

## Sino triumph

SYDNEY, Sept 21: China's Zhang Jun and Gao Ling won the first badminton gold of the Sydney Olympics after a sensational final victory Thursday, reports AFP.

The seventh seeded Zhang and Gao duo beat the top-seeded Indonesians Tri Kusharyanto and Minarti Tiur 1-15, 15-13, 15-11 in 1 hour 4 minutes.

To achieve the win the Chinese pair had to produce a comeback that eclipsed their semifinal 17-16 deciding game victory over Denmark's Michael Sogaard and Rikke Olsen.

In the final, they struggled to get into the match in the first game, which they lost in just 9 minutes.

When the Indonesians went ahead 8-5 and then 13-12 in the second game, the match appeared to be almost over for China's second string mixed doubles team.

But their resolve did not waver and in a fluctuating third game it was the Chinese duo's nerve that held.

"We are of course very happy" said Gao afterwards. "This is our first Olympics so we never thought of winning the gold medal."

"All we wanted to do was to perform at our best. But there was no pressure on us because of that so it made it easier to concentrate on just playing."

"Whatever I face, I seek to keep a smile on my face. But I never give up trying and that helped us in the final match because we just kept going."

Remarkably, the 22-year-old Zhang and 21-year-old Gao have only been paired together for just over one year. It was their first ever success over the Indonesian pair.



BALLERINA! China's Yang Yun in full bloom during her floor exercise routine in the final of the women's all-around gymnastics at the SuperDome yesterday. —AFP photo

## SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 21 (AFP): Colombian tennis player Fabiola Zuluaga Thursday heralded the 'girl power' that has helped the South American country win their first gold medal.

Zuluaga, an emerging talent on the women's circuit, booked her place in the third round of the Olympic women's singles with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Belgium's El Callens and paid tribute to Colombian team-mate and weightlifter Maria Isabel Urrutia who won the landmark title on Wednesday.

"What Maria Isabel did must serve as an example to all Colombian sportsmen and women," said Zuluaga. "I hope it can inspire me too to get a medal in the Olympics."

### SWITCH-OFF FOR SOME

While Olympic fever has well and truly gripped Sydney, 'not everyone is enthusiastic.

Television ratings from last Friday, the night of the spectacular opening ceremony, show 22,000 Sydneysiders opted instead to watch a third rate Paul Hogan film — Almost an Angel.

And if that proved too exciting there was always a scintillating cooking show, which attracted 9,000 viewers.

### FIRST DAUGHTER V FIRST LADY

Chelsea Clinton, representing her father at the Sydney Games, met the first lady to discuss the sights of Sydney and the Olympics.

But her mother Hillary, busy electioneering in New York, was not the first lady in question.

Clinton was talking to Dawn Fraser, the legendary Australian swimmer appointed by International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch as 'First Lady of the Olympics' as his wife, who has since died, could not attend the Opening Ceremony.

Chelsea told Fraser that she was very happy at Sydney and described the Sydney Opera House as 'very beautiful'.

### MARACANA MEMORIES

Uruguayan cyclist Milton Wynants was delighted with his silver medal in the Sydney Olympics — and so were his compatriots.

Uruguayan Olympic Committee (COU) president Julio Cesar Maglione described Wynants' achievement as "the greatest deed in Uruguayan sport since the Maracana".

That was a reference to Uruguay winning the 1950 World Cup, beating hot favourites Brazil 2-1 in front of 199,584 at Rio de Janeiro's famous stadium of that name. That crowd is still a world record for a stadium-based sports event.

### PINS PARTY

There are 3000 official pin lapel badges at the Sydney Olympics but that is just the tip of the iceberg.

With sponsors, media organisations and the national Olympic Committees all having their own pins the number is much higher.

And there is one collection of 365 pins which were issued in Sydney in the year leading up to the Games. Starting 365 days to go, 364 days to go... It required a lot of patience and no small amount of money to complete the set.

### ITALIANS GO ONE-TWO-THREE

Italian swimming gold medals are rather like London buses — you wait for an eternity and then three come along at once.

Going into the Sydney Games Italy had never struck gold in the Olympic swimming pool.

But Domenico Fioravanti changed that by winning the 100m breaststroke. He then doubled up to top the podium in the 200m.

And on Thursday Massimiliano Rosolino got in on the act by taking the 200m individual medley gold medal.

### THORPE RECEIVES BRADMAN'S WISHES

Cricketing legend Sir Donald Bradman was among the thousands of Australians who sent congratulations to Ian Thorpe on his Olympic swimming success.

"I have had so many hero faxes sent from across Australia, but I was very fortunate that I received a letter from Sir Donald Bradman," Thorpe said.

He said the letter touched on the values and sportsmanship shared by the champions. "All the ideals I have been trying to achieve in my life," the 17-year-old treble gold medalist said.



JAPANESE JOY: The Japanese pair of Yukiko Tkahashi (L) and Mika Saiki are ecstatic after beating the Czech Republic in the second round of the women's beach volleyball at Bondi Beach yesterday. —AFP photo

## Race wide open

### HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 21: Asian giants India and Pakistan enjoyed mixed fortunes as a mad scramble began for the four semifinal spots in the Olympic men's hockey here on Thursday, reports AFP.

Eight-time champions India stuttered to a 2-0 defeat at the hands of South Korea, who avenged the loss of the Asian Games crown at Bangkok two years ago.

Pakistan, allowing penalty corner specialist Sohail Abbas only two scoring chances, were forced to share points in a 1-1 draw with Germany.

Other gold medal contenders appeared to go into the defensive mode as the battle intensified, with hosts Australia held to a 2-2 draw by rejuvenated Spain.

The best match of the day was the rousing 5-5 draw between Argentina and Poland, sparked by Argentine striker Jorge Lombi's four goals, but it did little to shed light on the likely semifinalists.

With two rounds of matches to go, all six teams remained in contention for the two semifinal spots from Group B. Australia and South Korea lead the group with five points, followed by India and Poland with four each.

Even Spain and Argentina, trailing with two points apiece, fancy their chances as the tournament lives up to its hype of being the most open ever.

Group A has both Germany and reigning champions the Netherlands on seven points from three matches, two more than Pakistan.

The Koreans, with two drawn games behind them, scored once in each half against the Indians to resurrect their faltering Olympic campaign.

The result annoyed Indian coach Vasudevan Bhaskaran as his team was left facing must-win games against Spain and Poland.

"There are no excuses, we played a horrible game," he said. "The early start and the weather was the same for both teams. We can't hide behind such excuses."

South Korean manager Kim Sang-Ryul, who had fretted at his team's performance in earlier matches, was relieved.

"We are still in the competition and that is important," he said.

"The team had no option but to win, otherwise they may as well have been packing their bags."

All the action in the Germany-Pakistan match took place in the first half as Oliver Donk's 19th minute goal was equalised by Abbas five minutes before the interval.

"It's a very open contest, just as we had feared at the start," said Pakistan manager Islahuddin Siddiqui.

## Dutch date with gold

### SWIMMING

SYDNEY, Sept 21: The medal-winning, record-breaking feats of Dutch swimmers Inge De Bruijn and Pieter van den Hoogenband have put the Netherlands on course for an all-time Olympic high, reports AFP.

With five golds the Dutch have been catapulted into an unlikely fifth place in the medal rankings, ahead of the likes of Germany and Russia.

Not since legendary sprinter Fanny Blankers-Koen won four gold medals in the 1948 London Olympics has the Netherlands had so much to shout about at an Olympics.



DUCK RACE! A duck family walking past the Olympic rings at Penrith Lake yesterday, where the rowing competition is being held. —AFP photo

## No one is a favourite

### FOOTBALL

BRISBANE, Sept 21: Huge attendances, thrilling matches and a glimpse of some precocious young talent highlighted the opening round of the Olympic soccer tournament, which now pauses for breath before Saturday's quarter-finals, reports Reuters.

The original 16 teams have been reduced to eight, the most notable absentee being Australia who lost all three of their opening-round games to finish bottom of Group A.

Although their performance was a major disappointment to home fans, Australia's failure to make the last eight should have no negative impact on the remainder of a competition which has so far produced 77 goals in 24 matches and not one goal-less draw.

While gold medal favourites Brazil and defending Olympic champions Nigeria successfully negotiated their way through the group stage, none of the other six quarter-finalists can be ruled out as potential medalists.

Saturday's matches see the United States play Japan in Adelaide, Brazil-Cameroon in Brisbane, Italy-Spain in Sydney and Chile-Nigeria in Melbourne.

The competition is wide open and there is all to play for.

Of all the eight coaches whose teams are still in contention, the most relieved must be Brazil's Wanderley Luxemburgo. He is still under huge pressure to win Olympic gold for Brazil for the first time, but

at least he was saved the indignity of first-round elimination.

That was a real possibility when Brazil lined up to face Japan in their final Group D match in Brisbane on Wednesday. If the worst had happened and Brazil had failed to qualify, Luxemburgo would either have quit or been fired as soon as he returned home.

But Alex's fifth-minute header sealed a 1-0 win in a superb match with Japan, whose 19-match winning streak finally ended.

Brazil had failed to impress in their opening two matches against Slovakia, which they won 3-1, and South Africa, which they lost 3-1, but they looked a far better team on Wednesday.

"We learned a lot from the defeat to South Africa, and we put a lot of things right in training," said Luxemburgo after beating Japan.

Brazil are delighted to be staying on the Gold Coast and playing their quarter-final in Brisbane against Cameroon, whose 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic on Tuesday guaranteed them second spot in Group C behind the United States.

The Americans, who have done better in soccer here than at any other Olympics since Melbourne in 1956, now face the impressive Japanese in Adelaide.

Japan's dynamic French coach Philippe Troussier, believes his team is good enough at least to reach the semifinals.

"I had a dream a few weeks ago we would play Italy in the

semifinal in Sydney and if we beat the Americans and Italy beat Spain in their game that's what will happen," he said, adding, "Unfortunately the dream ended before I knew the result."

Troussier believes most of the Japanese players here will be in the country's World Cup squad in two years' time, and says they are under immense pressure to do well.

The gold medal is very important to Japan, and it will be the same pressure in the Asian Championships in Lebanon next month too.

Defending champions Nigeria, who failed to impress in the opening round, face a tough quarter-final against Chile in Melbourne with two key players — skipper Celestine Babayaro and defender Azubike Olieh — suspended.

Their 18-year-old forward Julius Aghahowa scored a breathtaking goal against Australia, however, and has a chance to build on his growing reputation this coming week.

Chile impressed in their opening three matches and with star player Ivan Zamorano expected to be fit for Saturday after missing Wednesday night's 1-0 defeat to South Korea, Chile have their eyes on a semifinals spot.

Although Honduras failed to make the quarter-finals, 20-year-old striker David Suazo, who plays for Serie A side Cagliari, top-scored in the first round with four goals and looks set for a great future.



TRUE BRAZILIAN! A Brazilian fan clad in his country's colours at the Gabba in Brisbane on September 20. Brazil were playing Japan in an Olympic football match. —Internet photo

## Time for Marion magic

### ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 21: Marion Jones quest to become the greatest woman athlete the world has ever seen starts here in earnest on Friday when the Sydney Olympics athletics programme gets under way, reports AFP.

Instead of talking the race the former basketball star will have to do it for real when the 100m heats begin.

It will be the launch of her campaign to do the impossible and lift five golds — the 100 and 200 metres, long jump and both relays. No woman athlete in Olympic history has managed to win more than four golds at a single Games.

US head coach Karen Dennis has no doubt the 24-year-old has what it takes.

Knowing Marion, if she completes five events I think she can achieve her dream. I really do," said Dennis.

"It would probably be an unprecedented accomplishment and make her one of the greatest athletes of all time."

"Marion has been a phenomenal athlete throughout her entire career so if she does phenomenal things, it shouldn't come as a surprise."

"She's driven to achieve, she's got a lot of pride and a phenomenal amount of confidence in her abilities. It is a combination of all those qualities that make her so great."

But despite Dennis' confidence there remains the question of whether Jones' body can stand the punishment it will be put through.

After the 100m battle on Friday and Saturday she will then get three days' rest before the first two rounds of the 200 metres on September 27 plus the long jump qualifying followed by the 200 semifinals and final on the following day.

Then she will compete in the long jump final on September

29 then the 4x100 and 4x400 metres relays on September 30.

It is a gruelling programme and there are fears that she risks a repeat of her nightmare at the World Championships in Seville last year when she collapsed in the 200m final.

As she hit the home straight she suddenly began to slow, then grabbed the small of her back before falling on her knees and finally lying prostrate on the track.

She was wheeled away on a stretcher and two days later was lying home and her season in tatters.

Pundits blamed her insistence on doing the long jump — an event that puts damaging stress on the back.

Jones knows that she lacks the proper technique, putting even more strain on her body.

So too does Dennis.

If she does, Jones should claim her five golds — and her place in the book of legends.



LOCAL HOPE: Australia's women's tennis ace Jelena Dokic executing a forehand during her Olympic second round fixture against Italy's Rita Grande at the New South Wales Tennis Centre yesterday. Dokic won 5-7, 6-3, 6-3. —AFP photo