

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.

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

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.

"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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Athletes hope to banish demons

AFP, Athens



Athletics faces its toughest Olympic Games test since the Ben Johnson scandal when the competition gets underway here on Friday with competitors 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 Montgomery, 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.

Bashar unlikely for Champs Trophy

Jewel times 25.47 sec

SPORTS REPORTER

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

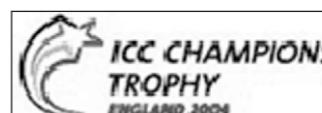
His appearance on the big stage was more academic than putting any serious threat on any medal.

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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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

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