



## High profile doping hits Games

AP, Beijing

Lyudmila Blonska of Ukraine is under investigation for a positive doping test and could be stripped of her silver medal in the Olympic heptathlon and banned for life.

The International Olympic Committee said Wednesday it has opened a disciplinary procedure into Blonska, who finished second behind fellow Ukrainian Natalia Dobrynska last Saturday.

The IOC disciplinary commission and executive board are expected to rule on the case Thursday. If found guilty of doping, Blonska would become a repeat offender and face a lifetime ban from the sport.

The 30-year-old Ukrainian served a doping suspension for the steroid stanozolol between 2003-05.

An athletics official close to the investigation said Blonska's "A" sample in Beijing tested positive for an anabolic steroid. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the probe was ongoing, including testing of the backup "B" sample.

If the second sample proves positive, "she will be suspended for life," Lamine Diack, the president of the International Association of Athletics Federations, said in an interview. "Over and done with."

Diack said he had been notified of the positive result by Gabriel Dolle, the director of the IAAF's medical and anti-doping department.



Japanese gymnasts train on the eve of the opening of the rhythmic gymnastics event of the Beijing Olympics 2008 yesterday.

## Pain engulfs Ronaldinho

INTERNET, undated

"The pain is so great I cannot explain it" was Ronaldinho's summary of Brazil's 3-0 defeat to Argentina in the semifinals of the Beijing Olympics. Brazil's national team captain, was gone for hours after the game played late Tuesday in Beijing. Having taken a doping test he then tried to avoid reporters and for explanations of the game that buried Brazil's dream of getting its first-ever Olympic football gold.

However, he was eventually cornered by Brazilian television on Wednesday.

"It is hard to face a situation like that against Argentina," he admitted.

Ronaldinho was also part of Brazil's Olympic team in Sydney 2000, when they crashed in the quarterfinals to Cameroon.

At the time, he was one of the youngest players in the squad. Now he is the most veteran and the captain, and as such he stresses that there is no time for regrets.

"My role as captain is to try to motivate the group and that is what I will do. Our goal was to seek the gold medal. Unfortunately we could not do it, and now we have to lift our heads up and keep going."

Brazil left the Olympic Village in Beijing Wednesday, to travel to Shanghai ahead of Friday's match for bronze against Belgium.

Ronaldinho's teammates agreed with him.

"It is a great pain not to have reached an Olympic final. But we still have the chance to achieve something in the Games, at least the bronze medal," the goalkeeper Renan told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

PHOTO: AFP

## Being there is all-important

INTERNET, undated

Some countries competing in the Beijing Olympics have worked years to get here and for them, while no medals are in the picture, just being here makes them proud. The Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, for example, are two small countries in the Pacific which are participating in the Olympics for the first time.

"For us, it's taken half a century to get here," said Anthony Muller, chef de mission for the Marshalls. "You have to be at all the regional, subregional and world tournaments."

His country's Olympic committee sent five athletes, while others, like Nauru, sent only one.

While some athletes are invited by the International Olympic Committee to participate because the IOC reserves spots in track and field and other sports for athletes from small countries who performed well in tournaments, others are here solely on merit - meaning they are among the best in the world.

Some of these athletes ranked among the top 10 in the Olympics while others came close to clinching medals - not small accomplishments considering that they are lucky to have an annual training budget of 100,000 dollars, compared to millions of dollars for big countries.

Dika Toua from Papua New Guinea took 8th place in the women's 53kg weightlifting competition while her countryman Ryan Pini made it to the finals in the 100 meter men's butterfly, swimming in the same pool as Michael Phelps and coming in 8th.

The pressure for athletes in small countries can be intense.

About half of the 180,000 population in Western Samoa was watching when Ele Opeloge, 22, was competing in the +75kg women's weightlifting category. She dropped the 150kg weights one second too early and improperly when she felt a sharp pain in her back. In the final rankings, she lost out by only one kilogram to the eventual bronze medal winner.

"It's one of those things. We had it, but we lost it," Opeloge said, looking disappointed and almost ashamed.

But following an outpouring of support from family, friends and fans, she added: "The main thing is to come here for the Games. It's a privilege to come here. Not just anyone can come to the Olympics."

For small countries, the biggest challenge is not lack of talent, but insufficient funding and support for domestic sports programmes, delegates said.

The government provides no

funding in some countries, so they must rely on scholarships from the IOC or donations from local businesses.

The lack of or insufficient sports facilities is also hindering some athletes from training at the elite level.

"You have a lot of athletes who have potential but not facilities. We don't have track and field, we are currently running on grass fields," said Terry Sasser, secretary general of the Marshall Islands' National Olympic Committee.

This forces many athletes who do have the ambition to go to the Olympics to train for months or years overseas, away from their families.

Strengthening sports programmes will not only benefit Olympic athletes and aspirants, it will help youngsters in these countries, he and others said.

"Sports has an immediate impact on these countries. We can have a basketball court and crime immediately goes down," said Sasser.

Athletes in smaller countries often come from humble backgrounds.

"Most of the athletes we have, they work in their family's farms growing taro, coconuts, bananas and pineapples," said Sebastian

Kolhase, chef de mission for Western Samoa, which sent six athletes to the Beijing Olympics.

"We as the sporting body raise funds for them, but they still have to contribute for uniforms and other expenses."

Some like taekwondo athlete Anju Jason from the Marshalls work full-time in a Chinese restaurant to support himself and pay for training.

Chinese sports fans in recent days launched a campaign online to show support for Iraqi athletes after one athlete told local media she risked her life to buy a pair of running shoes in a second hand market in Jordan, The Beijing News said.

Internet surfers donated their Olympic souvenirs, Chinese ornamental knots and other gifts to Iraq's athletes and coaches, the papers said.

One blogger was quoted by the paper saying: "We should award a gold medal to Iraq because they have shown the Olympic spirit. They are true champions."

Even athletes who did not come here on merit said the experience of competing with top athletes from around the world taught them a lot.

"If there are world championships, I want to compete; I want to push myself," said Hadley Kerson, a swimmer from the Federated States of Micronesia.

They are true champions.

## Bryant was in attendance

INTERNET, Beijing

US basketball superstar Kobe Bryant - a self-proclaimed fan of Argentina's Lionel Messi and Brazil's Ronaldinho - watched from the stands of the Workers' Stadium in Beijing Tuesday, as Argentina beat Brazil 3-0 in the semifinals of the Olympic football tournament. "He (Bryant) looked forward to this match all week. He was eager to see Messi playing again, also Ronaldinho," Dream Team spokesman Brian McIntyre told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

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## Johnson all praise for Bolt

ATHLETICS

AFP, Beijing

Usain Bolt's 100-meter world record triumph was the greatest race Michael Johnson has ever seen, the US legend said Wednesday, and the 200m and 400m world record-holder has watched quite a few.

Jamaican star Bolt lowered his own 100m world record to 9.69 seconds with his blowout Olympic victory Saturday and was set to attempt to complete a sensational sprint double by taking the 200 on Wednesday.

"It was the most impressive athletics performance I've ever seen in my life," Johnson said. "I certainly expected him to win. I can't say I expected him to win that fast or separate himself from the field so much."

"It was an incredible performance," Johnson said. "It's being addressed," said Johnson. "Fans