

Nataliia delivers gold

ATHLETICS
AFP, Beijing

Nataliia Dobrynska of Ukraine fell back on her strength in field events to win the heptathlon gold medal at the Olympics on Saturday.

The 26-year-old, who finished eighth at last year's world championships in Osaka, recorded a total of 6733 points after the gruelling two-day, seven-discipline event.

Dobrynska's compatriot Lyudmila Blonska took silver, 33pts adrift, with overnight leader Hyleas Fountain of the United States claiming bronze at 6619pts.

"The Olympic Games is the main goal for every athlete, but today I think I wanted it more and that's why I won it," said Dobrynska.

"I had very strong opponents, but like every athlete, I had the goal to win the Olympic Games."

Dobrynska's victory was based on two top performances in the shot put, in which she recorded a best of 17.29m, and the long jump, in which she jumped a lead of 6.63m.

A poor 24.39sec in the 200m was masked by a solid 13.44sec in the 100m hurdles, a 10th-best 1.80m in the high jump and an impressive 48.50m in the javelin throw.

She finished last in her 800m heat but fast enough to edge Blonska.

Fountain's superiority in the track events was shown up by her lack of power in the field events, the American managing only 13.36m in the shot and 41.93m in the javelin.

"I'm very satisfied and very excited," said Blonska, the 2006 world indoor champion and reigning world silver medalist who was banned in 2003 for two years after testing positive for stanozolol, the anabolic steroid used by the disgraced sprinter Ben Johnson.

"I never thought I could win a silver medal in the Olympic Games. It has always been my dream to win a medal in the Olympics."

Fountain added: "One of my

goals was to get on the medal stand. In the heptathlon you have to take the good with the bad and the bad with the good."

Pre-event favourite Kelly Sotherton of Britain, who has openly accused Blonska of being a cheat, finished fifth on 6517pts, with Russian Tatiana Chernova in fourth.

"I did three personal bests and in the end I came fifth," said the 31-year-old Sotherton, a bronze medalist in the worlds in 2007 and the Athens Games four years ago.

"If I had won here at the Olympics I probably would have quit, but I'm not satisfied."

"I will do another year - I want to go on and at least win the World Championships."

Bush hails Phelps

AFP, Crawford

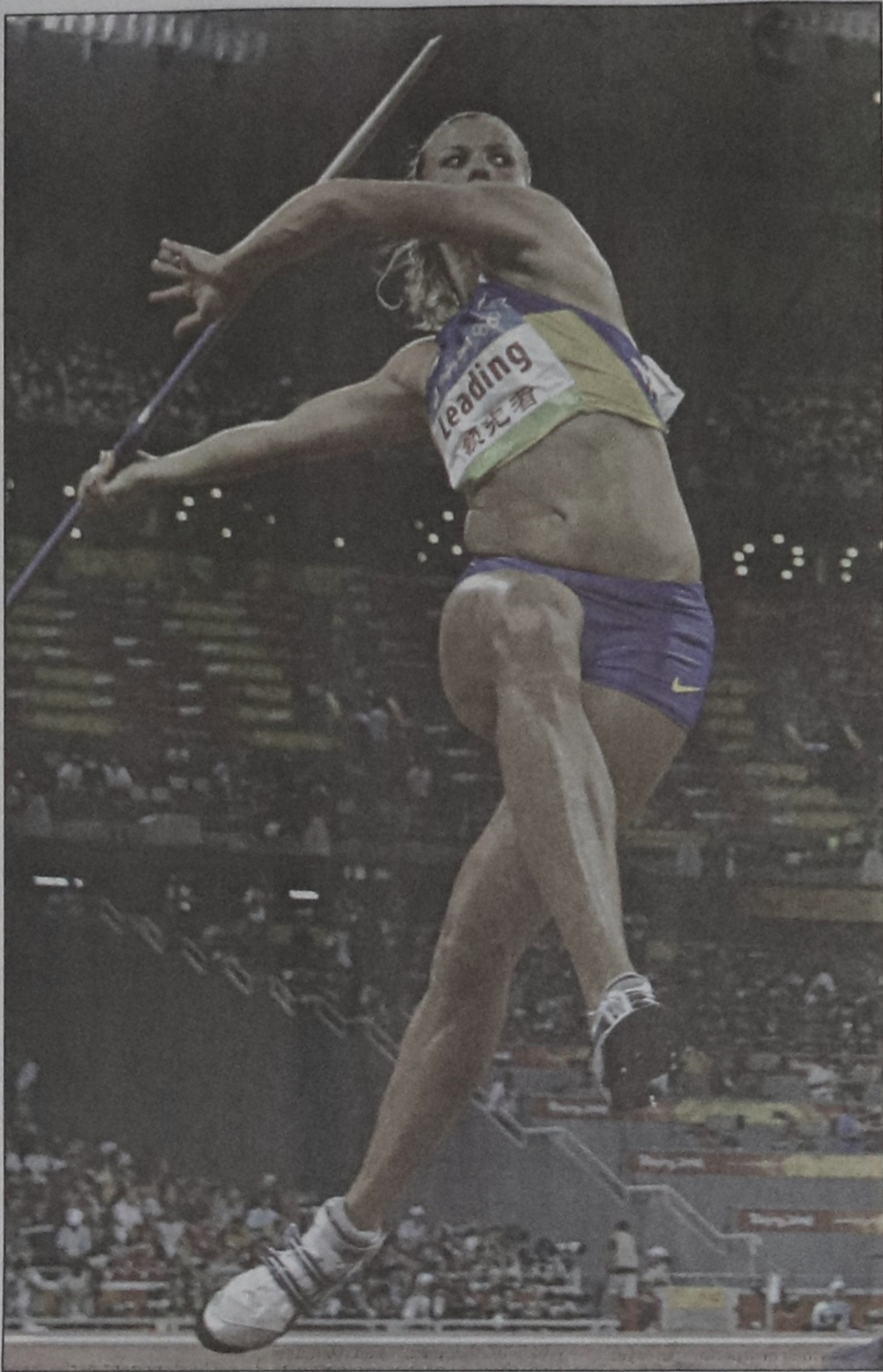
US President George W. Bush on Sunday telephoned Michael Phelps and told the US Olympics swimming sensation "if you can handle eight gold medals, you can handle anything," the White House said.

"Laura and I are proud of you. Our family is proud of you, but most importantly, America is proud of you," Bush, who was here on his Texas ranch, told Phelps, whose eight gold medals at a single Games are unmatched.

"We're excited for you. You handled yourself with humility. Give your mom a big hug for me. 41 and I were honoured to get a picture with her," Bush said, referring to his father, George Bush, the 41st US president.

They spoke after Phelps, 23, overtook compatriot Mark Spitz, whose seven swimming golds at Munich in 1972 were the most at a single Games.

Phelps, competing in his third Olympics, took his total of Olympic titles to a record 14, including six from Athens, where he also claimed two bronze.



Ukraine's Nataliia Dobrynska competes during the javelin event of the women's heptathlon in the Beijing 2008 Olympics at the Bird's Nest on Saturday. She won the heptathlon gold.

Oh no! not again!

INTERNET, undated

Matthew Emmons once again missed out on an Olympic gold medal in unusual circumstances Sunday as the American inexplicably fired a 4.4 in his final round of the men's 50-metre rifle three positions competition to finish fourth. Emmons held a clear lead of 3.3 points going into the last round but just as in Athens four years ago, when he shot at the wrong target in the same discipline and ended up finishing eighth, the 26-year-old blew his chances with a moment of madness, this time failing to even hit the black part of the target.

China's Qiu Jian went on to take gold with a total of 1272.5 points for the three shooting positions of prone, standing and kneeling with silver going to Ukraine's Jury Sukhorukov and bronze to Rajmond Debevec of Slovenia.

Emmons' Czech wife Katerina, who won the first gold medal of the Beijing Games in the women's 10m air rifle and followed it up with silver in the 50m rifle, could only look on in horror from the stands. She later went down to console her husband.

"I can't explain my new black-out but three medals (from Beijing) in the family is okay," said Emmons who won gold in the prone in Athens four years ago as well as silver in the same event on Friday.

China 5 for 5 in diving

INTERNET, undated

China's Guo Jingling became the most prolific women's diving medalist in Olympic history on Sunday when she retained her three-metre springboard crown.

Guo completed her second successive Olympic golden double when she added the individual springboard gold to the synchronised springboard title she shared with Wu Minxia the previous Sunday.

Guo, who now plans to retire with four Olympic diving golds plus two silvers from the 2000 Games, amassed 415.35 points from her five final dives to take China's sweep of Beijing diving titles to five, with three events to come.

European champion Yulia Pakhalina of Russia, bronze medalist in 2004, moved up to silver with 398.60. Wu, silver medalist in 2004, took bronze with 389.85.

Romero creates history

CYCLING
AFP, Beijing

Britain's Rebecca Romero made Olympic history here Sunday when she became just the second woman to claim medals in two different sports at the summer Games.

England's Romero dominated an all-British track cycling individual pursuit final to leave Wendy Houvenaghel of Northern Ireland with the silver medal after posting a winning time of three minutes 28.32 seconds for the three-kilometre event.

Lesya Kalitovska of the Ukraine defeated New Zealand's Alison Shanks to win the bronze medal.

Romero's was the first Olympic gold medal for Britain in the event, and came a day after Bradley Wiggins successfully defended his individual pursuit crown in the men's four-kilometre race.

Romero's win, five months after her maiden world title, meant Britain had now claimed an impressive four gold medals from five of what will

ultimately be a total of 10 finals.

British riders have also now won eight of the 15 medals up for grabs so far.

Romero, who won an Olympic rowing silver four years ago in the women's quadruple sculls, follows in the footsteps of Roswitha Krause of the former East Germany.

Krause won a swimming silver at the 1968 Games in Mexico from the women's 4x100m relay, then won silver in the women's handball final at the 1976 Games in Montreal and handball bronze at Moscow in 1980.

The 28-year-old Romero admitted there was no way she was settling for silver this time.

"I'd have been absolutely crushed if I got the silver," said Romero, who only took up cycling seriously in 2006 after giving up rowing due to a recurring back problem.

"It's taken for me to come into cycling to realise my full athletic potential," she added.

Houvenaghel only took up cycling six years ago, but won world championship bronze in the individual pursuit and gold in the non-Olympic team event at Manchester in March.

Formerly an amateur cross-country runner, she discovered a talent for time-trialling in 2002 not long after she had run the London Marathon for the first time in April of that year.

Although being pushed into road time-trialling by her cycling enthusiast husband, she was inspired to take up track cycling after she saw Scotland's Chris Hoy win gold in the kilometre at Athens in 2004.

Romero set out to make up for her "disappointing" silver rowing medal from Athens in defiant fashion.

Although Houvenaghel led over the first couple of laps of the 250-metre track, the Northern Irishwoman was soon playing catch-up.

Romero led after the first kilometre, and held her pace over the next four laps to virtually seal the gold. Houvenaghel raced a faster third lap but by then it was too late.

The 33-year-old Houvenaghel finished just over two seconds behind and, even as Romero screamed out in joy as she brandished a Union Jack flag, still had a huge smile on her face.



Great Britain's track cyclist Rebecca Romero displays her individual pursuit final gold in the Beijing 2008 Olympics at the Laoshan Velodrome in Beijing yesterday.

I freaked out, says Sullivan

INTERNET, undated

Australia swim star Eamon Sullivan says he "freaked out" when his goggles slipped as he crashed to a heartbreaking sixth in the Olympic 50m freestyle.

In a cruel irony, the deposed sprint king will return to Perth with both the 50m and 100m freestyle world records -- but without the gold medals he craved.

"Maybe I dived too deep at the start or maybe (the goggles) were too loose, but I got water in them," Sullivan said.

"That freaked me out a bit. I've never swum without vision before, but that's no excuse."

"I may have tried too hard. That happens sometimes when you are trying to prove something."

Sullivan was philosophical about coming home without either of the individual golds for which he was rated a huge chance.

"I'm almost glad it's nearly over," he said.

"I had a great start to the meet and a not so great end."

"I just have to learn from this and make sure it doesn't happen again."

Sullivan finished the one-lap splash and dash, won by Brazilian Cesar Cielo Filho, in 21.65sec, 0.37sec outside his world record.

Sullivan's Olympic dream of individual gold is now on hold until London in 2012, when he will be 26 and in his sprinting prime.

Slovenia cheer with Kozmus

AFP, Beijing

Slovenia's Primoz Kozmus picked up his country's first Olympic Games gold medal in men's track and field competition when he won the hammer final at Beijing's National Stadium on Sunday.

Kozmus threw a best of 82.02m to claim gold with Vadim Devyatovskiy from Belarus taking silver, with a throw of 81.61m, while compatriot Ivan Tsikhan, the triple world champion, took bronze with 81.51m.

It is the first time a Slovenian male athlete has won Olympic gold in track and field competition.

Before Sunday night's final, the best result the 28-year-old Kozmus had managed in major competition was silver at last year's world championships in Osaka.

Kozmus bolted into an early lead with his second round throw of 82.02 metres, a season's best, which catapulted him into first place and he consolidated his lead with four throws just over the 80m mark.

Beyond all borders

SWIMMING
JOE POSNANSKI

I keep staring at this photograph. Above me, the crowd is still cheering, still standing, still trying to find the words that match the emotions of watching Michael Phelps win his eighth gold medal of these Olympics. Impossible? Incredible? Unthinkable? It's like Phelps has forced the thesaurus into early retirement.

I keep staring at this photograph because it's the closest I can get to the heart of all this. Sure, I can tell you the facts of the day. On Sunday morning in Beijing, Michael Phelps swam the butterfly leg of the United States 400-metrel relay. In the medley relay, each country has four swimmers, and each swims 100 meters of a different stroke - backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle. It is a race that really tests a nation's depth of swimming talent. The United States had never lost Olympic gold.

When Phelps dived into the pool, the United States was in third place, a half second behind the leader. When he finished his 100-meters, the United States was in first place. That's Michael Phelps. His teammate Jason Lezak took the lead and swam the last 100-meters, brought home the gold, finished off another world record. And that gave Phelps eight gold medals for these Games, one more gold than American swimmer Mark Spitz won in 1972, more gold than anyone thought possible.

"Some many people thought it couldn't be done," Phelps would say moments after the race. "All it takes is some imagination."

Well, it may take a bit more than that. Winning eight gold medals in a single Olympics also takes a single mom in Baltimore, Debbie, who is a principal of a middle school and has dedicated her life to her son's athletic genius. It takes a driven coach, Bob Bowman, who can see what's

possible and wants to push those limits. It takes a 6-foot-4 young man with a 79-inch wingspan and the unimaginable drive to swim countless hours and eat 12,000 calories every day and handle the most intense pressure an athlete can feel.

And it also takes being part of the world's best swimming team - three of Phelps' eight medals came in relays. Individually, sure, he won the 200- and 400-meter individual medleys, the 100- and 200-meter butterfly and the 200-meter freestyle. That's remarkable enough, but that would not have stopped the world.

No, it was being part of those three winning relays - all three in world record time - that pushed Phelps' achievement from sublime to historic.

And still, I keep staring at this photograph. True, you could try to explain Phelps' triumph by using pure numbers. He's only 23, but he has now won 14 gold medals in his career, which is four more than any Olympian ever, which is more than 181 different countries that have competed at the Olympics, including Mexico (pop. About 108 million), India (about 1.1 billion) and Nigeria (about 120 million).

He has now won 16 medals overall, which is also the most for any Olympian. After the race on Sunday, FINA - the governing body for swimming - gave Phelps a special medal for his extraordinary achievements. That is just what he needed. He is also now either the sole owner or a part of seven world records and eight Olympic records.

True, you could try to explain Phelps' achievement by pointing out that in Olympic competition alone he swam more than two miles in the four disciplines. The sheer endurance it takes to win eight swimming gold medals at an Olympics is overwhelming; Melvin Stewart, a former Olympic champion in the 200-meter butterfly, compared it to someone trying to win gold medal in the



PROUD MOTHER: Deborah Phelps (L), mother of Michael Phelps, reacts after her son won the men's 4x100m medley relay gold in the Beijing 2008 Olympics at the National Aquatics Centre yesterday.

Phelps' tribute to Spitz

SWIMMING
AFP, Beijing

Michael Phelps paid tribute to Mark Spitz after breaking his fellow US swimming legend's record of seven gold medals at a single Olympics, saying it had provided the inspiration he needed to keep going through day after day of grueling training.

Spitz's mark, a record across all Olympic sports, had stood for 36 years since his stunning display at the 1972 Games in Munich.

But a statistic many considered would never be surpassed was topped on Sunday by Phelps, after he played his part in the victorious American 4x100 metres medley relay team to win his eighth gold in Beijing, seven of which were achieved in world record times.

Responding to a reporter quoting Spitz's comment that

while what he had done in 1972 was the equivalent of being the first man on the Moon then what his successor had achieved made him "the first man on Mars", Phelps simply said: "Records are always made to be broken, no matter what they are."

"Anyone can do anything they want if they really want to," he added.

"I've said all along I want to be the 'first' Michael Phelps not the 'second' Mark Spitz."

"Never once will I downplay his accomplishments by any means. What he did is still an amazing feat and will always be an amazing feat in the swimming world and the Olympics."

Phelps added: "To have something like that to shoot for, it made those days when you were tired and wanted to go home and sleep and not train, it made those days easier and say 'I want to do this'."

"It's something I wanted to do and I'm thankful to him (Spitz) for doing what he did."

Badminton gold for China

INTERNET, undated

China's Lin Dan of China won the Olympic gold medal in the men's singles badminton on Sunday in a lopsided match against Lee Chong Wei of Malaysia.

Top seeded Lin controlled the first game against the number two seed with accurate net play and leaping smashes to win 21-12.

In the second, Lee never had a chance as world number one Lin gained an 8-0 lead and never looked back. By the break Lee had only managed one point when Lin hit a shot into the net.

After winning the second game 21-8 Lin, a member of China's army, fell to the court, then jumped up pumping his fists in the air before giving his trademark victory salute.

The badminton phenomenon known in China as "Super Dan" then tossed his racquet and shoes to screaming fans in the stands, before grabbing a Chinese flag and holding it around his neck like a cape.

Lee's silver was Malaysia's fourth-ever Olympic medal, and second silver. The country has never won a gold.

China's Chen Jin won the bronze.