



1948 Olympics in London

Following a 12-year gap and the World War II which cost millions of lives and left the whole of Europe in disarray, new life was injected into the Olympic movement by certain ever-enthusiastic members of the IOC proving that Pierre de Coubertin's legacy had attained its intended state of maturity.

But since the Berlin Games in 1936, the movement was affected by a double blow: the death of its founder, de Coubertin, in 1937, and also the passing away of his successor, Henri Baillet-Latour in 1942.

However, in that crucial Olympics in London, Marie Provaznikova, head of the Czechoslovakian gymnastics team and gold medal-winner in the team event, made history by becoming the first athlete to leave the Games and defect to the West. The lack of 'freedom of expression, of the press, and of assembly,' following the coup d'état in February that year were cited as the major reasons why she refused to go back to her country.

Meanwhile, a Dutch mother-of-three, Fanny Blankers-Koen, 30, became a household name, and an icon for all sporting mothers, with an amazing haul of four gold medals (100m, 200m, 80m hurdles and 4 x 100m relay). On her return to Amsterdam, her neighbours offered her a bicycle, "so that she wouldn't have to run so much".

Privalova's perfect run

SYDNEY, Sept 27: Russia's Irina Privalova crowned her transformation from sprinter to sprint-hurdler in the best possible way here Wednesday — with an Olympic gold medal, reports AFP.

The 31-year-old mother from Moscow ran a cool and controlled race to sweep to victory in the 400 metres hurdles, despite being a novice in the event.

Privalova, who only took the event up this year, gave her rivals a tactical masterclass, showing them how to run the gruelling race known as "the man-killer".

Privalova made her 53.02sec clocking look easy, as behind her, defending Olympic champion, Jamaica's Deon Hemmings, battled to silver in 53.45sec, just staying ahead of the last two world champions, Nezha Bidouane, from Morocco, who nabbed the bronze ahead of Cuba's Dalmir Pernia, 53.57 to 53.68.

Privalova, the former European double sprint champion, cruised the first half of the race, but from the seventh hurdle began to pull away from Hemmings and the fast-starting Tatyana Tereshchuk.

Three metres clear as they came off the final bend, it was a lead that Privalova would not relinquish, even after a slight stutter at the penultimate barrier.

Olga 'mother of all Kazakhs'

SYDNEY, Sept 27: Olga Shishigina produced a late gold run in the final of the women's Olympic 100 metres hurdles here on Wednesday, winning Kazakhstan's first Olympic medal of any kind, reports AFP.

Shishigina, a 31-year-old mother, came from only fourth or fifth place with three hurdles left, and caught Glory Alozie, of Nigeria, on the run-in to the finishing line to clock 12.65sec, 0.03sec ahead of her African rival.

The bronze medal went to Melissa Morrison of the United States, in 12.76sec.

Alozie had the best start of the eight finalists, and was a clear leader after nine of the 10 barriers. But she and Shishigina landed off the last hurdle together, and it was the Kazakh's finishing power that yielded gold.

The race had a bitter-sweet poignancy for Alozie, who was competing just two weeks after her boyfriend, also a member of Nigeria's Olympic team, was killed in a road accident in Sydney.

Alozie, 23, and Shishigina are well matched. Their respective African and Asian records are exactly the same: 12.44sec.

Their performances in the Olympic final underlined the closeness of their abilities.

The gold medal was won in the absence of the favourite for the event, Gail Devers. The three-time world champion from America failed to finish her semifinal earlier in the evening.

Devers — Olympic 100m champion in 1992 and 1996, but who has extraordinarily never won an Olympic hurdles medal of any description — cited a hamstring strain.

Pyrotechnic closing

SYDNEY, Sept 27: An F-111 fighter bomber will ignite a massive plume of flame over the Olympic Stadium on Sunday night to start a stunning fireworks finale to the Sydney Games, reports Reuters.

"It is utterly spectacular," said Ignatius Jones, artistic

burn," Jones told Reuters. "It catches fire very quickly and forms this 1,000 foot plume of flame."

Lightning shells will then explode like giant flashbulbs at 24 points along the Parramatta River from the stadium to downtown Sydney, where an

ambitious millennium fireworks show, a New Year's Eve flop that was hugely upstaged by Sydney's impressive pyrotechnical welcome to the 21st century.

Jones, who masterminded that display, said Sunday's Olympic extravaganza would be far bigger, with the Harbour Bridge threaded with fireworks and yet more on four giant barges, 10 smaller boats and the rooftops of seven buildings.

"At the end of the show we're shooting two 24-inch shells, almost the biggest shells you shoot at all," Jones said.

The biggest are 36-inch shells but they would actually blow up the pyrotechnicians.

The 23-minute show, which will consume 3 million Australian dollars (1.7 million US) worth of fireworks, will also include a simultaneous fire burst of colour from 41 sites spread over more than 16-km (10 miles).

"That will be geographically the largest pyrotechnic effect in history," Jones said.

The display will be watched by millions of Olympic revellers in Sydney and billions more on television across the globe.

Jones said only winds of over 35 knots in Sydney Harbour could cause problems on the night.

"I've been doing New Year shows (in Sydney) since 1996," he said. "I kind of have an idea of what we're doing."

Hailing Haile

ADDIS ABABA, Sept 27: Ethiopia's press Tuesday feted Olympic 10,000m gold medalist Haile Gebrselassie as a national hero after his dramatic win in Sydney, reports AFP.

The Daily Monitor splashed a photo of the champion just after crossing the finishing line on its front page under the single word, "Victory."

In one of the most thrilling contests of the Sydney games, the Ethiopian snatched gold from Kenya's Paul Tergat in the dying strides.

"Our son has won," said 'the new Amharic language daily Eletawi Addis.

Another government paper, Addis Zemen, said the 'valiant Haile Gebrselassie in Sydney reiterated the victory of Atlanta,' where he took his first Olympic gold for the 10,000m.

The press also praised bronze medalists Gete Wami (for the women's 5,000m) and the 'team spirit' of Assefa Mezgebu, who came in third in the men's 10,000m.

Having long run in Gebrselassie's shadow, Assefa is a rising star of Ethiopian athletics who is likely to shine all the brighter if and when Gebrselassie goes back to the marathon distance.



director of what he billed as one of the biggest firework shows on earth.

"The people in the stadium will feel the heat, most definitely."

The Australian Air Force F-111 will fly 1,000 feet (300 metres) above Stadium Australia as the closing ceremony ends.

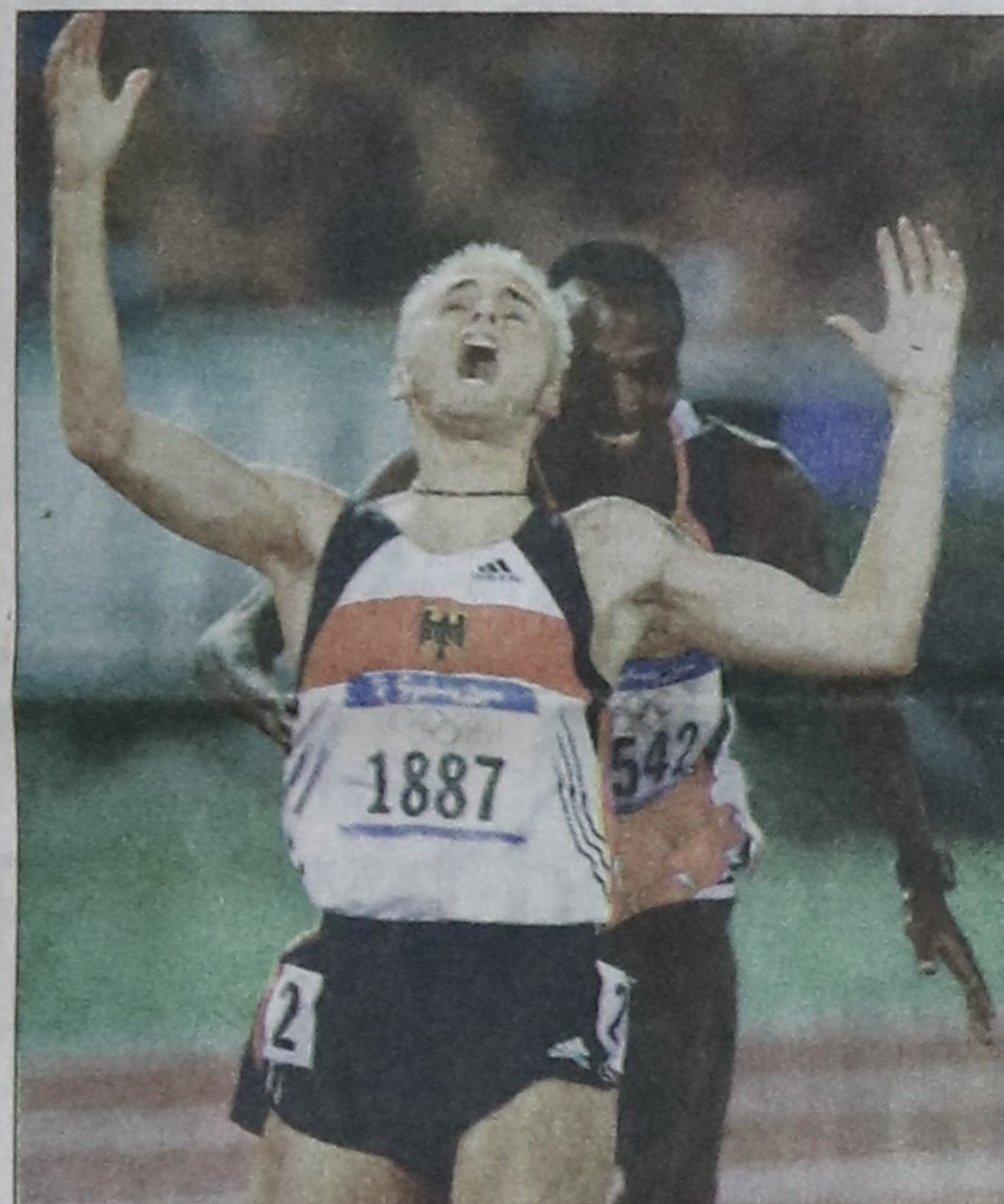
"It will jettison most of its fuel and ignite it with its after-

other F-111 will perform a second "dunk and burn" operation above the famous Harbour Bridge.

"It's like a giant firework that lights at the stadium and then burns down the river," Jones said.

"It will be very different from the river of fire on the Thames in that it will work."

He was referring to London's



NECK-TO-NECK: Germany's Nils Schumann exults after finishing inches ahead of favourite Wilson Kipketer of Denmark in the final of the men's 800 metres yesterday.

—AFP photo

Kipketer kept behind

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 27: Germany's Nils Schumann pulled off a stunning upset victory in the men's 800-metre final here on Wednesday night when he held off world-record holder Wilson Kipketer, reports AFP.

The 22-year-old Schumann fell to his knees as he crossed the line, unable to believe he had taken gold.

"I was only thinking of silver or bronze before the race, cer-

tainly not gold. But the race opened up and I seized it with both hands," said Schumann.

Algeria's Aissa Djabir Said-Guerni took the bronze.

"An Olympic final can be too much for some athletes but I was not nervous at all," said Said-Guerni.

"My first final and I have a medal. I am very happy, especially after I was injured last week," he added.

Schumann made his move from 100 metres out and powered to the front with 50 metres

to go. Outside him Kipketer, the Kenyan-born Dane tried all he could to close the gap but had left it too late to catch the German despite a desperate lunge as he crossed the line.

Italy's Andrea Longo, who was in the lead as they came round the final turn, faded back.

The Italian made his break half-way down the back straight as he banged Switzerland's Andre Bucher out of the way, knocking the Swiss onto the border. Longo was later disqualified.

"It cost me the race," complained Bucher. "I don't think it was done on purpose. It was just one of those racing accidents."

Schumann, the European champion, burst onto the 800m scene with a series of championship wins between 1997 to 1999. He managed to add the World Cup to his list of wins despite suffering a stress fracture of the leg. After taking the title he was out of athletics for 15 weeks.

It was a bitter blow for Kipketer who had been firm favourite to win in Atlanta but was unable to compete because Kenya refused to let him run for Denmark before serving the full residence period.

"I got tapped on my right calf 250 metres out and that disturbed me," said Kipketer. "Sometimes things work out like tonight."

Amanar's act of solidarity

BUCHAREST, Sept 27: Romanian gymnast Simona Amanar, who won gymnastics all-around silver medal at the Sydney Olympics, has refused to accept the gold medal after her compatriot Andreea Raducanu was stripped of her title, her mother Cristina told a television channel Tuesday, reports AFP.

"As far as I know, Simona will not accept this medal," she said.



VENUSOMENON! Venus Williams celebrating with the US flag after storming past Russia's Elena Dementieva 6-2, 6-4 in the final of the women's tennis competition yesterday.

—AFP photo

Venus' Olympic Slam

TENNIS

SYDNEY, Sept 27 (AFP): Venus Williams has some bad news for the rest of women's tennis: the new Olympic champion believes she can keep on getting better for years to come.

Williams has yet to claim the world number one ranking but after winning Wimbledon, US Open and Olympic titles in less than three months, there is little doubt that she is currently the dominant force in the women's game.

"I think that because I've been blessed with being pretty athletic, I can really keep improving my game throughout my career," she said after her 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Elena Dementieva in Wednesday's Olympic final.

It was Williams' 32nd consecutive win and the awesome nature of it suggests the streak could have some way to run. "I don't fear anyone," she said. "If anything I fear myself the most because sometimes I can get a little crazy, make a lot of mistakes and play badly."

Williams ascribes her current form to a change in attitude towards the game and what she could achieve in it

that she dates to the end of 1999, a year that saw her painfully eclipsed by her younger sister Serena's US

also a transformed player in terms of her technique. "One year ago she just had a very good serve and some big

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Open triumph.

"I had just been waiting around, not taking action on my abilities and it was time to move forward," Venus said. "It's easy to stand back. Its an easy thing to do. But to move forward and take a chance takes guts and courage."

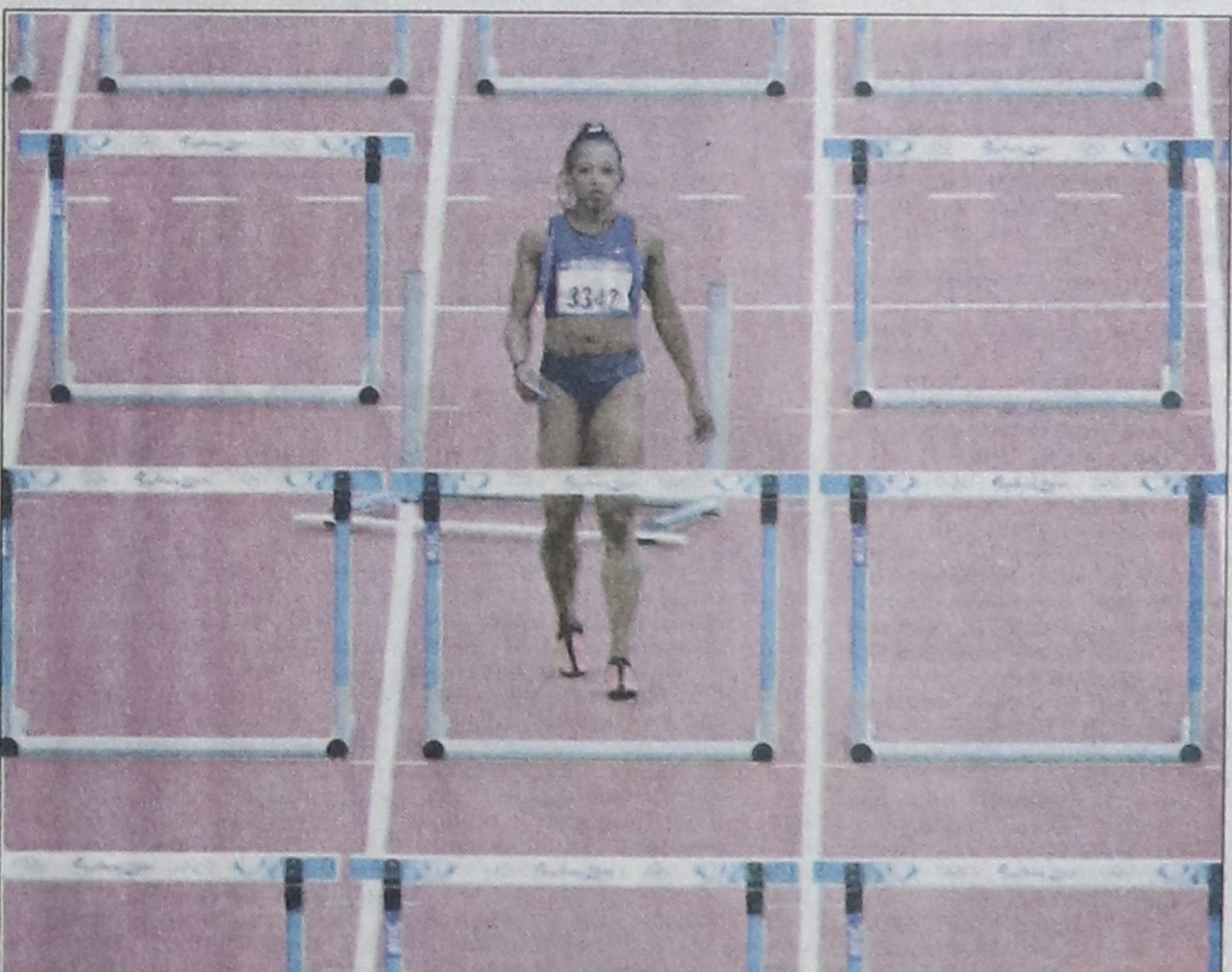
Dementieva, who beat Williams last year in a Federation Cup match, said the opponent she faced on Wednesday was

shots," Dementieva said. "Now she gets to the net and does everything on the court."

But the Russian said she felt Martina Hingis still has an edge over Venus in terms of her all round matchplay, a view shared by many in the game.

"Hingis is absolutely brilliant mentally," acknowledged Billie Jean King, who as coach to the US women's team has spent the last ten days here working with

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THE 'GAIL' NEVER BLEW: Gail Devers, the favourite in the women's 100 metres hurdles, stands alone after pulling out in the event's semifinal yesterday. Devers suffered a hamstring strain.

—AFP photo

A queen without a crown

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 27 (AFP): Gail Devers will go down in history as the best 100-metre hurdler never to win a gold or any other Olympic medal at the discipline, after dramatically crashing out in her semifinal on Wednesday with a left hamstring strain.

Her belief that it was destiny that she should never stand on an Olympic podium in the hurdles — in four tries — bears some truth given her ill fortune in the 1992 final.

The 33-year-old, who in 1996 became only the second woman in history to claim two consecutive Olympic 100m gold medals, looked set for the 100m/100m hurdles double in 1992 before she stumbled after the final hurdle while well in the lead and finished fifth.

"There is no jinx. Is this '92 all over again ... No it is not," she said.

"I don't think luck is involved in this," she said.

"Mine weren't able to do it for me today," she added.

Devers looks set to handle this latest Olympic disappointment as she has done other countless athletics heartbreaks because she has come through much more difficult challenges than simply taking on a set of hurdles.

The sparky sprinter, whose tiny physique is almost smaller than her long, extravagantly painted fingernails, came within a whisker of having a foot amputated in 1990 as she battled against the thyroid disorder Graves' Disease.

"That was a numbing time for me as I saw all my dreams coming to a brutal end," she said.

"I just thank God that somehow the doctors decided to go through with the operation because I don't know how I would have coped."

She has certainly coped after

getting over the illness with her two Olympic sprint titles and three world 100m hurdles titles which makes it even more astonishing that she has failed to garner a hurdles Olympic medal.

Devers is blunt about what made the difference between her form leading up to the previous two Olympics and her performances in the finals.

"It's not about confidence," Devers said.

"It's about getting out there and executing. Not hitting hurdles — given my history that's always my goal."

"If I don't clear hurdles, I can go from first to last."

Given her record, Devers could add injury as well to her list of hurdles to overcome.

She spent all of 1998 sidelined with injury and this year had seven weeks enforced lay-off with hamstring and Achilles injuries — before returning to post the fastest time of the season.

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SYDNEY, Sept 27 (AFP): Final updated Olympic medals table Wednesday:

Country	G	S	B	T
USA	29	15	25	69
China	22	14	15	51
Russia	18	16	21	55
Australia	13	21	12	46
France	12	13	8	33
Italy	11	6	11	28
Romania	10	4	4	18
Germany	8	11	17	36
Netherlands	8	6	3	17
Great Britain	6	8	5	19
South Korea	5	7	9	21
Japan	5	7	4	16
Bulgaria	5	3	2	10
Cuba	4	8	2	14
Poland	4	4	1	9
Sweden	4	3	1	8
Ukraine	3	7	5	15
Greece	3	5	1	9
Hungary	3	2	1	6
Spain	3	1	3	7
Turkey	3	0	0	3
Belarus	2	1	10	13
Canada	2	1	5	8
Czech Rep	2	1	3	6
Finland	2	1	1	4
Austria	2	1	0	3
Lithuania	2	0	2	4
Iran	2	0	0	2
Slovenia	2	0	0	2
Switzerland	1	5	2	8
Indonesia	1	3	2	6
Slovakia	1	3	1	5
Mexico	1	2	0	3
Kazakhstan	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
Mozambique	1	0	0	1
Brazil	0	4	2	6
Denmark	0	3	1	4
Belgium	0	2	3	5
Jamaica	0	2	2	4
Nigeria	0	2	0	2
Chinese Taiwan	0	1	4	5
South Africa	0	1	3	4
North Korea	0	1	2	3
Kenya	0	1	1	2
Norway	0	1	1	2
Argentina	0	1	0	1
Ireland	0	1	0	1
Moldova	0	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0	1
Trinidad	0	1	0	1
Uruguay	0	1	0	1
Yugoslavia	0	1	0	1
Georgia	0	0	4	4
Algeria	0	0	2	2
Armenia	0	0	2	2
Costa Rica	0	0	2	2
Estonia	0	0	2	2
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
Morocco	0	0	1	1
Portugal	0	0	1	1
Qatar	0	0	1	1
Thailand	0	0	1	1

Safe Games

SYDNEY, Sept 27: The official supplier of condoms to the Sydney Games is shipping extra supplies to the Olympic Village as many athletes complete their events and have more spare time, reports AP.

Ansell International originally sent 50,000 condoms to the Village and while 20,000 remain in stock, the company is providing another 20,000 — all of them free.

"While this may sound like an ample quantity, Ansell is mindful that demand for condoms goes up dramatically in the last few days as more and more athletes complete their events and pursue their athleticism off the field," the company said in a press release.

"You can quite imagine that with 10,000 young, fit and healthy competitors in the Village, relationships will blossom."

On his second attempt his approach looked laboured and although he rose above the bar, he brought it down with his body.

Unlike Bubka

SYDNEY, Sept 27: World pole vault record holder Sergei Bubka failed on Wednesday to qualify for the Olympic men's final, missing three times at his opening height of 5.70 metres, reports Reuters.

The 36-year-old Ukrainian, increasingly injury prone in recent years, did not enter the qualifying round until 3-hours into the competition.

After generous applause from a crowd privileged to watch the greatest pole vaulter in history, Bubka began but did not complete the first of his three attempts.

On his second attempt his approach looked laboured and although he rose above the bar, he brought it down with his body.