

## The Greatest Ritual of Sports



VIVA ITALIA! Italian kayakers Beniamino Bonomi and Antonio Rossi (L) jubilate just after winning the men's K2, 1000 metres final, on Penrith Lake yesterday. The pair took the gold medal. —AFP photo

## Savon king of the ring

### BOXING

SYDNEY, Sept 30 (AFP): Felix Savon joined legendary compatriot Teofilo Stevenson in the Olympic boxing hall of fame with his third consecutive gold medal Saturday. But it could have been four.

Had it not been for Cuba's boycott of the 1988 Seoul Games there is every reason to believe Savon would have surpassed Stevenson's hat-trick of Olympic titles achieved between 1972 and 1980.

The long-limbed 33-year-old has dominated his division for more than a decade, winning the first of six world titles in 1986 before his three Olympic golds in Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney.

His glittering CV and a dearth of talented heavyweights in professional boxing are believed to have attracted numerous multi-million dollar offers to turn professional.

Most promoters agree Savon could name his price — and infamous US ringmaster Don King once tried tempting him

with a 20 million dollar cash carrot.

But the fiercely patriotic Cuban is firmly opposed to giving up life in the amateur ranks.

"There is nothing greater than the love of one's countrymen," Savon has said, when rejecting offers to turn his back on Fidel Castro and his homeland.

He has also dismissed professional boxing as "dirty."

"I do not like professional boxing. There is a tremendous difference between Olympic style and professional boxing."

In the professional ranks the athlete is not protected at all and of course the main interest is earning money. It's a very dirty sport.



FANTASTIC FELIX: Felix Savon, the two-time Olympic champion boxer from Cuba, having a taste of the gold medal he won in the men's heavyweight category yesterday. —AFP photo

## SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 30 (AFP): Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj will miss the finale of the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) Grand Prix season in Doha, Qatar.

Since starting their domination in 1984 at Los Angeles, the US women have lost only three games in Olympic competition and settled for less than gold only once, taking bronze in 1992.

The Australians settled for their best Olympic women's basketball showing. The Opals' only prior medal, a bronze, came in 1996 at Atlanta.

Sherly Swoopes, the Women's National Basketball Association scoring champion who has led Houston to all four league crowns, added 14 points while Yolanda Griffith had 11 points for the Americans.

Australia was paced by 20 points from 19-year-old centre Lauren Jackson.

With 50,000 volunteers working at the different Olympic venues and support facilities SOCOG admitted a lot will be disappointed.

But SOCOG spokeswoman Liz Smylie said: "We will try and make it as equitable as possible."

### TEMPERATURE ON RISE

With so many athletes done competing, the Olympic Village was turning into party central by the final weekend of the Games.

Australian marathon runner Lee Troop, forced to stay in training until the very last day, was feeling a bit envious as the other competitors let their hair down.

"It's tough," he said. "We get 35 condoms each. I suppose I'll have to take them home with me because I haven't been able to use them."

Despite Troop's claim that the sexual energy in the village was "at an all-time high," Village mayor Graham Richardson insisted: "I haven't seen a lot of open bonkage."

"If there is, it's being done with great discretion."

### BANG, BANG BANG!

Fireworks fatigue must be setting in Sydney's Central Business District, where no fewer than 97 fireworks display permits have been granted during the two-week Olympic period.

The fireworks feast actually started before the Games, with 38 permits issued between August 6-20.

### FREE TICKETS

Five thousand volunteers at the Sydney Olympics will get free tickets to the Opening Ceremony, Sydney Games organisers (SOCOG) announced Saturday.

## Amazing Algerian

### ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 30: Algeria's Nouria Merah-Benida pulled off a stunning upset when she won the women's 1,500-metre Olympic title here on Saturday night, reports AFP.

Merah-Benida won in a slow 4mins 05.10 seconds ahead of Violeta Szekely of Romania and her teammate Gabriela Szabo, who added the bronze to her gold from the 5,000 metres earlier in the week.

Number one Suzy Faour-Hamilton, who had lead for almost half of the race, appeared to get tripped coming down the final straight and crashed to the track. She managed to get up and finish but even before the fall she had faded out of medal contention.

It was later revealed that Faour-Hamilton had collapsed from exhaustion.

"She is being treated for dehydration at the Olympic stadium medical facilities," said a statement issued by the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF).

"She is being treated with IV fluids and is responsive and is being tended to by stadium staff and the US delegation's medical team. No visible contact occurred to cause her to fall and at the moment it appears the fall was not injury related," it added.

The 29-year-old Merah-Benida kissed her vest before

taking an Algerian flag and going on a victory lap as she followed in the footsteps of compatriot Hassiba Boulmerka who won the 1500m in Barcelona eight years ago.

"This was a victory for Arab women," she said. "Europeans have sponsorship and facilities but we have courage and heart."

It was a sweet moment for Szekely who had impressed during the heats. The 35-year-old missed out on a medal at the World Championships in Seville last year when she finished fourth.

Making her last Olympic appearance, Szekely was delighted with the silver.

"This was it. I don't feel unhappy. I'm proud to end my Olympic career with a silver," she smiled.

Merah kicked too hard and my legs just could not carry me with her," she added.

With 400 metres to go Szabo looked to be out of the race as she languished at the back of the field but a surging run saw her pass eight runners to dip over the line to win the bronze.

"I thought I was going to win it in the last 400 metres. It's a shame I didn't but it doesn't matter that much. That's sport," she said.

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## Three cheers for Cuban women

### VOLLEYBALL

SYDNEY, Sept 30: Cuba staged a magnificent recovery from two sets down against Russia Saturday to become the first women's team to win the volleyball gold medal three times in succession, reports AFP.

The Caribbeans, who have claimed every major trophy over the past decade, showed their courage as well as their brilliant blocking and electric spiking to win 25-27, 32-34, 25-19, 15-18, 15-7 in 1 hour 43 minutes.

It was another major disappointment for the Russians, who were silver medalists behind Cuba in the 1999 World Cup and last month's World Grand Prix finals.

Russia had beaten the champions in the preliminaries — just as they did at Atlanta four years ago — and their confidence stood them in good stead in the first two sets when the Cubans failed in the critical closing stages.

But Cuba's capacity for winning lost causes came to the fore again. They similarly survived a five-set scare against Brazil in the semis and this was not uncharted territory.

Drawing on the experience of team captain Regla Bell, Ana Fernandez and Regla Torres, members of Cuba's previous two victorious Olympic teams, the champions came out with all guns firing in the third set.

Torres and Yumilka Ruiz, whose spiking attempts had been blocked in the first two sets suddenly had Russia's "Twin Towers" 1.94 Elena Godina and 1.91 Evgenia Aramanova leaning in the wrong direction. In a startling transformation, Cuba dominated the third and fourth sets from the start to square the match.

The Russians were rocked on their heels and Cuba maintained the momentum in the tie-breaking fifth where they

### Decade-old drought ends

SYDNEY, Sept 30: Russia's Yelena Yelisina ended a 10-year wait to claim the Olympic high jump gold here on Saturday, reports AFP.

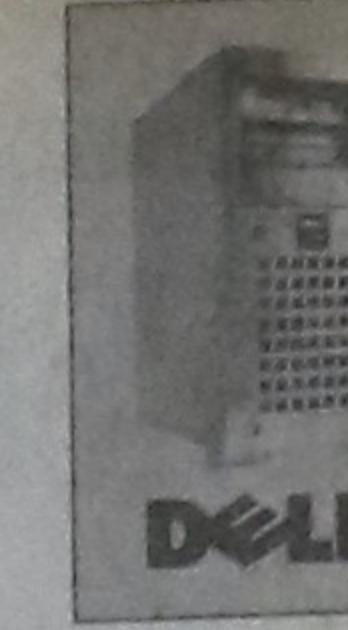
The 30-year-old mother last won a major title when she took the European Junior Championship in 1989.

But the wait ended when she sailed over 2.01 metres at her second attempt, beating South Africa's Hestrine Cloete, who also clear 2.01m but had more failures at lower heights.

There was a tie for the bronze medal between Kajsa Bergqvist of Sweden, and Oana Manuela Pantelimon, from Romania. Both cleared 1.99m.

In the best quality women's high jump for some time, Yelisina managed a perfect record in her first five jumps at lower heights.

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## PM's denial

SYDNEY, Sept 30: Australian Prime Minister John Howard Saturday dismissed speculation here that the 2004 Olympic Games could return to Sydney at Athens' expense, reports AFP.

The International Olympic Committee has warned Athens 2004 organisers that time was running out to resolve an array of problems including sport, venues, accommodation, transport and communications.

Criticism of the Athens preparation has led to speculation in the Australian media that the Games may return to Sydney, but Howard said he was confident there would be no change from Athens.

"Greece have got the Games," Howard said.

"I am quite certain the people of Greece and Athens will rise to the occasion very effectively, and they will do it with great flare," he said referring to the "sentimental symbolism" of the Games going back to Athens.

Howard did not rule out another Olympics Down Under but said: "Being realistic, your not looking at the return of the Games to Australia for some time yet."

IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch warned Athens in April that the Games could be in danger unless organisation was drastically improved.



ETHREAL ETHIOPIANS: Derartu Tulu (L) of Ethiopia and compatriot Gete Wami embrace each other after bagging the gold and bronze medals respectively in the women's 10,000 metres final yesterday. —AFP photo

## Tulu on target

### ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 30: Derartu Tulu of Ethiopia won a gripping women's 10,000-metre final here on Saturday night in a new Olympic record, reports AFP.

"I am more experienced than in Barcelona. It was always going to be an Ethiopian race. The others were just not up to it," said Tulu.

It was a devastating run by Tulu, who proved her comeback from the birth of her child and a series of injuries as she made her break at the 400 metre

Ribeiro of Portugal taking the bronze.

The previous record of 31:01.63 had been set four years ago by Ribeiro.

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