

Bernard rests ghosts

SWIMMING
THE TELEGRAPH

The blue ribbon event of swimming, the 100 metres freestyle, has gone to France for the first time with Alain Bernard winning the battle of the record breakers with a time of 47.12.0.11 seconds to defeat Australia's Eamon Sullivan.

The pair had broken the world record for the event no fewer than five times with the Frenchman leading 3-2.

Sullivan led at the turn but Bernard was level as they surfaced. The pair swam stroke for stroke, neither wanting to settle for second best, but it was the European champion who touched home first for Olympic glory.

Jason Lezak, who swam a brilliant final leg of America's 4x100m freestyle to snatch gold from the grasp of the French quartet, shared the bronze position with Cesar Cielo Filho of Brazil in 47.67 secs.

The defending champion, Peter van den Hoogenband, finished fourth in 47.75 secs some 0.09 secs faster than he had recorded in Sydney on his way to gold.

Bernard said: "I can't believe it. I know I was feeling down after the relay, but I didn't want to get beaten."

"Today it was not about the silver medal or the world record. It was about touching the wall."

Sullivan said of his performance: "I'm very happy I performed so well in my first Olympic final. Unfortunately it was not good enough for the day."

Zige Liu and Liuyang Jiao brought the capacity crowd to its feet when they won gold and silver in the 100m butterfly pushing the world champion and record holder Jessica Schipper into bronze position.

Liu established a world record of

2m04.18secs finishing 0.54 secs ahead. Jiao was also inside the previous world mark. The defending champion Poland's Otylia was placed fourth.

This was China's first gold since 1996 when Jingyi Le won the 50m freestyle. It was also their first world record since 1997 when Li Lin and Yan Chen established new marks for the 200 and 400m medley respectively.

Kosuke Kitajima of Japan stamped his name in the annals of the sport when he became the first man to successfully defend his two Olympic breaststroke titles. The 25-year-old did so in style leading from the dive.

Australia's Brent Rickard was the only one who made any attempt to stay with him but even he could not maintain the pace. Kitajima, who set a world record when retaining his 100m title, was inside his world mark at the three-quarters point of the race.

But that mark slipped as he raced to his second gold but his time of 2:07.64 secs just 0.13 secs outside his best was an Olympic record.

The race for silver and bronze down the final length was between three swimmers with Rickard, silver medalist at last year's World Championships, finishing runner-up.

France's Hugues Duboscq, who was bronze medalist at the European Championships this year, added another bronze when he managed to keep a very fast finishing Mike Brown of Canada at bay.

The women's 4x200m freestyle produced the only world record of the session when Australia stormed home in 7:44.31 secs.

Swimming the lead off leg from Australia was Stephanie Rice winning her third gold of the games. Her other golds came in the 200 and 400m medley. Australia were followed home by China and the USA.

Libby Trickett, the world cham-

pion and record holder for the 100m freestyle, was given a second chance in the semifinal of the event.

Competing in the first semifinal, she touched home fourth in 54.10 secs which, by her standards, was slow. Her best being 52.88 secs.

The second semi, which contained Britain's Fran Halsall, was faster with five swimmers being quicker than the Australians.

But fortunately for her, China's Jiaying Pang, was disqualified for moving before the starting signal.

Halsall the 18-year-old from Liverpool, stepped up to win a place in the final. She managed to shrug off last night's disappointment of being in the 4x200m freestyle relay which failed to qualify for the final.

Her time of 53.94 secs was 0.13 secs off the British record she established last Sunday morning when swimming the opening leg of the 4x100m freestyle.

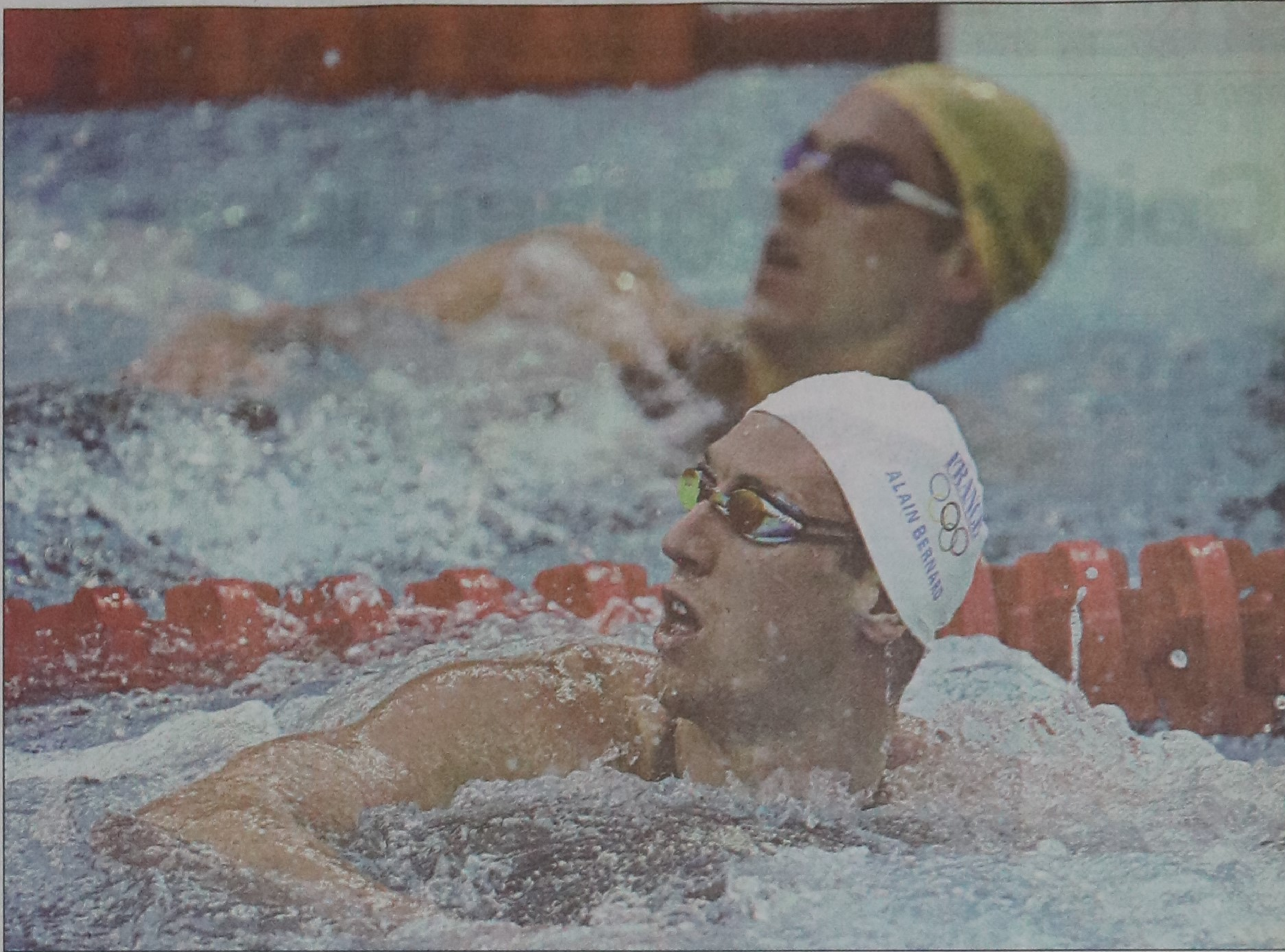
Britain will have another finalist tomorrow morning, this time in the 200m backstroke. Gregor Tait, a finalist four years, ago qualified in sixth place in 1:56.71 secs just 0.05 outside his British record.

Defending champion Aaron Peirsol is the fastest qualifier in 1:55.26 secs. His American teammate Ryan Lochte - with who he shares the world record - is the second fastest just 0.14 secs slower.

Today was a day without a medal for Michael Phelps, but he was in action in the semifinal of the 200m medley, winning his semifinal in 1:57.70 secs, just one hundredth slower than his teammate Ryan Lochte recorded to win the second semifinal.

The British duo of James Goddard, the national record holder, and Tancock will swim in the final having recorded times of 1:58.63 secs and 1:59.42 secs respectively.

If they are to have any chance of a podium place they will have to be better than their best.



NERVOUS WAIT: Frenchman Alain Bernard and Australian Eamon Sullivan (top) look at the time screen after the 100m freestyle event at the National Aquatics Centre in the 2008 Beijing Olympics yesterday. Bernard won gold, overtaking Sullivan as the fastest swimmer in the Games.

Van Hoogenband hangs up googles

INTERNET, undated

Pieter van den Hoogenband announced his retirement Thursday after Alain Bernard took away his chance at an unprecedented third straight victory in swimming's signature race, the 100-meter freestyle.

"Way too fast. It's a new generation and it's now time to step aside," Van den Hoogenband said. "They did a great job. I'm from the previous generation with Alex Popov."

Bernard and Australian speedster Eamon Sullivan improved the mark three more times at these games, and Sullivan's record of 47.05 still stood after a tactical final.

"This is my last race," the 30-year-old Van den Hoogenband said. "I've raced many times against Alain, but I didn't know he was in my (league). We met before the races and he's a great guy and we have a good (relationship). I'm very happy with an ambassador like Alain. He's a great sportsman."

Van den Hoogenband also won the 200 free in Sydney and he retires with three Olympic golds, two silvers and two bronzes.

"It's been a very long time, my fourth Olympics, my fourth final in the 100 freestyle," he said. "The Olympics is very special to me. When I was 10 years old watching Seoul, watching Matt Biondi, I got really inspired."

Van den Hoogenband always kept his best for the Olympics. He never won gold at a world championships, taking eight silvers and two bronzes.

He missed the 2005 worlds due to a hernia operation and withdrew from the European Championships in March at his home pool in Eindhoven due to a virus.

"I thought maybe it was possible to make history and win three times in a row, but in 2005 I got really set back, and started from zero," he said.

Love, Italian style

AP, Beijing

Winning a gold medal is a happy event for anyone and a moment to be shared with those you love. But when Italian policeman Andrea Minguzzi became the unlikely wrestling gold medal-winner Thursday, he wanted to share his joy with strangers, too.

Minguzzi couldn't have been more excited after his out-of-nowhere win at 84 kg in five previous attempts, he had never placed above 17th in a world championship. He wrapped himself with the Italian flag, did acrobatics on the mat, ran around the arena and gave his coach a bear hug.

But it didn't stop there. As a presenter in a traditional Chinese silk dress handed him his celebratory bouquet, the 26-year-old Minguzzi hugged and kissed hereliciting gasps from an audience unaccustomed to public displays of affection. Even from Italy.

Zhang downs a dynasty

ARCHERY
AP, Beijing

When China's Zhang Juan Juan beat one of South Korea's best in the women's individual archery quarterfinals, it could easily have been dismissed as luck.

After all, South Korea had won every Olympic gold medal in the event since 1984, had the top three seeds in this year's draw and had already claimed the team title in Beijing.

When Zhang beat another accomplished South Korean in the semifinals, it was undeniably impressive. When she did it for a third time, she earned gold.

Zhang defeated top-seeded Park Sung-hyun 110-109 in the final to cap an unlikely run for the gold medal in front of a boisterous home crowd.

Zhang trailed 109-101 before scoring nine of 10 on her final shot and sending her rain-soaked fans into a frenzy.

"I think this is the result of the efforts of all the Chinese archers," Zhang said. "I think the gold today should also be attributed to the cheers and spectators, and to my confidence and composure."

The final looked like a mismatch. Zhang was the 27th seed in qualifying going against the 2004 gold medalist. But Zhang said she always thought she could win.

"I would say I had a dream for the gold," Zhang said. "When I was competing, I calmed myself down."

To win gold, Zhang had to beat each member of South Korea's Olympic team champions. First she defeated Joo Hyun-jung, the No. 3 seed, 106-101 in the quarterfinals. Next was No. 2 seed Yun Ok-hee, who she beat 115-109 in the semifinals to tie the Olympic record score Park had set just hours earlier. Then, she beat Park.

Park wiped tears away during the press conference after the gold-medal match.

"I do regret the result," she said. "I am very sad in a way because I feel I may have broken the tradition set by those archers who were before me. However, I feel that by winning the silver, it will make me crave the gold more and make me appreciate the gold more in the future, so I think it's a good experience."

Park said she hopes there won't be as much pressure on other South Korean archers.

"It will be less burdensome now," she said. "It's OK to not win gold. It's not a must for them anymore."

Yun won the bronze medal with a 109-106 win over North Korea's Kwon Un Sil. Yun defeated American Khatuna Lorig 111-105 in the quarterfinals.

Lorig competed for the Unified Soviet Team in 1992 and with the

Republic of Georgia in 1996 and 2000. She worried about her family who remain in Georgia where new explosions were heard Thursday amid a shaky cease-fire with Russia, but she was able to focus on archery.

"I actually shot really well, with the way I feel," she said. "It just wasn't meant to be, I guess."

CCTV seeks damages

AFP, Shanghai

China's state broadcaster has filed a lawsuit in Shanghai against a website for broadcasting part of the Olympic torch relay without permission, official media reported Thursday.

CCTV.com, part of China Central Television International Networks Co. Ltd., says that xunlei.com, one of China's largest download service providers, broadcast the Olympic torch relay live on June 30, the Xinhua news agency reported.

CCTV.com is seeking more than 2 million yuan (290,000 dollars) in compensation, the report said.

CCTV.com has been recognised by the International Olympic Committee as China's only official Internet and mobile broadcaster of the Beijing Games, the report said.

Discarding the medal!

INTERNET, undated

Swedish wrestler Ara Abrahamian threw down his greco-roman bronze medal in protest on Thursday after his bid for Olympic gold was ended by a decision denounced by the Swedish coach as "politics."

Abrahamian took the bronze from around his neck during the medal ceremony, stepped from the podium and dropped it in the middle of the wrestling mat then walked off.

"I don't care about this medal. I wanted gold," he said.

A bitter Abrahamian, silver medalist at Athens 2004 who had high hopes of top honours in the 84kg competition in Beijing, announced he was quitting the sport.

"This will be my last match. I wanted to take gold, so I consider this Olympics a failure," he said.

The Swedish wrestler had to be restrained by teammates earlier when a row erupted with judges over the decision in a semifinal bout at the Chinese Agricultural University Gym with Andrea Minguzzi of Italy, who went on to the take gold.

Abrahamian shouted at the referee and judges then went over to their seats to speak to them up close. He angrily threw off the restraining arm of a team official then turned and left.

Swedish fans booed loudly as the judges filed out of the arena. Abrahamian said nothing to waiting reporters but whacked an aluminium barricade with his fist as he left the hall.

No husband in sight

AP, Beijing

Runner Sanya Richards, America's 400-meter gold medal contender, has 21 family members cheering her on in Beijing. Sadly for her, fiance Aaron Ross isn't among them.

Ross is a defensive back for the Super Bowl champion New York Giants. August means training camp.

"I really wish he could be here with me," Richards said Thursday. "At first I was OK with it, but then more and more people asked me 'Is he coming over? Is he coming over?' I really wish he could make it, but he has a preseason game on the 18th, the night before my final."

The two have been talking through a video communicating service.

"He's just very encouraging and motivating," Richards said. "He just can't wait for me to get my chance at a gold medal."

The couple met when both attended the University of Texas. They plan a 2009 wedding.

Wei realises dream

ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS
AP, Beijing

Deep inside, beyond the muscles and mind-set it takes to be an Olympic champion, Yang Wei felt an obligation to do more for his people. He needed to bring relief from the tragedies that have recently struck China.

While no sports success can erase the pain of thousands dying in earthquakes, floods and blizzards, Yang recognizes that even the slightest comfort is welcome. He was thrilled to have provided it Thursday, at last winning the all-around gymnastics gold medal he has chased for eight years.

"The Chinese team is responsible for a lot of people's dreams," Yang said. "This year has not been very good for China. There's been a lot of disasters, so these Olympic Games, there's a lot of pressure. It's impossible not to be nervous, and it's how to cope with the nerves is our job. And right now, I feel very excited."

Excited, relieved and, well, just plain thankful that he stuck around.

Denied in Sydney and disappointed in Athens, Yang was ready to quit at the age of 24. What a loss that would have been for China.

And for the sport.

"After the Athens Games, I wanted to retire from the national

team because I thought I was in very good shape back then. If I couldn't win a gold medal then, I thought I could never get a gold," said Yang, who had the gold medal for the taking in Athens but couldn't close the deal, falling literally to seventh.

"Extra training would not have had an effect. I was worried that even if I could have adjusted myself to the best standards in 2008, I could not get a gold."

"But my coach, Huang Yubin, kept on encouraging me. He took me on a vacation and told me that the 2008 Games would be the greatest chance in 100 years, and I should have a try at it. He kept pushing me, and then he kicked me to the highest position on the podium."

Yang stood above Japan's Kohei Uchimura and France's Benoit Caranobe on the medals stand. He looked down often at the piece of gold he cradled in his hands, then went back to being a showman afterward. He even held up his prize to one group of Chinese fans and pretended he was going to throw it at them.

Not that they didn't already feel they shared in his triumph.

Yang was the headliner of this extravaganza even when he was struggling on floor, his first routine. By the time he was done with his third apparatus, the vault, he was in the lead. When he reached the high bar to conclude the event, he was a cinch for his nation's second all-

around gold; Li Xiaoshuang won in 1996.

He didn't even bother waiting for his marks on the bar before hammering it up. Yang leaped onto the podium, thrusting his fists in the air while the crowd waved flags, chanted his name and hugged each other.

Even more fitting was the judges' delay in posting his marks, allowing the celebration to build and Yang to revel in it.

"I thought a month ago if I would get this medal, I would be very emotional," Yang said. "But I'm really not because we won the team gold medal."

Oh, yeah, his all-around win gave China all three titles in gymnastics so far. Yang still has the pommel horse and rings events in the individual finals.

Regardless of what he achieves thenis anyone really going to bet against him? Yang has set the bar incredibly high for everyone else in gymnastics. He won so decisively Thursday (by 2.60 points) that the gap between him and Uchimura was the same as between the silver medalist and the 19th-place finisher.

That's called a rout.

"He is amazing," said American Sasha Artemev, who finished 12th. Remember that Artemev had just been added to the team a week ago, replacing injured Morgan Hamm.

"He must be the most consistent gymnast, and to do it in front of the home crowd, with all that pressure, that's just a great performance."

But the most stunning performance came from Caranobe, who was shocked himself to have won the bronze, France's first all-around medal in 88 years.

"I'm extremely happy today," he said. "Actually, I did not do any research in regards to the previous medals (for France). It was not part of my preparations. I came to be a part of the final six on pommel horse; that was the goal and that was my expectation."

"This medal, it was so unexpected, and I probably will not realize the significance of it until later."

Neither Artemev nor Jonathan Horton, the other American in the all-around, could match the bronze they helped the U.S. squad earn in team finals.

"I definitely didn't have that fired-up feeling that I had with the team, but I'm really happy with how I did," said Horton, who wound up ninth. "I don't have any regrets with my competition today."

There would have been so many regrets had Yang left the sport in 2004. But Huang, his longtime coach, persuaded Yang there was an Olympic gold medal in him.

So Yang stuck at it, winning the world title in 2006 and 2007.

Then came Thursday's crowning achievement.

"After so many years of competition, especially in the all-around, there is no pressure from the outside anymore. It's just from yourself," he said.

"Today was perfect."



China's Wei Yang performs on the parallel bars during the men's individual all-around final of the artistic gymnastics event in the 2008 Beijing Olympics yesterday.



SETS HER SIGHT AT GOLD: Zhang Juan Juan of China shoots an arrow in the women's individual archery event at the Olympic Green archery field in Beijing yesterday.