



STILL GOT THAT GRACE! Former Romanian gymnastics legend Nadia Comaneci throws a ceremonial first pitch of the Olympics softball game between Italy and Taiwan in Athens on August 18.

Athletes hope to banish demons

AFB, Athens



Athletics faces its toughest Olympic Games test since the Ben Johnson scandal when the competition gets underway here on Friday with com-

petitors under intense pressure to drag the sport out of the mire into which it has slumped.

Their task has been made all the harder with the saga over Greek Olympic medallists Kostadinos Kenteris and Ekaterini Thanou.

Thankfully for the organisers the duo finally caved in and withdrew from the team on Wednesday despite still protesting their innocence over missing a mandatory drugs test.

With the case of world 100 metres champion Torri Edwards also resolved as the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) rejected her appeal against a two-year ban the organisers are hoping the sport can begin.

"Hopefully now the focus will switch onto the sport and the athletes competing in it," International Olympic Committee spokeswoman Giselle Davies said.

It is little wonder that while athletics cleans out its stable of drugstakers -- with the stars as vulnerable to detection as the minnows - there are worried brows at the sport's governing body, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

"We are doing a better job of it than many other federations," an IAAF source said.

"However you have got to laugh that as we clean up the sport we are committing suicide."

Most pressure in the cauldron of an Olympics athletics extravaganza will be on Marion Jones. Clouded by allegations of doping, the former golden girl of the sport will compete in the long jump -- ironically considered the three-time Olympic champion's weakest event - and probably the 4x100m relay.

With most of the athletes implicated in the scandal surrounding the BALCO drugs laboratory, including Jones' boyfriend and 100m world record holder Tim Mont-gomery, failing to qualify for the Games, it will be up to those who have made it here to mount a salvage operation for a sport that has struggled to make an impact Stateside since the end of the Carl Lewis era.

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PHOTO: AFP

CHILDREN OF OLYMPIC LIGHT! Two children run on a lit pavement leading to the Olympic flame burning above the Olympic stadium in Athens yesterday on the eve of the start of athletics competitions at the 2004 Games.

Not a fall guy

REUTERS, Athens



Paul Hamm etched his name into the record books as he became the first American man to win the Olympic gymnastics all-round crown on Wednesday.

Hamm overcame a fall from the vault to grab a last gasp victory with the final routine of the day for a total score of 57.823.

"I thought after the vault I cost myself any medal. My thought was I should shoot for bronze," said a jubilant Hamm after adding the Olympic gold to the world title he won last August.

"I dug down deep and gave it everything I had on the parallel bars and high bar. And after high bar, my coach said 'all right Olympic champion, and I said 'what, no way'."

Mounting the horizontal bar trailing in fourth place, Hamm completed his gravity-defying routine to perfection

and threw his arms up in the air in victory even before the judges had declared their verdict.

His final score of 9.837 was enough to edge out South Korean's Kim Dae-eun by just 0.012 of a point and spark off ecstatic celebrations around the Olympic Indoor Hall.

South Korea's second representative Yang Tae-young settled for bronze with 57.774.

"This is the most amazing comeback in gymnastics history," said Hamm's team mate, Brett McClure, who was also in contention for the crown going into the final round.

"Paul's worked really hard and he deserved to win."

Hamm's title hopes appeared to have ended in spectacular fashion in the fourth rotation when he mis-timed his vault and ended up flat on his side before rolling off the mat.

With his disappointment etched on his face, the American walked slowly back to his seat thinking his title aspirations had vanished even

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SL tour on time, India coming in December

SPORTS REPORTER

India will tour Bangladesh in December (8-22) for two Tests and will return for a tri-nation series in January next year, also involving Zimbabwe.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed this after its advisory board meeting at the Gulshan office yesterday.

BCB's chief executive Macky Duddhia also said that Sri Lanka's tour of Bangladesh this November is still on.

"As it stands, there has been no change in the schedule and they will be here after playing one-dayers in Pakistan," Duddhia told the Daily Star over phone.

Sri Lanka had earlier sought to shift their first full series in Bangladesh to February next year so that they could play two Tests in Pakistan after featuring in a triangular tournament in October.

The Board also announced

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No sweat MSC

CU CORRESPONDENT



match at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

It was the Dhaka giants' third win in four matches and moved them to second place in the Group B table behind Brothers Union who have ten points. Mohammedan have a match in hand against Brothers on August 21 which happens to be the last fixture of the second phase.

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra, who had finished their group campaign with ten points also, were the other team from the Group to have made it to the final.

Unmochan failed to collect a single point from their five matches. But the boys from Bagerhat managed to keep their mighty opponents at bay until the

39th minute when Mohammedan striker Manju broke the deadlock by heading in off a corner taken by winger Kaiser.

Five minutes later, midfielder Sentu who was adjudged man of the match, doubled the lead with a powerful drive from 25 yards.

Veteran Nakib made it 3-0 in the 73rd minute when the unmarked substitute striker nodded home a perfect cross by Sentu from the right flank.

Captain Jewel Rana said after the match that he was not satisfied with the outcome.

"The scoreline would have been bigger had we given a little extra effort in the field," said Jewel.

Bagerhat manager Mortuza Hossain Moon observed that his team has gathered a lot of experience in the competition.

"Playing against some of the biggest clubs in the country will help us perform better in future," the Unmochan managers said.

Two matches will be held today

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

I STILL HAVE ONE GOOD HAND! Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar (R), with his left arm resting in a sling to protect the injured thumb, gestures at a teammate while his predecessor Khaled Mahmud runs in to bowl during practice at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

THE TALLY				
Country	G	S	B	Total
China	12	8	5	25
USA	10	10	9	29
Japan	8	3	2	13
Australia	6	4	6	16
Ukraine	5	1	1	7
Germany	4	2	5	11
Russia	3	7	7	17
Italy	3	4	2	9
France	3	3	4	10
Korea	2	5	3	10
Netherlands	2	4	4	10
Hungary	2	2	1	5
Greece	2	0	1	3
Romania	2	0	1	3
Turkey	2	0	1	3
Poland	1	2	1	4
Slovakia	1	2	1	4
Georgia	1	1	0	2
South Africa	1	1	0	2
Bulgaria	1	0	2	3
Thailand	1	0	2	3
Switzerland	1	0	1	2
UAE	1	0	0	1
Great Britain	0	2	4	6
DPR Korea	0	2	1	3
Austria	0	2	0	2
Cuba	0	1	4	5
Belarus	0	1	1	2
Czech Republic	0	1	1	2
Zimbabwe	0	1	1	2
India	0	1	0	1
Indonesia	0	1	0	1
Portugal	0	1	0	1
Serbia/Montenegro	0	1	0	1
Spain	0	1	0	1
Azerbaijan	0	0	2	2
Belgium	0	0	2	2
Brazil	0	0	2	2
(As of 9:30 pm BST)				

Bashar unlikely for Champs Trophy



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar looks doubtful for next month's ICC Champions Trophy as his injury seemed more serious than it was anticipated.

The think tanks have already discussed a possible replacement for the 31-year-old batsman, who suffered an injury on his right thumb during the team's net session a couple of days ago.

An X-ray report later confirmed that the top batsman of the country fractured the hyperextension of his right thumb. The report was sent to Australia for expert comment, which is expected to reach here by Tuesday.

But the team management decided not to take any risk for just two games ahead of a hectic home series starting in October.

"We have selected a replacement for Bashar in the event he can not go England. But we will not disclose the name until we get the final report of his condition," said coach Dav Whatmore during the team's morning session.

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Jewel times 25.47 sec

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh swimmer Jewel Ahmed took part in the 50m freestyle at the Athens Olympics on Thursday.

His appearance on the big stage was more academic than putting any serious threat on any medal.

He clocked 25.47 seconds in the first heat. Although Jewel finished second in that group, his timing was far too slow compared with the qualifying mark of 22.53 seconds, by South African Lyndon Ferns.

American Gary Hall recorded the best timing of 22.04 in the heats.

Jewel was the second Bangla-deshi athlete to appear in this Olympics after Asif Hossain, who took part in the men's 10m air rifle.

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ATHENS STREET TALK

AFB, Athens

Posters depicting Greek sprinter Ekaterini Thanou are being hastily replaced around the Olympic host city by those of Australian swimming superstar Ian Thorpe after she pulled out of the Games in the wake of a missed drugs test along with her training partner Kostadinos Kenteris.

"Since she won't start in the Games, it makes no sense to utilise her as an advertising agent. So we decided yesterday to replace her with Ian Thorpe," said Adidas International corporate spokesman Jan Runau.

But the sportswear company's contract with Thanou will not be terminated until a final decision has been made on her fate.

"We have a very clear doping policy. There is a clause in all our sponsoring contracts that we can immediately cancel them if an athlete is proved doped and is banned from

his own national or international federation".

So far there is no proof.

ARRON CALLS

TO SCRAP IT

French sprint star Christine Arron says the women's world record for the 100 metres should be wiped from the books because it is unrealistic.

The mark of 10.49sec was set by Florence Griffith-Joyner, around whom doping allegations swirled until her sudden death at the age of 38.

"It hurts to see a 100 metres world record at 10.49 seconds," Arron said ahead of her attempt to win Olympic gold in the event.

"But that is the way it is and there is no point dwelling on it." The French woman's personal best time is 10.73sec.

Griffith-Joyner won an Olympic silver medal at 200m in 1984 before

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What to WATCH

BTV

Nitol-Tata National Football League

MSC Ctg v Panchagar Brothers Union

Live at 2.15 pm

Muktijoddha KC v Najirpara Chandpur

Live at 4.15 pm

Athens Olympic Games

Highlights

At 8.30 pm

ESPN

Sportscentre

Sports News

Live at 8.30 pm

English Premier League

Preview show

Taped at 9 pm

STAR Sports

England v West Indies

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