



1996 Games in Atlanta

Almost a quarter of a century following the first attempt to derail the 1972 Games in Munich, the Olympics again fell victim to an uninvited threat in Atlanta with the explosion of a home-made bomb in a park in the centre of town.

It was Friday, July 27, 1996, the ninth day of the Games. At 5:20am GMT in Centenary Park, a spot popular with tourists and even more popular with young people since the start of the Games, a lively party atmosphere was rudely interrupted by an explosion. Panic spread throughout. Security, numbered at around 35,000, were caught totally by surprise by the bomb. The world-famous FBI and the American authorities had already assured the public that Atlanta would be "the safest city in the world". The attempt caused one death and more than 110 injured. A Turkish cameraman also died from a heart attack while running to the scene of the drama.

Three hours following the explosion, the IOC declared that the Atlanta Games would continue. A one-minute silence was observed at all the sites and the Olympic flags flew at half-mast on the next day.

The IOC meanwhile handed over Muhammad Ali another Olympic gold medal to replace the one he won in 1960 Games. The story goes that the American legendary boxer, then known as Cassius Clay, threw the medal into a river in a fit of rage after being refused entry to a "whites only" restaurant in Ohio.



SYDNEY, Oct 1 (AFP): Final Olympics medals table at the close of the Sydney Games:

Country	G	S	B	T
USA	39	25	33	97
Russia	32	28	28	88
China	28	16	15	59
Australia	16	25	17	58
Germany	14	17	26	57
France	13	14	11	38
Italy	13	8	13	34
Netherlands	12	9	4	25
Cuba	11	11	7	29
Great Britain	11	10	7	28
Romania	11	6	9	26
South Korea	8	9	11	28
Hungary	8	6	3	17
Poland	6	5	3	14
Japan	5	8	5	18
Bulgaria	5	6	2	13
Greece	4	6	3	13
Sweden	4	5	3	12
Norway	4	3	3	10
Ethiopia	4	1	3	8
Ukraine	3	10	10	23
Kazakhstan	3	4	0	7
Belarus	3	3	11	17
Canada	3	3	8	14
Spain	3	3	5	11
Iran	3	0	1	4
Turkey	3	0	1	4
Czech Rep	2	3	3	8
Kenya	2	3	2	7
Denmark	2	3	1	6
Finland	2	1	1	4
Austria	2	1	0	3
Lithuania	2	0	3	5
Azerbaijan	2	0	1	3
Slovenia	2	0	0	2
Switzerland	1	6	2	9
Indonesia	1	3	2	6
Slovakia	1	3	1	5
Mexico	1	2	3	6
Algeria	1	1	3	5
Uzbekistan	1	1	2	4
Latvia	1	1	1	3
Yugoslavia	1	1	1	3
Bahamas	1	1	0	2
New Zealand	1	0	3	4
Estonia	1	0	2	3
Thailand	1	0	2	3
Croatia	1	0	1	2
Cameroon	1	0	0	1
Colombia	1	0	0	1
Mozambique	1	0	0	1
Brazil	0	6	6	12
Jamaica	0	4	3	7
Nigeria	0	3	0	3
Belgium	0	2	3	5
South Africa	0	2	3	5
Argentina	0	2	2	4
Morocco	0	1	4	5
Chinese Taipei	0	1	4	5
North Korea	0	1	3	4
Moldova	0	1	1	2
Saudi Arabia	0	1	1	2
Trinidad	0	1	1	2
Ireland	0	1	0	1
Uruguay	0	1	0	1
Vietnam	0	1	0	1
Georgia	0	0	6	6
Costa Rica	0	0	2	2
Portugal	0	0	2	2
Armenia	0	0	1	1
Barbados	0	0	1	1
Chile	0	0	1	1
Iceland	0	0	1	1
India	0	0	1	1
Israel	0	0	1	1
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Macedonia	0	0	1	1
Qatar	0	0	1	1
Sri Lanka	0	0	1	1

See ya in Athens

SYDNEY, Oct 1: The Olympic Games ended with a bang Sunday as at least one and a half million people crammed around Sydney's harbour to watch a spectacular fireworks display billed as the biggest on earth.

A giant street party erupted as the sun set and the Closing Ceremony at Olympic Park was beamed onto giant screens set up around the harbour foreshore, reports AFP.

After the Olympic cauldron lit 16 days ago was extin-

guished, two F-111 fighter planes swooped low over the stadium with their afterburners blazing, igniting the fireworks display.

The jets roared east down the Parramatta River towards the harbour, trailing fiery plumes behind them and making a symbolic link between the Olympic Stadium and the city's heart.

Along the 15-kilometre (9-mile) journey, a river of lightening cracked across the water as a barrage of shells exploded

in sequence.

The planes skimmed the landward Harbour Bridge, setting off a cascade of gold, silver and bronze that tumbled into the water below and sent up a huge roar from the crowd.

Sydney was then set alight as 3-million Australian dollars (1.7 million US) worth of fireworks exploded from eight city buildings and a flotilla of boats anchored in the harbour.

The captivated crowd stood awe-struck for the 23-minute display that eclipsed the New Year celebrations Sydney laid on to bring in the new millennium.

Wild cheers greeted the finale, where Olympic rings fixed to the bridge erupted in light.

Authorities banned traffic from the city to make way for the crowds — the biggest Sydney has ever seen — that packed every inch of vantage points in harbourside parks and the Opera House forecourt.

The huge numbers forced police to close off the six 'Olympic Live' sites where parties have raged since the start of the Games.

"Normally when you get to the end of an Olympic Games, there is a feeling that the whole thing is over and we are all going home," said Ignatius Jones who created the pyrotechnic display.

"Not in Sydney," he promised.

At the ceremony, a host of Australian stars joined the 10,000 Olympic athletes who paraded into the stadium led by the gold medal winners.

Those watching in the stadium and on the screens around the harbour were elated when International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch gave the Games a glowing review.

"Seven years ago I said, 'and the winner is Sydney,'" he said. "Well, what can I say now?"

"Maybe, with my Spanish accent — Aussie Aussie Aussie." The crowd responded with a rousing 'O-o-o-o' to cheers and applause.

"To you, all the people of Sydney and Australia, these have been your Games," he said.

"I am proud and happy to proclaim that they have presented to the world the best Olympic Games ever."

After the singing of the Greek and Australian national anthems, the Greek national flag was raised and, in accordance with tradition, Samaranch invited the world to Athens in four years time.

The Spanish IOC chief traditionally bestows that accolade on host cities of Summer Games but significantly refused to do that four years ago at the much-criticised Atlanta Games.

Samaranch, whose wife died during the Sydney Games, ech-

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IT'S YOUR TURN NOW: International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch (L) handing over the Olympic flag to Lord Mayor of Athens Dimitris L Avramopoulos during the closing ceremony of the Sydney Games yesterday. —Internet photo

Goodbye old guards

SYDNEY, Oct 1 (AFP): "I have lived this dream for four years and it lies in tatters at my feet."

Nothing encapsulated better the athletics than the distressed Hicham El Guerrouj's comment after he had been beaten by Kenya's Noah Ngeny in the blue riband of the middle distance races, the 1500 metres.

When all was said and done

the kings of the track and field over the past four years saw their supposed crowning at the top table of athletics fall like leaves in autumn.

For all their world titles and world records El Guerrouj, who found the weight of the Moroccan nation too much to bear and turned up to the stadium already crying, Wilson Kipketer and Donovan Bailey could not produce the goods when they

were required and for them Olympic glory slipped from their grasp.

"I hand my crown over to Noah Ngeny," the 26-year-old Moroccan said as he revealed that he would be moving up to 5000 metres.

"I was too stressed and felt the pressure of the Moroccan people and the King on me," he added.

Talk about pressure! If there was a symbol of when the going gets tough the tough get going then Marion Jones was it. She may not have won the five gold medals but then everyone apart from her entourage knew it was a big ask without having a long jump coach.

However, to battle through and win three golds and two bronzes with the revelations that her husband CJ Hunter had tested positive four times during his travels round the European circuit showed that she was still a quite outstanding athlete.

"I wanted five and didn't get them. That was disappointing," she said.

However, at least she can dream again of trying it in Athens and her worth to the sport is so priceless that everyone will be willing her to stay fit and healthy.

While Jones will probably be there in Athens Kipketer, who ran the world race of his life and produced one of the images of the Games when he crossed the line looked up to the screen and rubbed his head in sorrow. It is probably one strike and out.

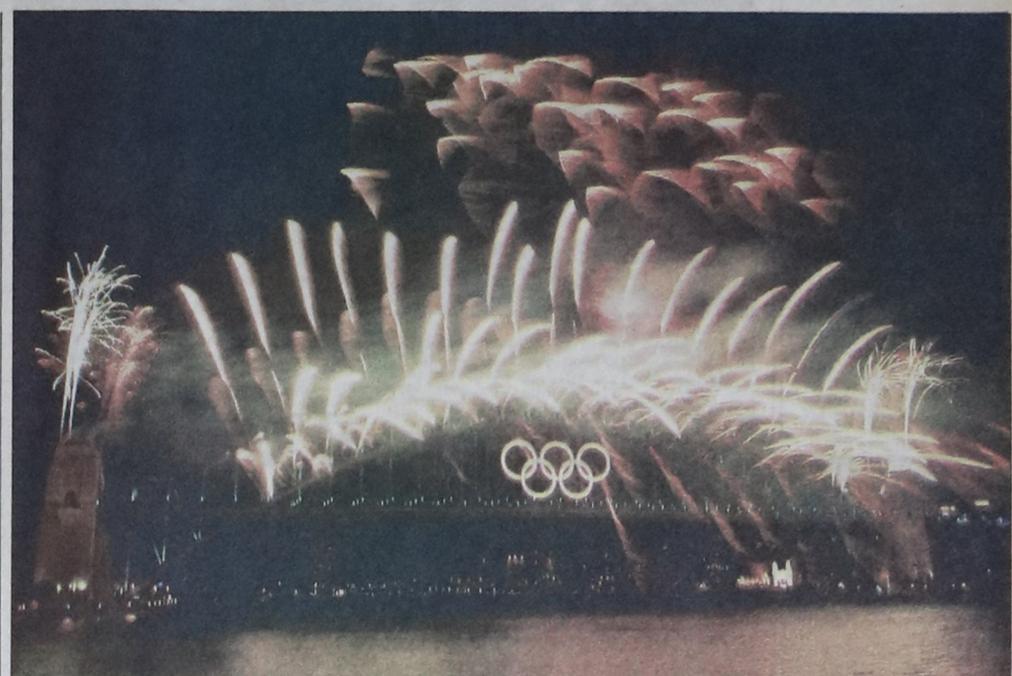
"It is a crushing blow but I have lived through malaria and I think I can survive this disappointment," Kipketer said in his usual enigmatic style.

It was the end of an era too for Michael Johnson, who finished the Games with a baton in his hand as he effortlessly led the United States to the 4x400 relay gold and then promptly handed it over to the

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RULE BRITANNIA: Great Britain athletes Stephanie Cook (R) and Kate Allenby celebrate after securing the gold and bronze medals respectively in the women's modern pentathlon yesterday. —AFP photo



FASCINATING, FANTASTIC: The night sky over the Sydney Bridge is illuminated by a terrific display of fireworks during the Closing Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games yesterday. —AFP photo

Awesome America

SYDNEY, Oct 1: For the first time outside home soil in 32 years, the United States has topped an Olympics medal table, reports AFP.

Americans won 39 golds, 25 silvers and 33 bronze medals to capture 97 medals overall, leading the haul at the Games of the 27th Olympiad despite finishing with four fewer medals than four years ago on home soil in Atlanta.

Host US athletes led the way in 1996 as well with 44 golds, 32 silvers and 25 bronze medals. In 1992, the Americans won 108 total medals.

Russia was second on the Sydney table with 88 medals — 32 gold, 28 silver and 28 bronze.

In 1996, Russians had only 63 total medals in their first Games following the breakup of the Soviet line-up which set the medal pace at the 1972, 1976, 1980, 1988 and 1992 Games and boycotted the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles where the Americans won 174 medals without many of the world's best on hand.

China made impressive medal gains at Sydney as well, finishing a best-ever third on the nations' list with 59 medals, one more than the Australian hosts and two more than Germany. They stood second most of the Games until the Russians moved past them in the final weekend.

Chinese competitors won 28 golds, 16 silvers and 15 bronzes — nine medals more than their 1996 total and five ahead of their best prior showing from Barcelona in 1992.

China had never won more than 16 golds at a Games. The Sydney success included China's first Olympics team gold medal, which came in men's gymnastics.

Australia nabbed a record haul of 16 golds, 25 silvers and 17 bronzes. The fourth-place overall rank, aided by entrants in every sport as host nation, was their best showing since third the first time they hosted the Games, in 1956 at Melbourne. That feat was done with only 35 medals.

Back to business straightway!

SYDNEY, Oct 1: Australian Olympic chief John Coates told sports bosses Sunday to start planning for Athens in four years' time, reports AFP.

Australia enjoyed its best-ever Olympics at these Games, finishing fourth, with 16 gold, 25 silver and 17 bronze medals, behind the United States, Russia and China.

And Coates, the Australian Olympic Committee president, said Prime Minister John Howard had already assured him he would not cut government funding.

The government spent just under 300 million dollars (165 million US) in the past six years to help prepare Australian athletes for the Sydney Games.

However, the Olympic Athlete Programme aimed at preparing elite athletes for the Sydney Games has come to an end, meaning a cut in funding next year of 26 million dollars (14.5 million US).

"The prime minister made it quite clear to me he is disposed to increasing the funding, but I said to him that my concerns are firstly planning," Coates said.

Many sports federations had not yet started their planning for Athens, despite spending seven years getting ready for the Sydney Games, he said.

So long, Sydney

SYDNEY, Oct 1: The Millennium Olympiad ended here Sunday after two weeks of spectacular competition which has wiped away years of agony, bloodletting and scandal to set new standards for the Games of the future, reports AFP.

In the view of millions of Australians, tens of thousands of overseas visitors and much of the world's media, the sheer power and personality of the athletes combined with brilliant organisation to deliver a triumph to all connected with the Games.

Never was success more needed by the Olympic Movement, tainted by the whiff of corruption, cronyism and doping scandals and facing incessant demands for reform of its grandiose ideas.

Never was success more needed by Sydney organisers who had to endure two years of cynicism and sustained media criticism over policy gaffes, sackings and perceived arrogance.

But they will undoubtedly now have the satisfaction of hearing International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Juan Antonio Samaranch proclaim the games the best ever held in his concluding speech on Sunday — an accolade he traditionally bestows on host cities but pointedly refused to at the much-criticised Atlanta Games four years ago.

Few who had used Sydney's inefficient and accident-prone rail network expected it to cope with the influx of visitors, and reports of its daily derailments

or signal failures were well publicised throughout the world.

It was the major concern to the hosts and even the New York Times raised questions about whether it would cope.

But it did, and, despite teething problems, millions of people were conveyed to and from the Olympic stadiums efficiently and quickly.

Facilities functioned well, revellers behaved, a well-drilled police managed security efficiently and unobtrusively and even the heavens smiled with delightful spring weather. An army of 46,000 unpaid volunteers impressed visitors with their friendly helpfulness.

The only other ingredient needed was exciting competition — and the athletes produced that with bells on, creating a new generation of superstars and Olympic legends.

Most loved among them, at least as far as the host nation was concerned, was 27-year-old Aboriginal runner Cathy Freeman who bore the weight of a nation's political and sporting hopes on her slender shoulders.

More than 110,000 in the stadium and most of Australia's population of 19 million held their breath the night she delivered a 400 metre triumph in a manner that brought tears to the eyes even of the most hardened cynic.

Britain's Daily Telegraph summed up the view of many saying: "There will be many grander feats than Freeman's victory over Lorraine Graham, as well as Katharine Merry and Donna Fraser from Britain. But many of us doubt whether we will ever be so moved again by a single sporting act."

For the most part the corporate sponsors of the Sydney games are smiling over what, at the time they made their commitment, was something of a gamble.

Ansett-Air New Zealand, which invested 50 million Australian dollars (27.5 dollars US) in sponsoring the games, has won between 1.1 and 1.5 billion dollars worth of new business from it.

The heads of hundreds of major multi-national companies brought to Sydney for the games by the Australian government's export agency Aus-

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QUEEN KYLIE: Australian pop superstar Kylie Minogue in her elements during the song Dancing Queen yesterday at the Olympic Stadium in Sydney. —Internet photo

Asia's bumper harvest

SYDNEY, Oct 1 (AFP): Thai boxer Wijan Ponlid brought the curtain down on a glittering Olympic campaign for Asia highlighted by the emergence of China as a medal table heavyweight.

Wijan danced and jabbed his way to a brilliant gold medal against world champion flyweight Bulat Jumadilov to win Asia's 43rd and final gold of the Olympics.

The tally surpassed the continent's previous best total of 37 golds from the Barcelona Games eight years ago, with the top nations now eyeing an even better performance at Athens 2004.

The gold rush got underway when Japanese judoka Ryoko Tamura won gold on the first Saturday of competition.

Japan and South Korea eventually failed to dominate judo and taekwondo as expected although each chipped

in with five and eight gold medals respectively across a range of sports.

Spearheading Japan's golds was marathon winner Naoko Takahashi, the first Japanese woman to win an athletics gold.

But it was China who proved to be the principal Asian standard bearer, eventually winning 28 of the continent's total gold haul.

Two of China's golds came from the peerless diver Fu Mingxia, who took her all time tally to four when she retained the women's three-metre springboard title.

Among the Chinese medals was an unprecedented second consecutive clean sweep of the golds in table tennis, with singles star Kong Linghui completing the feat with a dramatic victory.

They nearly achieved a similar feat in badminton, only Indonesia's doubles pair of

Candra Wijaya and Tony Gunawan denying them all five golds.

But China did sweep the board in women's weightlifting, an Olympic sport for the first time in Sydney, with Ding Meiyuan being crowned world's strongest woman.

Women's weightlifting saw Thailand's Khassaraoporn Suta finish in the medals with a bronze medal. Khassaraoporn, an officer in the army, was promoted as a result.

India's Karnam Malleswari — "overweight, drinking beer and eating too much chicken and cheese" according to the press — left her critics shamefaced. She won weightlifting bronze to become her country's first ever woman medalist.

There was no joy for Taiwanese weightlifter Chen Po-pu however, who earned the unwanted distinction of becoming

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