in the closing stages.

India and Australia play each other in their next match on Tuesday.



HOW'S THAT! US sprinter-supreme Maurice Greene testing his talent at blowing the Digeridoo—an Aboriginal flute—while a native Australian looks on at Sydney yesterday.

--AFP photo

Last laugh Ottey's

SYDNEY, Sept. 17: Jamaican sprint legend Merlene Ottey looks set to get her wish to run in the individual 100m here at the Sydney Olympics. It was revealed on Sunday.

A leading Jamaican athletics official told AFP that the 40-year-old two-time world 200m champion would run at the expense of national champion Peta Gaye-Dowdie as the latter had failed the selectors' criteria.

"The criteria are that the runners who filled the first three places of the trial should turn up at the Olympics in the same shape that they were in at the trials," the official said.

"Unfortunately Gaye-Dowdie went back to summer school in America and apparently did not train at all."

"My understanding is that Merlene will run instead of Gaye-Dowdie although of course the official announcement will be made on the 20th."

Ottey herself, meanwhile, said she was in medal-winning shape and eager to run although she has said she will not compete in the relay if overlooked for the individual event.

"If I could produce the perfect race, I will have a fantastic result," said Ottey, who won her first Olympic medal at the Moscow Games 20 years ago.

Suspended for a drugs offence last year, Ottey was reinstated just in time to compete at Jamaica's Olympic trials in July. But there, the veteran of five previous Olympics finished fourth, and so was only included in the sprint relay squad.

"I cannot comment on the Olympic Games," Ottey maintained after completing her first training session in Sydney since flying in from her base on Queensland's Gold Coast.

The team hasn't been decided yet. I have to wait a couple more days. I can't say anything more until then."

The tension in the Jamaican team was evident during Ottey's hour-long training session.

While she worked on her race starts with Slovenian coach Srđan Djordjevic, seven other members of the Jamaica team sat in the shade nearby, ignoring Ottey, the winner of 34 medals at international championships.

Ottey is certain that her recent form deserves consideration for a place in the individual 100m.

"I'm in very good shape considering everything," she said. "I came here having had just two months to get fit for the Olympic Games. It's not the best, but that's all I have. I came to Australia after running 10.99sec in my last competition in Europe, and now I've had another two weeks' training."

That 10.99sec — a world record for a woman of Ottey's age — ranks her 12th in the world this year, and was run into a strong headwind.

Ottey's subsequent form has shown constant improvement, including a wind-assisted 10.91sec in a pre-Olympic warm-up meeting near Brisbane at the beginning of the month — the fastest time ever seen in Australia.

"I think I've made great progress," she said.

Djordjevic, her coach, agrees with his charge. "In good conditions, I think she could run 10.80sec," he said.



AUSTRALIA ALL THE WAY: Australians cheering their countryman Michael Diamond during the trap event of the shooting competition yesterday. Diamond won the gold.

--AFP photo