

Zhan going great guns

SYDNEY, Sept 22: China's Zhan Xugang completed a golden double on Friday by winning his second straight Olympic weightlifting title against a field weakened by the mysterious late withdrawals of three top lifters, reports AFP.

Zhan, winner in the 69kg class in Atlanta four years ago, stepped up to the 77kg division and blew away a vastly reduced field with a world record equaling 207.5kg lift in the clean and jerk.

He joined compatriot Ding Meiyuan atop the winner's podium on a golden day for China. Earlier, the imposing Ding, current world champion, won the women's superheavy-weight division in record breaking style to add a fourth gold to China's collection in the Olympic debut of female weightlifting.

Ding was dubbed the "strongest woman in the world" after beating teenaged Pole Agata Wrobel in a fascinating display of power lifting from the female heavies.

Zhan claimed top spot with a total of 367.5kg (160kg-207.5kg) beating Viktor Mitrou of Greece on lower body weight. Mitrou also totalled 367.5kg (165kg-202.5kg) with Arsen Melikyan of Armenia in third spot on 365kg (165kg-197.5kg).

"I am very happy I got a gold medal today," said Zhan, who was only fourth at the 1999 World Championships



BADMINTON BUNCH: Indonesian fans sporting shuttle-cock hats, cheering on their men's Olympic badminton team yesterday. —AFP photo

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 22: Anthony Ervin and Gary Hall shared the gold medal after dead heating in the men's 50m freestyle — and they also share some unusual dietary habits.

Their coach Mike Bottom claims he feeds the pair with nutritional supplements fed to Kentucky Derby winner, Fusaichi Pegasus.

11-MINUTE REIGN
Andy Warhol famously said that everyone has 15 minutes of fame and Mexican road walker Bernardo Segura found out what it was like to be an Olympic champion for just 11 minutes.

That was how long after he crossed the line first in the 20km walk that it took officials to inform him that he had been disqualified.

Segura had just said on Mexican television to his mother: "Mama, I have won!" But officials cut short the interview and promptly told him that Poland's Robert Korzeniowski was the new champion.

His Mexican teammate Noe Fernandez therefore had his bronze upgraded to silver but sympathised with his teammate, saying: "The bronze was fine. I am not happy to receive this (silver) medal."

CHELSEA TREAT FOR SISTERS

Chelsea Clinton was in the crowd to see Venus Williams reach the quarterfinals of the Olympic tennis tournament then hooked up with her and younger sister Serena after the match.

Chelsea, representing her father at the Games, praised Venus on her win and Serena on her ability to get to nearly as many hot-ticket Olympic events as she has, according to one witness.

NEW-LOOK PM

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has never been renowned for his dress sense — predictably, he's a white shirt and dark suit kind of fellow.

But it seems the PM, who dubbed himself Australia's "chief cheerleader" in the leadup to the Olympics, has undergone a makeover of sorts for the Sydney Games.

He's been seen donning the dark green blazer, pale green shirt and "greeny-gold tie" that make up the official Australian team uniform several times in the past week. The Sydney Morning Herald reported Friday.

"We all feel like he's never looked better," the Herald quoted someone close to Howard as saying. "The colours suit him and he's feeling very com-

fortable." Howard isn't alone in undergoing a makeover — his normally staid wife, Janette, has been seen around town wearing pieces from the team uniform. Among them: a scarf by Melbourne label "Vixen".

BURGER BET
France's women's basketball coach Alain Jardel is ruling a wager he made before the start of the Olympic tournament.

He told his charges that he would eat only burgers from a famous multinational company if they reached the quarterfinals.

For someone from the Perigord — a region that enjoys a reputation for gastronomy and where fast food is seen as a

cultural abomination — that was no idle bet.

One more victory will mean Jardel will have to fulfil his bet.

RIGHT ON ROYAL SHOW

Dawn Show may be the First Lady of the Games and Chelsea Clinton the First Daughter but there is little doubt as to who is the First Royal Family.

With Australia's head-of-state Queen Elizabeth II absent, a large contingent of Spanish royals have caught the eye.

Queen Sofia of Spain is the latest arrival, joining her son Crown Prince Felipe and her daughter Princess Cristina, the Infanta.



NO PROBLEMO MAAN! World record holder American ace Maurice Greene acknowledging the applause from the stands after clocking the best time in the 100 metres heats yesterday. —AFP photo

Luxemburgo for a new look

GOLD COAST, Sept 22 (Reuters/AFP). Coach Wanderley Luxemburgo said on Friday he would change Brazil's lineup to face Cameroon in the Olympic soccer quarter-final on Saturday after studying videos of their first round matches against the United States, Kuwait and the Czech Republic.

Luxemburgo has brought in Rennes striker Lucas to replace Geovanni — in attack at least for the first half — while Athirson takes Fabio Aurelio's place in defence.

Fabio Aurelio moves into the left side of mid field into the spot vacated by Edu, who is suspended after picking up his second yellow card of the tournament when Brazil beat Japan 1-0 in Brisbane on Wednesday to top finish top of Group B.

"Lucas will play the first half against Cameroon who are a very physical side," Luxemburgo said.

"My plan is to bring on Geovanni at half-time to keep the pressure on them. We are not underestimating them for one second."

"They are very experienced, their top players are all in Europe and if the squad won the African championships this year. Some people may say we are favourites for the gold medal but Cameroon have not lost a match here and we face a very tough battle."

Luxemburgo looked relaxed

at Brazil's luxurious golf resort hotel on Queensland's Gold Coast on Friday, despite being under enormous pressure to ensure Brazil wins gold for the first time in their history.

They came through the first round with wins over Slovakia (3-1) and Japan (1-0) and also lost 1-3 to South Africa. Although they have not yet played the dazzling football of which they are capable, Luxemburgo added: "I think you will see a different Brazil from now on. I still am very optimistic we can win the gold medal."

Meanwhile, at Adelaide, Japan square up to the United States in the quarters with a real chance of becoming the sport's first Asian gold medal winners.

Their bronze at Mexico City in 1968 is the only football medal an Asian side has won, but impressive wins over South Africa and Slovakia in the group stages here have raised hopes in the Far East of an even better performance.

Coach Philippe Troussier believes his team is good enough to reach the semi-finals at least.

"I had a dream a few weeks ago we would play Italy in the semi-final in Sydney and if we beat the Americans, and Italy beat Spain in their game, that's what will happen," he said.

Troussier believes the majority of his squad will progress to his country's World Cup. See page 15

Germany crash out

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 22: Natascha Keller's hopes of adding to her family's collection of two Olympic golds and three silvers went up in smoke after Germany were knocked out of the women's hockey here on Friday, reports AFP.

The Germans, who needed a win to enter the second round, were held to a 2-2 draw by the Netherlands in their last Group B match.

Both teams ended the preliminary round on five points and the same goal difference, but the Dutch moved ahead having scored nine goals to Germany's six.

Keller, recently voted the International Hockey Federation's player-of-the-year, is part of the first family of German hockey with three Olympic medals.

Her grandfather, Erwin Keller, was part of the German team which won a silver at home in Berlin in 1936. Father Carsten won a gold at Munich in 1972.

Her elder brother, Andreas, topped that with two silvers in 1984 and 1988 and a gold at Barcelona in 1992.

Natascha in her chance at Atlanta four years ago, scored five goals but Germany only managed to finish sixth. The trip to Sydney has also drawn a blank.

"I can't believe it," the 23-year-old cried bitterly. "I was desperate for a medal here because I don't know whether I will be there in Athens four years from now."

The Dutch joined New Zealand and China from Group B for the medal pool round which starts on Sunday.

Defending champions Australia, Spain and Argentina qualified from Group A.

South Korea, silver-medallists at Atlanta four years ago, bowed out of the competition after being given a 3-0 hiding by the hosts.

Australia, hoping to become the first women's team to retain the Olympic title, ended the preliminary league with 10 points, the most by any side in the tournament.

South Korea were confined to two points, way behind Argentina's six and Spain's five.

First-timers China and Spain were jolted ahead of next round when they were beaten in their last matches.

China lost to South Africa 1-0, Jacqueline Geyser scoring the winner in the second half, while Great Britain stunned Spain 2-0.

South Africa still finished last in Group B while Britain's late revival helped them move above the Koreans in Group A with four points.

In a replay of the Champions' Trophy final in May, which the Dutch won 3-2, the Germans matched their rivals with swift counter-attacks.

The Dutch took the lead four minutes before half-time through Susan van der Wielen, but the Germans made it 1-1 the very next minute when Fanny Riinne deflected in a penalty corner.

The Netherlands went ahead again midway through the second half as Carole Thate broke free from a goalmouth melee and scooped the ball over the German goalkeeper sprawled on the ground.

Realising time was running out on them, the Germans launched an aggressive attack in the last quarter.

Nadine Ernsting-Krienke equalised with a deft flick five minutes before the end but there was not enough time left for the Germans to pump in one more.

D-day for South Asians

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 22: India and Pakistan face stiff hurdles in their quest for semifinal berths when the Olympic men's hockey resumes on Saturday after a day's rest, reports AFP.

The Indians take on Atlanta silver-medallists Spain, while Pakistan clash with Malaysia on a day that could prove crucial for all contenders.

In other games on Super Saturday, hosts Australia meet Argentina while reigning champions the Netherlands take on Germany.

With two rounds of matches to go, semifinal berths are up for grabs as the men's tournament lives up to its hype as the most open Olympic contest ever.

All six teams in Group B are in contention for the two semifinal spots, with Australia and South Korea leading with five points, followed by India and Poland on four each.

Even Spain and Argentina, trailing with two points apiece, will fancy their chances in a competition where upsets have become the rule rather than the exception.

Group A has both Germany and the Dutch on seven points from three matches, two are then the other serious contenders Pakistan.

India, the eight-time Olym-

pic champions hoping to play their first semifinal in 20 years, cannot afford to drop another point in their remaining games against Spain and Poland.

It's a task that is easier said than done.

Spain, who made a disastrous start by losing to Poland, finally got their act together by holding Australia to a 2-2 draw on Thursday.

Poland, returning to the Olympics after 20 years, have been a revelation and hungry for goals as they showed in their rousing 5-5 draw against Argentina.

"We can't afford to have another bad day," said Indian coach Vasudevan Bhaskaran, referring to the 2-0 defeat by South Korea on Thursday.

"We had counted Spain as one of our tougher opponents, so it's going to be a lot of hard work out there."

Like India, Pakistan have had a roller coaster ride so far, reaching their peak when they handed Great Britain their worst Olympic drubbing of 8-1.

But it's the lows, the drawn match against Canada, followed by another draw against Germany, that has worried coach Islahuddin Siddiqui.

"We are not consistent enough," Islahuddin said. "One has to be performing at one level to win a major tournament like this."

"You can't rise one day and fall the next and then expect to win the gold medal."

The last time Pakistan clashed with Malaysia, at the Olympic qualifiers in Japan in

March, they won 5-2. But Islahuddin was not taking victory for granted.

"We've had some tough matches with Malaysia in the past," he said. "Moreover, the pressure's on us to force the pace because we have to win."

S Korean eves' quest ends

SYDNEY, Sept 22: Gold medal favourites Australia knocked Asian champions South Korea out of Olympic women's hockey with a 3-0 win in their last Group A match here on Friday, reports AFP.

The Koreans, silver-medallists at Atlanta, needed a win to stay in contention for a place in the medal pool round.

The defeat, instead, carried Spain into the next round from the group with Australia and Argentina.

Australia, hoping to become the first women's team to retain the Olympic title, ended the preliminary league with 10 points, the most by any side in the tournament.

South Korea were confined to two points, way behind Argentina's six and Spain's five.

Australia showed why they are the most feared team in women's hockey by outplaying the Koreans through the 70-minute encounter.

Cheered by a full house at the State Hockey Centre, the Hockeyroos took an early lead in the eighth minute with a goal from Katrina Powell.



A SWEDISH SURPRISE: Sweden's Lars Froelander, who upset local favourite Michael Klim in the final of the men's 100 metres butterfly, jubilates at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre yesterday. —AFP photo

Runaway sprinter

ATHLETICS

PARIS, Sept 22: Fugitive Olympic athlete Marie-Jose Percec showed Friday she's getting good at sprints other than on the track, ducking a waiting crowd of television cameras and journalists in Paris eager to hear why she exited the Games so spectacularly, reports AFP.

Around 40 reporters, television crews and photographers were on hand at the arrival gate of Paris Charles de Gaulle airport to speak to the French champion, who had left a trail of dramatic scenes behind her in her escape from Sydney.

But — like the millions of people around the world who had been keen to see her run against Australia's Cathy Freeman in the 400 metres, a highlight of the Olympics — they

were disappointed.

A waiting car spirited Percec and her boyfriend, US athlete Anthony Maybank, away at the steps of the Air France plane well before any media could catch a glimpse of her.

Her agent, Annick Avierinos, told AFP that Percec was going to her home in the French capital to rest.

"She is recovering because she is tired after a long trip. She will make a statement in a few days, maybe at the beginning of next week," Avierinos said.

It was up to French Sports Minister Marie-George Buffet, who is in Sydney for the Games, to explain Percec's actions.

Buffet said she had spoken with Percec by telephone after her departure and that the

athlete had spoken of being "badly affected" by her experience.

"What she told me during a telephone conversation was that there had been threats, too much pressure, therefore she had decided to withdraw (from the Games)," Buffet told France Inter.

Earlier, French Olympic Committee president Henri Serandour and Buffet had confirmed that Percec would not compete in Sydney.

"Marie-Jose Percec left Australian territory on Wednesday September 20 which means she has withdrawn from the Sydney Olympic Games," they said.

"The French delegation doesn't know the reasons but it would like to clarify that it is in no way linked to an anti-doping test."



BRAZILIAN WALL: (L-R) Elisangela Oliveira, Walewska Oliveira and Sandra Voloch blocking a spike from Croatia's Barbara Jelic during their women's volleyball fixture yesterday. Brazil won the match 3-0. —AFP photo