



BULL'S EYE: South Korea's archer Park Sung-Hyun shoots an arrow during the women's team archery competition at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games yesterday. Sung-Hyun along with Yun Ok-Hee and Joo Hyun-Jung won the gold in the event.

PHOTO: AFP

Records tumble in Cube

SWIMMING

Michael Phelps electrified the Water Cube on Sunday, smashing his own 400m individual medley world record to claim the first of a possible historic eight swimming gold medals at the Beijing Games.

The American star's performance was one of two world records recorded in the first swimming finals session of the Games.

With US President George W. Bush looking on, Phelps outdistanced Hungarian Laszlo Cseh and fellow American Ryan Lochte to win in 4min 03.84sec - slicing 1.41sec off the previous world mark of 4:05.25 he set at the US trials in June.

"That was a pretty emotional race today," said Phelps, the subject of intense scrutiny for months as he readied his assault on US swimmer Mark Spitz's record of seven gold medals at one Games, set in Munich in 1972.

Phelps was unable to match Spitz's feat in Athens four years ago, winning six golds and two bronze. But he raised expectations that he could go even one better in Beijing when he won seven titles at the world championships in Melbourne last year.

To do so, he'll have to swim at least 17 times over the nine days of competition as he goes for gold in five individual events and three relays.

"I think I am as prepared as I can be at the moment, and this is the best time to be in that position," Phelps said.

"I can't express how excited I am to be able to start off with that event and how it turned out."

With his medley triumph, Phelps, wearing the revolutionary Speedo LZR Racer suit, successfully defended one of his Athens titles.

Phelps turned in a blistering opening butterfly leg, surrendered the lead to Lochte at the first backstroke turn, and regained a narrow margin heading into the breaststroke.

Lochte, swimming two lanes over, briefly edged ahead in the breaststroke, but Phelps held the advantage at every remaining turn, closing out his rivals with a majestic finishing freestyle.

"I turned around and I thought I saw 4:31 on the clock," Rice said. "The first thing that went through my mind was 'that hurt a lot for a 4:31,' but when it all clocked over and I realised I had swum a 4:29, I thought that's amazing!"

Phelps' time of 3:41.86 was the second-fastest 400m freestyle in history.

There was disappointment for Australia's vaunted women in the 4x100m freestyle relay.

The Dutch team of Inge Dekker, Ranomi Kromowidjojo, Femke Heemskerk and Marleen Veldhuis, who set the world record in winning the European title in March, followed up that victory by claiming Olympic gold in 3:33.76.

He was cool," Phelps said of the presidential salute. "He waved the flag and nodded his head, that was a cool feeling to have the president there and to say congratulations."

Australian Stephanie Rice captured gold, and reclaimed the world record, in the women's 400m individual medley with a time of 4:29.45.

Zimbabwe's Kirsty Coventry, swimming out in lane one, was also under the previous world record, taking silver in 4:29.89, while Katie Hoff, who had set the world mark of 4:31.12 at the US trials in June, settled for bronze in 4:31.71.

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"I came off the last wall and it was the same feeling as in Athens," Phelps said. "I saw myself out there and I smiled."

"I knew the first one (gold medal) was there, and I had the same feeling this morning."

Resting at the pool wall, Phelps smiled and raised an arm in triumph. He waved again as he exited

S Korea gain archery gold

REUTERS, Beijing

South Korea beat China to win gold in the women's team archery on Sunday, earning their sixth Olympic title in a row.

Athens gold medallist Park

Sung-hyun, world No.1 Yun Ok-hee and Joo Hyun-jung beat the Chinese trio 224-215 to confirm their status as the sport's superpower.

The Koreans, who set a world record against Italy in the quarterfinals and hammered France in the semis, have won every Olympic archery gold medal since 1984.

France beat Britain by a point to win the bronze medal after driving rain and thunder forced a 15-minute postponement.

Park, who ripped gold from China's grasp with her very last arrow four years ago, was in imperious form, shrugging off miserable conditions and heckling from the home crowd to lead her team to victory.

China's Chen Ling, Guo Dan and Zhang Juan Juan were never able to get back on level terms with the Koreans after falling behind with their first three arrows.

Gay very confident

AP, Beijing

U.S. sprinter and gold medal contender Tyson Gay said Sunday he's confident and "injury free" after completing a workout during which he showed no obvious signs of discomfort from the hamstring he hurt last month.

Gay, the defending world champion in the 100 and 200 meters, had to wait almost an hour to start due to heavy rain and lightning. He did some light jogging before completing sprints of 60, 80 and 100 meters during a workout that was open to reporters.

"I've been looking for an indicator to let me know where my confidence is going to be at, and I think today let me know that," Gay said as he left the track at the U.S. Olympic training center in Beijing Normal University. "I'm happy with today's workout; injury free, no pain."

He injured his left leg while running in preliminary heats in the 200 during the U.S. trials in July. He had already qualified for the 100, where he is expected to contend with world-record holder Usain Bolt and Asafa Powell, who held the record before Bolt.

Gay pulled out of a race in London on July 25, saying he wanted to rest to ensure he was healthy for the Olympics. He said earlier this week that he would be ready, and looked comfortable running the 100 for coach Jon Drummond.

Gay said a more detailed MRI had discovered a slightly strained tendon that was worse than originally diagnosed. He admitted having doubts about whether he would be able to get back to form in time for the games. Now, he's "pretty close" to where he was before the injury, noting that he might have run the 100 faster had he done a second set of sprints after being fully warmed up.

"Everyone knows I haven't raced since nationals, but I think that was good for me because even if I would've run the 200 I'd have been really fatigued," Gay said. "I've seen a lot of people from the U.S. not running as fast as they were and a lot of people's bodies are tired, so I think this rest really did me well."

Owe it to a fortune-teller

REUTERS, Beijing

the clean and jerk world record of 129kg held by China's world champion Li Ping with an audacious attempt to heave 130kg.

However, the effort failed and she had to console herself with the gold medal and an Olympic record.

Yoon Jinhe of North Korea won the silver with 213kg on countback while Nastassja Novikova of Belarus, who also lifted a 213kg total, settled for the bronze.

Jaroenrattanarakon effectively won the gold medal with an initial clean and jerk attempt of 120kg, raising the bar to a level none of her rivals could match.

With the gold locked up, she turned her sights on the record books, breaking the eight-year-old Olympic clean and jerk record, held by China's Yang Xia, with her second attempt.

With her performance, the Thais strengthened their women's weightlifting credentials four years after winning their inaugural two Olympic gold medals at the Athens Games.

The team sent here was composed of youngsters, however, following the retirement last year of

Ivanovic pulls out

AFP, Beijing

Top seed Ana Ivanovic pulled out of Olympic tennis tournament on Sunday with a thumb injury, calling it "the worst moment of my career" and dealing a fresh blow to the injury and rain-hit event.

The French Open champion from Serbia, who had been due to face Ukraine's Mariya Kirilenko in the first round, said she had been carrying the right thumb injury since the Rogers Cup in Montreal.

"This is the worst moment of my career," she said. "In the past month I've been in so much pain and I haven't been able to practise for 10 days."

"I haven't even hit a ball since arriving in Beijing."

Ivanovic, who will be deposited as world number one by compatriot Jelena Jankovic on Monday, is the latest big name to withdraw.

Maria Sharapova, Tatiana Golovin and Amelie Mauresmo had already pulled out of the competition while 1996 champion Lindsay Davenport has decided not to play in the singles.

Second seed Jankovic is still a doubtful starter after picking up a calf strain. She is due to play Zimbabwe's Cara Black in the first round.

Ivanovic's pull-out came on a rain-hit day at the tennis tournament where only nine of a scheduled 45 matches were completed.

She has not played since losing her third-round match in Montreal to unseeded Austrian Tamira Paszek on July 31.

I could have won eight'

AFP, Hong Kong

US swim legend Mark Spitz thinks Michael Phelps could beat his record tally of seven gold medals at a single Olympics, but says if things were different in his time, he could have had eight.

Phelps has his eye on eight golds in Beijing, which would surpass the record Spitz set at Munich in 1972 that many consider one of the greatest achievements in sport.

But Spitz believes that if he'd had an extra event at the time, he would have been the first to eight.

"I won seven events. If they had the 50m freestyle back then, which they do now, I probably would have won that too," he told AFP in Hong Kong. He said Phelps called to mind his own days as a world-beater decades ago.

"He's almost identical to me. He's a world-record holder in all these events, so he is dominating the events just like I did," Spitz said. "He reminds me of myself."

The 23-year-old Phelps shaved 1.41 seconds of his own world record to set a new benchmark in the 400m individual medley on Sunday, taking the first of what he hopes will be eight golds in Beijing.

"There is nothing I am going to be able to say or do that is going to prevent this from happening. It is what it is," said Spitz, who won worldwide fame with his historic performance in then-West Germany, 36 years ago.

"I think what I have done has obviously inspired him. He's been inspired to go after me."

Big guns enter quarters

FOOTBALL

Ronaldinho was back to his best as he led Brazil on a 5-0 romp over New Zealand Sunday to confirm their quarterfinal berth in Olympic men's football along with Argentina and Italy.

The tournament's big three cannot be denied winning their groups with one pool match remaining but the Netherlands last gasp draw with the United States left three teams in with a chance to take the two berths from Group B.

Only two points separates the co-leaders United States and Nigeria from the Netherlands and the US and Nigeria are still to play each other.

The Netherlands were staring at defeat and the prospect of having to beat Japan by a wide margin in their final pool game when a Gerald Sibon free kick three minutes into stoppage time reversed their fortunes.

Nigeria, who earlier drew with the Netherlands, posted their first win of the tournament Sunday when they beat Japan 2-1.

Ronaldinho delighted his legion of fans, scoring twice as he led Brazil to an untroubled 5-0 win over minnows New Zealand to remain unbeaten in pool.

The Brazilian captain, a clear favourite with the large crowd, was at the heart of nearly every decisive move as New Zealand struggled to stay in the match.

Brazil coach Dunga also warned Ronaldinho will only get better as the tournament progresses.

"Finally, we start to see his smile. Not everybody knows that he hadn't played an official game for four months, but a talented player like him will retrieve his form very fast," Dunga said.

In the other pool C match China's underachievers went down in a tame 2-0 defeat to Belgium who must now beat New Zealand to remain in the tournament.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil captain Ronaldinho points to the heavens after scoring one of his two goals against New Zealand during their Beijing Olympic Games first round match in Shenyang on Sunday. Brazil won 5-0.

DIVING

AFP, Beijing

morning to night, so although it looked easy to you, we earned it.

"We were under a lot of pressure before the competition, but we just focused on making sure we did what we had to do."

Russia's Julia Pakhalina, who won gold in the same competition in Sydney with now retired Vera Ilyina, took the silver medal with her new partner Anastasia Pozdnyakova.

"Congratulations to the winners, they deserved it and we are just happy to have got our first medal," said Fischer.



PHOTO: AFP

GOLD DIVERS: Guo Jingjing (upper) and Wu Minxia perform in the women's synchronised 3m springboard diving competition at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing's National Aquatics Centre on Sunday. The Chinese team won the gold in the event.