

## Intercontinental clash

### FOOTBALL

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Countries from four different footballing continents clash in the men's semi-finals here Tuesday all chasing Olympic glory, reports AFP.

Only Asia and Oceania are not represented in the final stages - in contrast to football's World Cup, which has been dominated since its inception by European and South American nations.

Spain and Chile represent the traditional powers but their opponents - the United States and Cameroon respectively - give the last four a truly intercontinental flavour.

### CHILE v CAMEROON

Chile are the competition's leading scorers with 11 goals - four of them from Inter Milan's Ivan Zamorano - but Cameroon coach Jean-Paul Akono has attacked their style of football, claiming it is defence orientated.

"We know they have two strikers, very quick, very fast for counter attacks and we have prepared something special for that," said Akono.

"I think Chile play defensive football and try to counter-attack. It is not positive football."

"It is not spectacular for the crowds to see," he added.

"When people come to a match they firstly come to see good football. If that's what they want to see they will get behind us."

The Africans, seeking their first Olympic gold medal, will be without skipper Geremi Njitap and defender Aaron Ngumbat, who were both sent off in extra-time during the semi-final win

over Brazil.

But Akono said this was something that a coach had to expect in big tournaments like the Olympics - and the World Cup.

"When we come to a competition like this we have 18 players so we have to manage all the situations, even this kind of bad situation where you lose a captain and a key player," he said.

"We intend to win gold like Nigeria did four years ago," he added.

Chile have never won an Olympic gold either and have won nothing since a silver in shooting in 1988.

"The country has been getting more and more excited about the prospect of an Olympic gold," said their goalkeeper Nelson Tapia.

"You must keep things in perspective and concentrate only on the next match, but of course, the thought you might be making Olympic history is in your mind."

### SPAIN v USA

Spain, who defeated European rivals Italy with a late goal in the quarter-finals will start favourites at the Sydney Football Stadium against the US.

The 1992 gold medalists, who triumphed 3-2 over Poland on home soil in the final, have gradually improved throughout the tournament.

Their line-up includes three players, who have graduated from their Under-20 World Championship winning side last year - Benfica defender Marchena and Barcelona duo, captain Xavi and Gabri, who scored the winner against Italy.

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BONDI BEACH BEAUTIES: Aussie fans get behind their women's beach volleyball team in the event's final against Brazil at Bondi Beach yesterday. —AFP photo

## Marion's Mission Immortality

### ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): For two years Marion Jones has dreamt of just one thing - standing on top of the podium five times in Sydney and becoming the greatest woman athlete the world has ever seen.

The American superstar and two-time world 100m champion, has been driven by a phenomenal amount of confidence in her ability to succeed in her target of a record-busting five gold medals at the Olympics Games.

The last thing she needs is to have her focus diverted, not least by the IAAF, athletics' controlling body, announcing Monday her husband and world shot put champion, C.J. Hunter, had tested positive for steroids.

The sprint sensation has always been a magnet for the media analysing her remarkable track performances, but now she faces being hounded over the drug allegations surrounding her husband.

On Wednesday, when Jones next takes the track, she will show whether her steely determination has allowed her to block out the news or if her concentration has been broken.

Jones set her five-golds target in 1999, when she was the world's best in the 100m, 200m and long jump.

Her first attempt at the quintet ended in disaster, sprawled on the track at last year's world championships in Seville where she collapsed in the 200m final.

Now the ever-smiling 24-

year-old is back, declaring on arrival in Sydney she was ready to prove wrong the critics who say five from five is impossible.

"I'm not saying I'm Superman or that I am invincible, but I do feel I am at the top of my game now," said Jones, who has not been beaten over the 100m for three years.

The world record holder opened her account in Sydney with four sprints in two days to win the blue-riband 100m gold on Saturday.

After three days rest she starts an even more gruelling schedule on Wednesday with the first two rounds of the 200m and the long jump qualifying round.

Thursday is the 200 semi-finals and final, followed by the long jump final on Friday then the 4x100 and 4x400 metres relays on Saturday.

It is a demanding programme and there are fears that she risks a repeat of her nightmare in Seville last year.

Pundits then blamed her insistence on doing the long jump - an event that puts damaging stress on the back - and Jones knows she lacks the proper technique.

"The long jump is the big question but that's why it is special to me of all the events that I will contest," she said.

"I've learnt a number of things from Seville and have made the necessary changes."

None other than athletics legend Carl Lewis has criticised Jones, saying she was being too ambitious in wanting to win five titles and outdo his haul of four in the Los Angeles Games.

## History beckons Hockeyroos

### HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 25: Reigning champions Australia rode on a double strike by Alyson Annan to storm into the Olympic women's hockey final with a 5-0 romp over the Netherlands here on Monday, reports AFP.

The Hockeyroos avenged their defeat in the Champions' Trophy in May to step closer to becoming the first women's team to retain the Olympic title.

With 10 points in the bag, Australia booked their place in Friday's final even before their last super-league match against China.

A strong tussle emerged for the other finalists ahead of Wednesday's last round of matches with Spain and Argentina on six points each and China and New Zealand on four apiece.

Spain's Nuria Camon scored in the final seconds to hold New Zealand to a 2-2 draw, while Argentina came from behind to defeat China 2-1.

Spain take on the Netherlands and Argentina clash with the Kiwis in matches they must win to ensure their place in the final.

The first two teams in the super league will fight for the gold medal and the next two for the bronze.

Australia, restricted to a 1-0 lead at half-time, showed why they are the most feared team in the world by pumping in four more in the second session.

Annan scored the first with a penalty stroke and the fourth.

while Rechelle Hawkes, Katrina Powell and captain Jenny Morris added to the goal feast.

Australian goalkeeper Rachel Huison denied the Dutch a golden opportunity to reduce the margin when she dived to her right to palm away a penalty stroke by Ageeth Boomgaardt.

The Aussies spilled blood in their quest for the gold, Juliet Haslam receiving six stitches on the forehead after being hit by a stick while trying to clear the ball from the circle.

"We were good, we deserved it," Hawkes said. "It seems we keep getting better and that is a good sign."

Dutch coach Tom van't Hek, a former men's international, was shocked at the way his team caved in under the Aussie pressure.

"We played bad, that's for sure," he said.

"It's good I am leaving the team after the Olympics because I would have been forced to quit the way we played."

New Zealand, helped by goals from Mandy Smith and Kate Trolove, appeared to be running away against Spain when they led 2-1 with just 10 minutes remaining.

But the Spanish were rewarded for their attacking play when Camon scored just before the final hooter went off.

Argentina, the Pan American champions, sighted their first hockey medal when they overcame a sixth minute goal by the Chinese to score twice on either side of the interval.

Meanwhile, in classification matches for 7-10 places, Great Britain overcame South Africa 3-2 and Germany beat South Korea with a golden goal by Denise Klecker after the two teams were locked 2-2 in extra-time.

## 24-carat Nemov

### GYMNASTICS

SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): Men's all-around gymnastics champion Alexei Nemov won the horizontal bar title here Monday, giving the 24-year-old Russian the biggest medal haul among all Olympic athletes for the second Games in a row.

Nemov also won a bronze on parallel bars during the last day of gymnastics competition to finish with six medals and just missed a seventh by finishing fourth in the vault, an event where he had been the reigning Olympic champion.

The Sydney medal count for Nemov also includes all-around gold, silver in the floor exercise and prior bronzes in team and pommel horse.

"I feel lucky, just very lucky," Nemov said.

"I came to the Olympics hoping that I would be able to win one medal, any medal, and I wanted to perform well. I did not expect to perform so well. Everything went my way."

Nemov also captured six medals at the 1996 Olympics, including gold in team and vault, silver in all-around and bronzes in horizontal bar, pommel horse and floor exercise.

A spectacular performance on the bar topped by a high backflip release move gave Nemov a golden finish with 9.787 points. France's Benjamin Vranian had the same total but Nemov won as a result of better overall placings by judges.

Nemov plans to compete next at the World Cup in December in Glasgow, Scotland, but will spend most of the next six months relaxing and celebrating.

"I must take some time off,"

he said. "I'm not made of steel. I'm not a robot."

In other apparatus finals, Elena Zamoletchikova edged Russian teammate Svetlana Khorkina for the floor exercise crown. China's Liu Xuan won the balance beam. China's Li Xiaopeng won on parallel bars and Gervasio Deferr, 19, won Spain's first-ever Olympic gymnastics medal, taking gold in the vault.

On a day when most vaulters struggled with landings, Deferr scored 9.712 points with Russia's Alexey Bondarenko second at 9.587 and Poland's Leszek Blanik third at 9.475, edging Nemov for bronze by .019.

"I thought I had a chance, but I wasn't really thinking of winning," Deferr said.

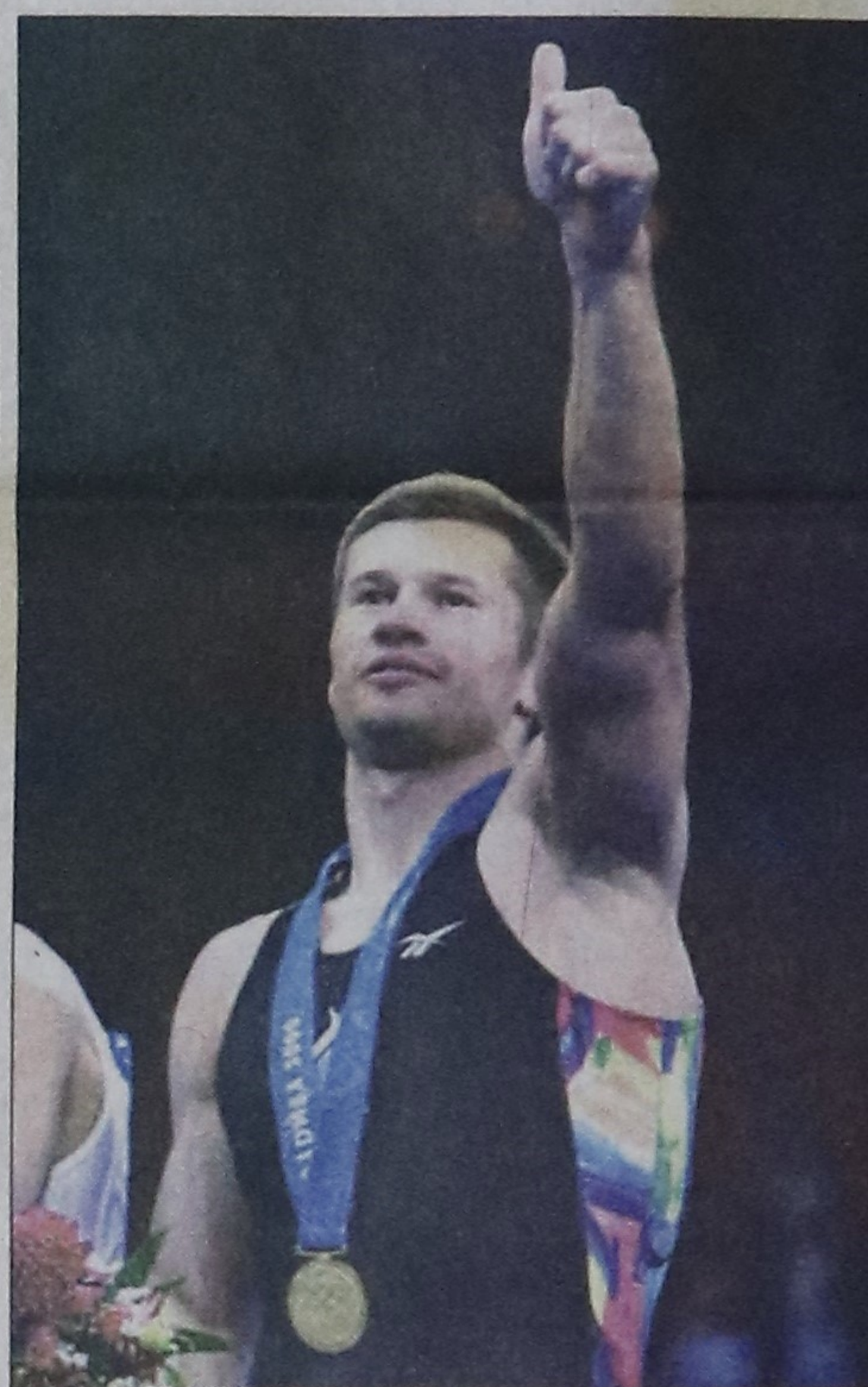
Nemov landed on his rear on his first vault, a tucked double somersault which received a 9.262. His second try, a hand-spring into a twisting flip, ended with only a small step backwards, leaving him just short of the podium.

"I worked like an automaton," Nemov said. "I did not think about what I was doing."

China's Li Xiaopeng won the parallel bars crown with 9.825 points, although only one judge named him alone as the top performer. Reigning world parallel bars champion Lee Joo-Hyung of South Korea scored 9.812 to edge Nemov at 9.800.

Zamoletchikova, who turned 18 last Tuesday, had won the vault title after only being allowed to compete because Khorkina dropped out. Then she swiped gold from the former Playboy pin-up girl.

"I'm very upset about not winning the gold but it was good to have the crowd supporting me," Khorkina said.



WHAT'S NEXT? The magnificent Russian gymnast Alexei Nemov acknowledging the applause from fans after securing yet another gold medal - this time in the men's apparatus horizontal bar - yesterday. —Internet photo



BRAVING THE BEAM: Russia's Ekaterina Lobazniouk performing on the beam during the women's apparatus final yesterday. Lobazniouk's effort earned her the silver. —AFP photo

## Bond for Bondi

### BEACH VOLLEYBALL

SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): In the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics there was no venue more controversial than the 10,000-seat beach volleyball stadium at Bondi Beach - it caused protests and political rows and was as a result built late and under heavy security.

But as the beach volleyball competition comes to a close Tuesday with the men's finals, the stadium on Australia's best-known beach has risen above the controversy to become the think-thunk-thunking party heart of the Sydney Olympics.

"Let's hear it for beach volleyball on Bondi Beach!" the announcer yelled out near the end of Monday's women's final, setting off a roar of approval from the crowd that must have startled the surfers paddling outside.

With a DJ spinning tunes ranging from bass-heavy dance music to Santana and James Brown and a wandering MC trotting around the court to fire up the crowds, beach volleyball has become a beach party at the Sydney Olympics.

A new variant on the curse of stadiums everywhere, the wave, has been unveiled - the slow-motion wave. Done as a Viennese waltz blares out from the PA system, it can send even the most cynical sports fan into stitches.

The atmosphere has been so electric that players have called the stadium the best they've ever played in and talked about

it lifting their game.

The effect was especially true for Australian women's pair Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook who emerged with a gold medal Monday and said playing in front of a home crowd in the stadium was like riding a wave that made every game they played in it better than the last.

"It's the most fantastic venue of all time," Pottharst said. "But to do this in front of my home crowd in Sydney in front of family and friends is just awesome."

The protests against the temporary stadium - it will be dismantled after the Olympics - had centred on environmental concerns and the simple fact that erecting scaffolding on Sydney's playground would create an eyesore for local residents and international visitors alike.

The stadium is not pretty from the outside. A tangle of scaffolding, it takes up a full third of the beach and is surrounded by barbed-wire topped fencing that gives it the slight air of a prison camp.

But on the inside it's a different story.

"I think it is beautiful," said Brazilian bronze medalist Adriana Samuel. "To me it is the best place I have played in the world."

Better even than Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach where she competes when she is home in Brazil?

"Today yes," Samuel grinned.



WE'VE DONE IT! The Australian pairing of Kerri Cook (L) and Kerry Pottharst embrace each other after downing Brazil in the women's beach volleyball final yesterday. —Internet photo

## SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 25 (AFP): Australia may have stolen their talismanic "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, oi oi oi!" chant from the English but now they have been given a taste of their own medicine.

Polish spectators at the match between their Olympic men's hockey team and Australia's "Kookaburras" were more than a match for the home supporters.

"Polska, Polska, Polska, oi oi oi!" was their hearty - if unimaginative reply to the Aussies.

Australians have been horrified to discover their chant actually originated from a chant in Cornwall in the south west of England in praise of the local delicacy, the Cornish pasty - known locally as the "oggy".

"Oggi, oggi, oggi, oi oi oi," was chanted by the locals during a surfing competition between a Cornish team and visiting Aussies in 1975-6. The Aussies were so impressed they adopted the chant and brought it home, substituting the word Aussie.

### MIDAS TOUCH

Australian beach volleyballer Natalie Cook bought a fishbowl recently with the plan to use it as a trophy cabinet for her Olympic gold medal.

She duly won that medal Monday in the women's final with team-mate Kerri Pottharst and can now make the gold the centrepiece of the piscine pot.

In a preparation that also involved walking over hot coals Cook used some bizarre psy-

chological techniques. Cook had consulted motivation experts before the Sydney Games who had encouraged her to paint everything gold in her house - she even used golden toothpaste and shampoo. Now the gold medal will add the final touch.

### AUSSIES DON'T DRINK ANYMORE?

If beer-drinking were an Olympic sport, Australians would have a good shot at gold. But that well-earned reputation is taking a knock at the Olympic Stadium where despite the record crowds, beer sales have flopped.

"I just don't think people want to drink," says baffled caterer Richard Errington. Compared with the 800 millilitres a person guzzled during last month's sell-out rugby union clash between Australia and New Zealand at the Olympic stadium, just 52mls - less than a tea cup - is being sipped at the Games.

### ONE FOR THE ROAD

Women's Olympic marathon champion Naoko Takahashi of Japan had to go on her training run alone on Monday - the day after becoming the first female athlete from the Land of the Rising Sun to win an Olympic gold.

The explanation was simple - her coach and normal training partner Yoshio Koide - was nursing a huge hangover.

"I tried to run by myself without my coach as he was drunk," said the pocket-sized runner. "He did wake up and

wanted to run with me. But I went out by myself."

### FATSO STILL A CONTROVERSY

Oilly, Millie and Syd move over. The official Olympic mascots have been completely upstaged by Fatso the Wombat, an irreverent upstart that threatens to derail a lucrative Olympics marketing campaign. Fatso, a stuffed toy complete with sewn-on excrement attached to its ample backside, is the creation of television comedians Roy and HG, who one bemused American journalist described as "Monty Python on speed".

Their late-night Games commentary, where Fatso wades across the screen leaving droppings in his wake during replays of the day's outtakes, has elevated the wombat to cult status.

### THE EEL BEATS ALL

Goggles belonging to Eric the Eel, who became an unlikely Games hero with his solo performance in the swimming heats, have topped Muhammad Ali's signed T-shirt as the most sought after item in an Olympic charity auction.

Eric Moussambani, from Equatorial Guinea, has been the toast of Sydney since his 100m thrash which he swam alone, and in record slow time, after the other two competitors were disqualified.