



Lizzie launched

Lizzie the Paralympic Mascot was being unveiled Monday in the Main Press Centre at the Sydney Olympics. Lizzie, a lizard, will be the face of the Paralympics.

The Paralympics is proving a big draw with 80 per cent of tickets now sold just four weeks before the start of the Games.

But the 540,560 tickets moved still falls short of the final target of 100,000.

For the Opening Ceremony 62,000 of the 87,000 tickets have been sold while all 449 wheelchair seats have been snapped up.

Lizzie, a strong, tenacious and energetic frill-necked lizard, was chosen to carry the Paralympic message of performance, power and pride to Australian and international audiences because of her determined will and attitude. Source: AFP



SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): Updated medals table Monday:

Country	G	S	B	T
USA	23	14	21	58
China	21	14	13	48
Russia	14	14	19	47
Australia	12	20	11	43
France	12	13	6	31
Italy	11	6	11	28
Romania	10	4	5	19
Netherlands	7	5	3	15
Great Britain	6	8	5	19
Germany	5	9	15	29
Japan	5	4	4	13
South Korea	4	6	8	18
Poland	4	4	1	9
Bulgaria	4	3	2	9
Ukraine	3	6	5	14
Cuba	3	4	2	9
Sweden	3	3	1	7
Hungary	3	1	1	5
Spain	3	0	2	5
Greece	2	4	1	7
Czech Rep	2	1	3	6
Austria	2	1	0	3
Finland	2	1	0	3
Lithuania	2	0	1	3
Slovenia	2	0	0	2
Turkey	2	0	0	2
Switzerland	1	5	2	8
Indonesia	1	3	2	6
Slovakia	1	3	1	5
Belarus	1	1	8	10
Canada	1	1	5	7
Mexico	1	1	0	2
New Zealand	1	0	3	4
Ethiopia	1	0	2	3
Croatia	1	0	1	2
Latvia	1	0	1	2
Azerbaijan	1	0	0	1
Colombia	1	0	0	1
Uzbek	1	0	0	1
Mozambique	1	0	0	1
Brazil	0	3	2	5
Belgium	0	2	2	4
Denmark	0	2	1	3
Jamaica	0	1	2	3
South Africa	0	1	2	3
Chinese Taipei	0	1	2	3
Kenya	0	1	1	2
North Korea	0	1	1	2
Norway	0	1	1	2
Argentina	0	1	0	1
Ireland	0	1	0	1
Moldova	0	1	0	1
Nigeria	0	1	0	1
Trinidad	0	1	0	1
Uruguay	0	1	0	1
Yugoslavia	0	1	0	1
Costa Rica	0	0	2	2
Estonia	0	0	2	2
Georgia	0	0	2	2
Algeria	0	0	1	1
Armenia	0	0	1	1
Barbados	0	0	1	1
Iceland	0	0	1	1
India	0	0	1	1
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Portugal	0	0	1	1
Qatar	0	0	1	1
Thailand	0	0	1	1

King Kong rules

SYDNEY, Sept 25: China's "King" Kong Linghui secured a second consecutive Olympic table tennis clean sweep Monday, defeating Sweden's Jan Ove Waldner in a thrilling men's singles final, reports AFP.

Kong succeeded compatriot Liu Guoliang as Olympic champion as China snaffled the last of the gold medals on offer in Sydney, following victories in the other three finals.

But it required all of the top seed's guile to defeat Sweden's veteran 1992 Barcelona Games gold medalist Waldner.

Kong finally emerged triumphant from the Europe versus Asia confrontation 21-16, 21-19, 17-21, 14-21, 21-13 after 62 minutes of table tennis of the highest class.

Both players demonstrated the full range of their renowned strategic manoeuvring around the table in some scintillating exchanges.



'GALE' DEVERS: US icon Gail Devers crossing a hurdle during the women's 100-metre hurdles Round 1 heat yesterday. Devers is the current world record holder in the event with a time of 12.37sec. —AFP photo

Fingers crossed for Asia

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Asian men's hockey gets a chance to create Olympic history and regain its former glory when the last round of preliminary matches are played here on Tuesday, reports AFP.

India, Pakistan and South Korea are all one victory away from booking semifinal berths, the first time three Asian teams could enter the medal round

since hockey became an Olympic sport in 1908.

For that to happen, India must defeat Poland. South Korea need to overcome hosts Australia, while Pakistan face a mouth-watering do-or-die clash against world champions the Netherlands.

Germany are the other strong contenders for the semifinals, needing just a draw against lowly Great Britain to qualify.

"I will dance all night if Asia reigns supreme," said Indian hockey chief Kunwar Pratap Gill.

"I obviously want India to do it, but I'll be glad when Europe's domination ends," said Gill, a highly-decorated police officer credited with wiping out Sikh militancy in Punjab.

Pakistan's former hockey boss Mansoor Atif concurs. "The game needs a boost in Asia and only the return of the Olympic gold can do it," he said.

India and Pakistan, who ruled world hockey till the 1970s when Europe made its presence felt on synthetic turf, have lost their grip over the Olympic gold which was once theirs almost by right.

India won the last of its eight golds at the western-boycotted Moscow Games in 1980. Pakistan's third and final gold came at Los Angeles four years later.

Since then it's been a downhill ride, with India finishing eighth at Atlanta and Pakistan sixth, their worst Olympic placings ever.

The Koreans, meanwhile, emerged from the shadow of their famous Asian rivals to be fifth at Atlanta and third at the elite six-nation Champions Trophy in May.

The job ahead for the Asians is fraught with danger. Poland, who last played in the Olympics 20 years ago, will not allow the Indians an easy outing, evident from their 4-1 shock of Atlanta silver-medalists Spain and a rousing 5-5 draw against Argentina.

"Poland are pretty dangerous because they never give up," said Indian coach Vasudevan Bhaskaran.

"They are down one moment and suddenly turn things around with two quick goals. We can't afford to give them space."

India's only defeat in the competition came against the Koreans, the perfect role models for Poland with their swift counterattacks.

The Dutch, the reigning world and Olympic champions, will take Pakistan lightly at their own peril.

The unpredictable, but brilliant, —AFP photo



HUNTED HUNTER: An AFP file photo of US shot put C J Hunter who is also the husband of sprint queen Marion Jones. The International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) yesterday revealed that Hunter has tested positive for steroids from a test taken during a competition Oslo, Norway on July 28. Hunter is not a competitor at the Sydney Games.

Haunted Hunter

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 25: A drug scandal involving the husband of American sprint star Marion Jones rocked the Olympics Monday, prompting denials from US officials of a wide-ranging doping cover-up, reports AFP.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation said in a statement Jones' husband, shot put world champion C J Hunter, had tested positive for a banned drug in Norwegian capital of Oslo on July 28.

"The IAAF confirms that shot put C J Hunter of the United States has tested positive for a banned substance within the IAAF control system," the sport's global governing body said.

A press report said 1,000 times the accepted limit of the banned anabolic steroid nan-

drolone had been found in Hunter's test sample.

Hunter withdrew from the Olympics citing a knee injury earlier this month. His wife Jones is attempting to win a record five gold medals here, and won the 100 metres gold medal on Saturday.

Hunter, who is accredited as Jones' coach in Sydney, promptly vowed to defend himself against the drug allegations.

"I know what's going on and I am aware of the allegations and I am going to defend myself vigorously," he said in a statement.

His comments came as IAAF general secretary Isvan Gyulai denied suggestions there had been a cover-up of the test results.

"There was no cover up," Gyulai said. "The interest of the

athlete comes first... it must be understood we defend the rights of the individual."

Earlier the International Olympic Committee's medical chief Prince Alexandre De Merode said he would not be surprised if attempts had been made to conceal the test findings.

"I would not be surprised, I would not be astonished," he told reporters, hinting at a wider problem of concealed dope tests in American athletics.

He said the IOC believed five American athletes who competed in the 1988 Olympics had failed drugs tests but were subsequently allowed to compete.

Norwegian IOC member Johann Koss called on US and international athletics authorities to come clean on doping in

Marvellous Mutola

SYDNEY, Sept 25: A battling Maria Mutola secured Mozambique's first ever Olympic gold when she powered to victory in the 800m final here on Monday, reports AFP.

The 28-year-old 1998 Commonwealth Games champion pushed to the front in the final 20 meters to come home in 1:56.15.

Austria's Stephanie Graf (1:56.64) took the silver and Britain's Kelly Holmes (1:56.80) the bronze.

As Mutola crossed the line she broke into a huge grin as she realised just what her win meant.

Graf, the European indoor champion, rushed over and embraced Mutola.

"I love you," she told her.

Mutola was almost overcome with emotion as she left the track after a lap of honour, wrapped in the Mozambique flag.

Edwards' dream comes true

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Britain's Jonathan Edwards finally achieved his lifelong goal of an Olympic gold medal here on Monday, adding the one major omission on his CV to a career record, reports AFP.

Edwards posted a leap of 17.71m to edge out Cuba's Yoel Garcia who took silver and Russia's Denis Kapustin, the bronze medalist.

Garcia produced his best leap of 17.47m with his last effort but it was not enough to deny Edwards who only managed silver in Atlanta four years ago when he was the hot favourite.

The 34-year-old, holder of the world record since 1995, very nearly did not come to Sydney for the Olympics.

His wife's mother, sick for a year with cancer, died within days of the opening ceremony, deeply affecting the devoutly religious Briton.

Michael 'Legend' Johnson

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Michael Johnson turned from greatness into a living legend when he became the first man to successfully defend the Olympic 400 metres title here on Monday, reports AFP.

The 33-year-old, already one of the greatest athletes in the sport's history thanks to his 400m-200m double at Atlanta

four years ago and the two world records he holds, swept home in 43.84secs.

Fellow American Alvin Harrison (44.40) took the silver and Jamaica's Gregory Haughton (44.70) snatched the bronze.

For Johnson it was a spectacular farewell Olympic appearance.

"This is my last major competition," he announced. "I was here to defend my last individ-

ual race in the Olympic Games. My Olympic career has been great. This Olympics is very special because it is my last."

It has been a stunning Olympic career for the 'Waco Express'. Altogether he collected 13 Olympic medals — all of them gold. And he could make it 14 when he competes in the relay at the end of the week.

Johnson had vowed to attempt to become the first man to run under 43secs but a breeze sweeping through the multi-million dollar Stadium Australia and an overcast sky put paid to ambition.

But it could not spoil the sweet taste of victory.

"I just went out and did what I have been doing for the past ten years and tonight feels just as good as the first time," said the Texan.

But he insisted it was not the stroll in the park that it looked to the 100,000 strong crowd here to witness history in the making.

Wearing his traditional golden running shoes, Johnson and his unique shuffling style of running, once again showed there is no 400m runner in the world who can compete against him.

Johnson is the only 400m runner here to have run under 44secs and it showed this evening as he turned into the home straight comfortably in the lead and with only the clock to run against.

Behind him Haughton was firmly placed for the silver as he hit the final straight but Harrison clawed him back to make it an American one-two.

Johnson lifted his hands in salute as he crossed the line, his face breaking into a broad grin.

Grabbing the Stars and Stripes he began a victory tour with Harrison, also clasping the American flag, following him round the track as the crowd roared their approval of one of the greatest athletes ever to compete.

Greene is the loser

SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): Newly crowned 100 metres Olympic champion Maurice Greene failed to get his wish on Monday when his Hudson Smith International (HSI) teammate Curtis Johnson was not included on the United States 4x100m relay squad.

To make matters worse for the 26-year-old world record-holder and two-time world champion his place in the first round heat is in doubt as he has a sore leg.



BORN TO CONQUER: Michael Johnson crossing the finish line ahead of the pack to win gold in the men's 400-metre yesterday. Johnson became the first man in history to successfully defend his Olympic 400 metres title. —AFP photo

Cathy crowned

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Cathy Freeman became the darling of Australia here on Monday when she took the Olympic 400 metres title, reports AFP.

Cheered on by more than 100,000 partisan fans packed into the custom built Stadium Australia, the 27-year-old became the first Aboriginal to win Olympic gold in an individual event.

Freeman clocked a season best 49.11secs to beat off the

challenge from silver medalist Lorraine Graham (49.58) of Jamaica and bronze medalist Katharine Merry (49.72) of Britain.

Both Graham and Merry ran personal bests.

"It has been a dream since I was a little girl. Tonight I've grown up," said a smiling Freeman.

"I felt great coming round the bend and I couldn't wait to cross the line to end four years of expectation. I have felt the pressure from the Australian people. I didn't mind. But I am

glad it is over."

Graham had no complaints about winning the silver.

"I'm exhausted but it feels great," she said. "I knew I was in front but unfortunately I did not have it in me to hold on. Freeman is a great, great sprinter," added the Jamaican.

Merry had nothing but praise for Freeman.

"She ran her socks off," she said.

"As for me, I'm over the moon. I have an Olympic bronze and I ran the fastest 400m race of my life."

It was an emotionally charged race as Freeman was being hailed as the winner even before the Games began more than 10 days ago.

But despite the intense pressure Freeman, unbeaten over the distance for two years, delivered to an ecstatic crowd desperate to see an Aussie gold on the track.

When the field got ready for the start the helpers and volunteers inside the stadium left their stalls and positions — all wanting to be part of Freeman's run into the history books.

Dressed in a body suit that covered her from head to toe Freeman appeared to be propelled around the track by the roar from the crowd but it was only in the final 50 meters that she managed to get ahead of Graham.

Freeman had started in lane six and it was only as they hit the final bend that she became fully aware that Graham, who was in lane three, was threatening to deprive her of the gold.

After crossing the line Freeman sank to the track and sat holding her head — looking stunned as the fact she had finally done it began to sweep over her.

It was only several minutes later that she rose and allowed a smile to cross her face.

"The first emotion was relief. When you have trained so long for something the emotion is just so intense. I don't think it



FREEWOMAN: Australia's darling Cathy Freeman running towards glory during the women's 400 metres final yesterday. Freeman got rid of all the pressures on her by taking the gold. —AFP photo