

From gold to disgrace

GYMNASTICS

SYDNEY, Sept 26: Romanian Olympic gymnastics champion Andreea Raducan was stripped of her gold medal for failing a drug test Tuesday as Olympic chiefs reaffirmed a strict zero-tolerance anti-doping policy, reports AFP.

Raducan was disqualified and lost her medal after testing positive for use of the banned stimulant pseudoephedrine. Olympic officials said.

But late Tuesday, the Court of Arbitration for Sport issued a statement saying Raducan planned to appeal against the decision. The sports tribunal will hold a special three-member hearing at its Sydney office Wednesday, the body said.

The IOC had confirmed the decision to strip Raducan of her medal earlier Tuesday.

Traces of pseudoephedrine exceeding permitted levels were found in her urine sample following the individual all-around competition on September 21, where Raducan won the gold medal.

She failed the test after Romania's team physician Ioachim Oana gave her two over-the-counter cold remedy tablets.

Oana has been banned from the Sydney Olympics and will also be excluded from the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City and the 2004 Summer Games in Athens.

International Olympic Committee officials accepted the Romanian team's explanation, but were adamant that Raducan's disqualification must stand.

IOC media director Francois Carrard said the ruling was necessary to send a message drugs in sport would not be

tolerated. "There is a specific provision which states at the mere presence of a prohibited substance in an athlete's body is a doping case," Carrard told a press conference.



"We're not looking at the intent. It's the presence of a substance in the body of an athlete that constitutes doping," he said.

"It's tough but that's what it's all about. We have to be

tough and refrain from emotions and feelings," Carrard added.

Raducan was a member of the Romania squad which won team gold on September 19. Two days later she lifted the overall individual title and on September 24 she finished second in the vault.

She was not one of the two members of the Romanian team selected for a dope test after the team event, but a test on September 21 revealed the presence of pseudoephedrine.

Three days later after winning a silver medal in the vault competition she passed a mandatory dope test.

Stimulants act on the brain to boost the body both mentally and physically, increasing alertness and decreasing feelings of fatigue.

However there appeared to be confusion amongst Olympics officials over whether the level of pseudoephedrine detected in Raducan's sample would have given her an advantage.

"No, I don't think it would have given her a competitive advantage," Carrard told the press conference. "The point is that this is a prohibited substance, and the presence of it alone is enough," he said.

But Jacques Rogge, a member of the IOC Executive Committee and the World Anti-Doping Agency, later said the diminutive star could have gleaned an unfair advantage from the drug.

"We had to take her medal away because, even involuntarily, she broke a rule and was benefiting from an advantage. But all she did was make an error. Like an athlete who makes a false start," he said.

Raducan will keep her gold and silver medals from the other events. Her gold medal

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WATER LILIES: Virginie Dedieu and Myriam Lignot of France performing during their Olympic synchronised swimming free routine on September 26. The pair won the bronze.

-Internet photo

Synchronised for gold Yevgeny, Tommy to face off

SYDNEY, Sept 26: Olga Brusnikina and Maria Kisseleva, stripped of their European title this year after Kisseleva failed a drug test, secured Russia's first ever synchronised swimming Olympic medal when they blew away the opposition to win the women's duet gold in Tuesday's free routine final, reports AFP.

"This is compensation there's no doubt about it," said 25-year-old Kisseleva, of the trauma of losing their third successive European title after she tested positive for the drug ephedrine following Helsinki last July.

"When it happened it was quite a shock. It was a great tragedy. But later we got stronger and tried to forget the situation and put everything into winning the Olympic medal," said Kisseleva.

Ironically it was a similar substance to the pseudoephedrine for which 16-year-old Romanian gymnast Andreea Raducan tested positive and was stripped of her Olympic all-around gold medal earlier Tuesday.

Normally the offence carries a three-month suspension, barring her from the Olympics, but the Russian swimming federation imposed a lighter sentence after Kisseleva pleaded she unwittingly took the substance to control her weight.

"It's such a tough sport. You have to be very slim and adhere to a diet and refuse tasty food. You have to sacrifice everything," said her partner Brusnikina.

SYDNEY, Sept 26: Former world number one Yevgeny Kafelnikov will take on unseeded German Tommy Haas for the Olympic tennis gold medal in a final that nobody would have dared to predict before the tournament, reports AFP.

On a day that saw Monica Seles claim the first tennis medal of the Sydney Games, both men comfortably came through their semifinals — Kafelnikov ending the giant-killing run of France's Arnaud di Pasquale 6-4, 6-4 and Haas ousting Roger Federer of Switzerland 6-3, 6-2.

Seles bounced back from the disappointment of her semifinal defeat to her American teammate Venus Williams on Monday to down home favourite Jelena Dokic 6-1, 6-4 in the bronze medal match.

The battle for bronze in the men's doubles had to be suspended for the night because of rain with Spain's Alex Corretja and Albert Costa leading South Africa's David Adams and John-Laffnie de Jager 3-2 and 40-15 in the third set.

Kafelnikov, 26, remains a top 10 player but he has struggled badly this year since losing to Andre Agassi in the final of the Australian Open in January.

A third-round exit from the US Open earlier this month left him in such despair that he

aired the possibility of not coming to Sydney, although he insisted on Tuesday that he was never serious about missing out on his chance of playing in an Olympics.

"I hope I'm still playing pro tennis at 30 but I don't think I'll be in a position to compete for a medal. I have to take my last opportunity on Thursday and win the gold medal."

Kafelnikov admitted that he had arrived in Sydney not expecting to last more than a couple of rounds. "I felt my game was not there. I did not consider myself a medal contender," he said.

But as the tournament has gone on, the trickle of returning confidence has turned into a flood and he is playing close to the kind of form that brought him the 1996 French Open and 1999 Australian Open.

"I started to believe within myself that I can do it."

The strength of Russia's Olympic tradition means the experience of claiming an Olympic gold would, for Kafelnikov, be the crowning moment of his career.

The Williams sisters beat Belgium's Dominique Van Roost and Els Callens while the Dutch girls eliminated Natasha Zvereva and Olga Barabanschikova of Belarus 6-3, 6-2. The Americans will start as overwhelming favourites having won 32 of the last 33 matches they have played together.



KING CARL'S RETIRED LIFE! US legend Carl Lewis passing his time with a group of underprivileged children at the Redfern Police Community Youth Club yesterday.

-AFP photo

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 26 (AFP): Australia's Prime Minister John Howard Tuesday backed Cathy Freeman's decision to carry both the Aboriginal flag and the Australian flag on her lap of honour after her gold-medal winning performance in the 400m Tuesday.

Freeman became the first Aboriginal to win gold in an individual Olympic event.

"I think that's terrific," Howard told ABC radio. "I've never had any qualms about that; she's proud of her Aboriginality and she's proud of being an Australian."

ANOTHER CATHY RECORD

Once again an Australian television record has been broken — this time by Cathy Freeman's run to victory in the 400m.

An estimated 6.3 million viewers watched the race on Channel Seven while a further 2.4m watched on local networks in the outback.

It did not quite match the figure for the Opening Ceremony (7.4 million plus 3 million in the bush) but surpassed the record for a single event set for the epic 4x200m freestyle swimming relay won by Australia (5.1 million plus 2.3 million).

BONDI RESIDENTS' VETO

The spectacular temporary stadium erected on Bondi Beach has proved such a spectacular success in the Olympics that beach volleyball chiefs want it to feature on the World Tour.

But that has not gone down well with Bondi residents who were opposed to the building of the stadium in the first place.

International Volleyball Association (FIBA) president Ruben Acosta sparked the new row by saying, "I hope we are going to come back to the

Bondi next year, maybe two years but no later than that."

Even Brazil's Adriana Samuel who paired with outgoing Olympic champion Sandra Pires had to settle for bronze was impressed by the venue.

Asked if it was better than their home beach and training venue — Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana — Samuel said: "Today, yes."

BLATTER KEEN ON AUSSIE WC

FIFA president Sepp Blatter encouraged Australia to bid for the football World Cup after praising the organisation of the Sydney Games.

"The excellent organisation of the Olympic Games without doubt opens the right to take such a step. What the Australians have done is quite simply excellent," said Blatter.

Oceania has never staged a World Cup and was embarrassed when their delegate Charlie Dempsey — a New Zealander — disobeyed orders from the Oceania federation and his own Government to

back Germany's bid instead of South Africa's for the right to stage the 2006 tournament. His abstention ensured Germany won the day.

But Blatter said that would not affect Australia's chances, explaining: "All that business has already been forgotten."

ICELAND TOPS PER CAPITA MEDAL TABLE

Despite the heroics of Cathy Freeman the Aussies are slipping down the medal table.

It ranks a bit with the Aussies that they are fourth on the medal table — trailing the United States, China and Russia — so they have resorted to talking about medals on a per capita basis.

On that scale, the United States slipped back to 56th

position, two ahead of China in 58th place, while France fared slightly better in 25th.

Australia moved up, but only one place to be third behind leaders Iceland and Barbados.

LONGO-DISTANCE FLIGHT

France's deposed Olympic champion cyclist Jeanette Longo had a run-in with airline officials who wanted to put her bikes in cargo during the long flight to Australia.

Longo, a feisty character, adamantly refused to allow her bike to be stored with the luggage.

Eventually she had her way and the bikes were not separated from the rider during the flight.

PONCHO SALES RAIN PROFITS

There's a new buying craze at the Sydney Games. Along with tickets and stamps and T-shirts and pins, soggy Olympic spectators are snapping up plastic ponchos and Drizabone rain jackets.

The Drizabone raincoats, priced between 220-414 Australian dollars, went at the rate of 60 in an hour at the Olympic Superstore in the Olympic Park at Homebush Bay.

SILVER SPLASH DOWN

Ian Barker, who partnered Simon Hiscocks to a silver medal in the Open 49ers of the Olympics sailing competition, has the nickname 'Captain Splash'.

"That's a name I picked up when we were all just learning to sail these boats," he said.

"There's not a tremendous amount of stability and it's easy to make mistakes. We did a lot of swimming in the early days. Hopefully that's not the case now."

Dreaming down under

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 26: Australia's sporting icon Cathy Freeman agreed on Tuesday with comments by the country's Opposition leader Kim Beazley that her gold medal in Monday's 400 metres would help bring her people the Aboriginals and other Australians closer together, reports AFP.

The 27-year-old, who brought the house down when she sauntered home to collect Australia's 100th ever Olympic gold medal, added that she was not sure what she was going to do in the future and that she had had moments when she had thought of retiring.

"Kim Beazley's statement is not bad at all," the two-time world champion said.

"It's not surprising as it has been happening for a while and I am happy about that."

"Let the wheels turn on reconciliation," she added.

However, Freeman, who sports a tattoo stating 'Cos I'm free' on her right shoulder, denied that she was looking at a political career just yet.

"Politics isn't something for me at the moment," she said.

"I haven't had the time to channel my energies in that direction."

"Who knows? Maybe down the track when I'm supposed to be older and wiser I will get involved," she added.

Freeman, who is set for a head to head with American sprint queen Marion Jones in the 200m which begins on Wednesday, admitted that she was having a tough time thinking of what the future held for her.

"Every 10 seconds I have different thoughts of what I might do," she said.

"Yes retirement has crossed my mind."

"Life is a mystery and it is the question marks that lie ahead that really excite me."

"The only thing I do know is that I am going on an exotic holiday in October!" she added.

Freeman, who said that she had a hard time coping with her own moodswings, denied that being given the task of lighting the flame at the opening ceremony had placed too much of a burden on her.

"I was very surprised and extremely honoured," she said. "It involved a certain amount of pressure but I believe that I handle pressure pretty well," she added.

Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) chief John Coates agreed and said that if there had been any question of it being too much for her he would have chosen someone else.

"However, it was an opportunity too good to miss as she's a hero to all the children, she's Aboriginal and a woman," he said.

"We talked about the burden it could have, at a dinner in Los Angeles, but she said it was no problem," he added.

Freeman, who lives most of the year in London and is married to a sports firm executive, did reveal that it was a huge relief that the main part of her Games were over.

"I wanted to do something normal because life hasn't been normal for a while and that is why I sat down on the track," she explained.

However, while she awaits normal every day life to return Freeman did admit that it would be hard to ever surpass the moment she crossed the line.

"I don't know if it gets any better than this," she said.

"It'll have to be something really phenomenal to better this."



OLYMPIC SHOWERS: Fans at the New South Wales Tennis Centre wait for the rain to stop prior to the men's semifinal between Roger Federer of Switzerland and Germany's Thomas Haas yesterday.

-AFP photo

'Mutolamania'

ATHLETICS

MAPUTO, Sept 26: Maria Lurdes Mutola's feat of securing Mozambique's first ever Olympic gold on Monday came as her country celebrated its 36th anniversary of the start of their struggle for liberation from Portugal, reports AFP.

"We are full of joy from Rovuma to Maputo at the victory of Lurdes Mutola," Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano said during the anniversary celebrations Monday.

"She has brought us still more happiness on this festive date," he said.

Mutola's victory in the 800m filled headlines and airwaves in both private and state-run media.

Mutola won in a time of 1min 56.15sec, half a second ahead of her main rival Stephanie Graf from Austria. Bronze went to British runner Kelly Holmes.

The country's largest daily Noticias opened with the headline "Maria Mutola becomes Olympic champion."

On the streets, people are hailing her as a heroine, and calling the track star unbeatable.

Until Mutola Mozambique had not matched the success of other African countries in track and field at Olympic level.

In 1996 at Atlanta she was hot favourite for gold at the same distance but in the end had to settle for bronze behind Svetlana Masterkova of Russia and Ana Fidelia Quirot of Cuba.

She had been hotly tipped to top the podium after first emerging into the limelight in the 1992 Games in Barcelona where she finished fifth.

And that result itself paled into significance a year later when Mutola was crowned world champion over the two-lap distance in 1993.

Since 1991 Mutola has trained in the United States, on a grant from the International Olympic Committee.

Old school ties pay off

SYDNEY, Sept 26: Coaching guru John Smith has set many firsts in his career but on Wednesday night he could outdo his previous achievements if Haidi Sman Smanayi wins Saudi Arabia's first ever Olympic track medal — only the Gulf's second — when he competes in the 400 metres hurdles final, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old, who is the Pan Arab Games champion, will start as the dark horse in the field having set the fastest time in Monday's semifinals and broken the Asian record in the process.

Somayli, who is a teacher and started his sports career as a footballer, sounded a confident note after the semifinal in which he beat, among others, world champion Fabrizio Mori of Italy and Poland's European titleholder Pawel Jantszewski.



MARVELOUS MARIA: Mozambique's women's 800 metres ace Maria Mutola is exultant as she crosses the finish line first in the event's final yesterday.

-AFP photo