



WE'VE DONE IT: United States' Misty May-Treanor (R) and Kerri Walsh celebrate their victory over China in the women's beach volleyball final at Beijing's Chaoyang Park Beach Volleyball Ground yesterday. The US team won 2-0.

Not really a Bolt from the blue

ATHLETICS

AP, Beijing

Usain Bolt's eyes darted to check the numbers on the trackside clock once, twice, three times, more.

For the only time in eight races at these Olympics, Bolt was really trying gritting his teeth, pumping his arms, churning his golden spikes with those long, long legs. In the closing steps of the 200-metre final Wednesday night, with no other runner nearby, Bolt trained those mischief-loving eyes on the bright numbers he knew would ultimately define what already was a sublime performance.

And so he lunged at the finish. Yes, all alone out front, 25 feet clear of the nearest competitor, his second gold medal of the Beijing Games assured; the Jamaican dipped his head and thrust his 6-foot-5 frame through the last step of a sprint as special as the world has seen. Bolt leaned forward as if trying to edge an opponent who'd matched him stride for stride.

Just past the line, Bolt twisted his torso and turned his head around for one more glance at those numbers. Like everyone else who was watching, Bolt needed to be sure HE could believe what he saw.

The final tally on that clock was

truly astounding. Bolt's time of 19.30 seconds broke the world record of 19.32 set by Michael Johnson at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, a world record that so many were sure would last far longer than it did.

"I just blew my mind," Bolt said, "and blew the world's mind."

He lifted his arms, then fell on his back, exhausted and exhilarated.

The milestone was magical.

The moment, too.

The medal? Consider this one of those once-in-a-generation instances at an Olympics where it was an afterthought, even if Bolt did put himself alongside US swimmer Michael Phelps the man with a record eight golds in Beijing in forging one of the lasting memories from these Summer Games.

Even if Bolt is the first man since Carl Lewis in 1984 to win the 100 and 200 golds at a single Olympics, and the only man ever to do it by breaking world records in both.

"I was, like, looking at myself."

Bolt said of checking out the overhead video scoreboards, "and I was like, 'That guy's fast!'

The official results show that seven other men, including Shawn Crawford and Kim Collins, Walter Dix and Wallace Spearmon, were also competing this day, were also trotting that same Bird's Nest track, were also running as hard as they could, nearly as fast as anyone ever has.

Crawford was the defending Olympic champion. Collins was the 2003 world champion. Dix won a bronze in the 100 behind Bolt on Saturday. Spearmon owns two world championship medals in the 200 and ranked as the fourth-fastest man in the distance's history, faster than Bolt's previous best of 19.67 until Wednesday.

No one provided a challenge.

Heck, no one finished within a half-second, an eternity in a race of this length.

And after two runners, Churandy Martina of Netherlands Antilles and Spearmon of the United States, were disqualified for running out of their lanes, the official results had silver medalist Crawford of the U.S. behind by 0.66 second, the biggest margin of victory in a 200 final at any Olympics. The DQs left Dix, another American, with bronze.

"I've been dreaming of this since I was a year high," Bolt said. "So it means a lot more to me actually than the 100 means."

Even before the race's halfway point, when Bolt held a big lead that he was padding with each stride, it was quite clear that he really was racing against the men who long ago proved their excellence and set the sport's standards.

Men such as Johnson, Or Lewis, Or Jesse Owens, who also pulled off the 100-200 double.

None of them was as tall as Bolt, who is turning what once was thought to be a liability in sprinting into an asset.

"He got an incredible start. Guys of 6-5 should not be able to start like that," Johnson said. "It's that long, massive stride. He's eating up so much more track than others. He came in focused, knowing he would likely win the gold and he's got the record."

That size is what the experts point to when asked how it is, exactly, that the man who calls himself "Lightning Bolt" could be so darn fast and could improve so well, fast.

"It's his anatomy. He's just blessed with an uncanny frame, an uncanny quickness, a huge competitive heart," said Renaldo Nehemiah, the former world record-holding hurdler. "And he is having a good time, which I think our sport sorely needs to see: people enjoying themselves, having a good time. And he recognized the responsibility of seizing the moment and he did it."

Said Crawford: "He's revolutionized things."

Which is why Bolt found himself running against the clock, against those numbers that kept scrolling. After showboating his way to lowering his own world record to 9.69 in the 100 final arms outstretched, slap to the chest and taking it easy in heats for both of his individual events, he had vowed to finally push himself Wednesday.

"I told myself, 'If I'm going to get this record, it's going to be here, because the track is really fast,'" he said. "I told myself, 'I'm going to go out there and give it my all,' and I went out there and just left everything on the track."

This time, he saved all of the emoting for after the race blowing kisses to the fans, swaying his body to the reggae music on the stadium loudspeakers, walking barefoot around the track, putting his face inches from a TV camera, raising an index finger and yelling, "I am No. 1! I am No. 1!"

As if anyone, track fan or not, anywhere in the world needed to be reminded.

Amid all of his pre- and post-race mugging and preening for the cameras, he repeatedly pointed to or popped out his yellow jersey with "Jamaica" written across the chest. That Caribbean island of 2.8 million is now 3-for-3 in the sprints at these Summer Games. Sherry-Ann Fraser won the women's 100 Sunday and collected another gold on the track with Melaine Walker's victory in the women's 400-meter hurdles Wednesday.

Bolt grew up in the same Yamming Trelawny parish that Ben Johnson was born before moving to Canada. Johnson, as everyone knows, crossed the line ahead of Lewis in the 100 final at the 1988 Seoul Olympics in what would have been a world-record time of 9.79. But Johnson failed a drug test and was stripped of his gold medal and record.

There are sure to be cynics who will question Bolt's emergence. He credits his improvement over the past few months including first breaking the 100 record in May to rededicating himself to training and made a point of partying less.

"I told myself, 'If I'm going to get this record, it's going to be here, because the track is really fast,'" he said. "I told myself, 'I'm going to go out there and give it my all,' and I went out there and just left everything on the track."

Churandy Martina of the Dutch Antilles spoke Thursday of his disappointment at losing out on a silver medal for stepping out of his lane in the men's 200 metres final but vowed to put the incident behind him. The sprinter was disqualified an hour after the race Wednesday night following a protest by the United States. Earlier, American Wallace Spearmon was also disqualified for the same offence after initially being placed third. Jamaica's Usain Bolt won the race in a new world record time of 19.30 seconds.

"I was very happy when I won the medal, I ran fast," Martina told a news conference.

"Then they told me they sent a protest in and I lost my medal. I was very disappointed but I can't do much. I stepped on the line and they saw it. It's bad for me I guess and good for them."

As a result of Martina's disqualification, the US ended up with Shawn Crawford and Walter Dix in the silver and bronze medal positions but the decision by the US to lodge a protest was immediately criticised by the tiny Caribbean island nation's sports minister, Omayra Leeflang.

"It is not in the spirit of the Olympics," he said. "It is a pity for big country like the US to make such a small statement."

Before Wednesday's race, track officials said Bolt had been drug-tested 11 times in 2008, including four since July 27. None has come back positive.

Shortly before the race, standing on the warm-up track near the Bird's Nest, Bolt unleashed a wide yawn, as though thinking, "Let's get this thing started."

Wearing black track pants, a yellow T-shirt and the sort of regular sneakers you use to mow the lawn, he took a comfortable jog down a straightaway, putting forth about the same amount of effort he expended in the latter stages of the seven races he ran over the preceding five days.

He'll be the first to tell you he isn't big on taxing workouts. That, remember, is why Bolt persuaded his coach to let him add the 100 and not the draining, full-lap 400 to his specialty the 200.

Hours later, as Wednesday melted into Thursday, which just so happens to be Bolt's 22nd birthday, he wasn't preparing to party.

No, the guy who rightfully can call himself the "World's Fastest Man" and the "World's Greatest Sprinter" had something else in mind, something he wanted to make sure he did before thinking one bit about chasing a third gold in the 400 relay final Friday. Slowing down.

"I've written history, pretty much," Bolt said. "I just want to chill out. I just want to sleep. I wish I was in sandals right now."

The world champion overtook Russian Maria Abakumova whose 70.78 metre throw proved only to be good enough for a silver medal. Germany's Christina Obergföll took the bronze medal with her throw of 66.13 metres.

Spotakova, watched by Czech triple Olympic gold medallist Jan Zelezny, the man credited with encouraging her to quite heptathlon to focus on the javelin, said she

ATHLETICS

INTERNET, undated

Barbara Spotakova of the Czech Republic won the women's javelin gold medal Thursday with a dramatic last throw of 71.42 metres that left her shocked by her own success.

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ATHLETICS

INTERNET, undated

President Hamid Karzai awarded a house to Afghanistan's first Olympic medallist, Rohullah Nikpai, a presidential aid said Thursday, while a trading firm gave the taekwondo athlete a new car.

The 21-year-old Nikpai won a bronze medal in Beijing on Wednesday, beating world champion Juan Antonio Ramos of Spain 4-1 in a play-off final.

His victory has dominated the country's media, with over a dozen private television stations showing pictures of him bringing his rival to his knees.

President Karzai called Nikpai, who is due home next Wednesday, after his victory and praised him for bringing pride to his home country.

"The president awarded him a house" in Kabul, presidential spokesman Homayun Hamidzada told AFP. "The president will receive him after he returns home."

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who is visiting war-torn nation, congratulated Afghanistan on the accomplishment during a press conference Thursday.

record holder, was never in serious contention for a medal and ended in sixth place behind German Steffi Nerius and Britain's Goldie Sayers.

Russian Abakumova, a 22-year-old and relative newcomer, was agonisingly close to a surprise gold.

"There were so many thoughts in my head saying 'Is this my day, can I be the gold medalist?' They kept popping up until the very last moment," said silver medalist Abakumova.

"I gave it my all and I'm satisfied with my result," she said.

PHOTO: AFP



GOLDEN ARM: Czech Republic's Barbara Spotakova is about to dispatch the spear during the women's javelin throw final in the Beijing 2008 Olympics at the National Stadium yesterday. The Czech won the gold with a best throw of 71.42 metres.



COSTLY LET-OFF: Darvis Patton of the United States (R) hands the baton to Tyson Gay (front-C) before it was dropped during the men's first round 4x100m relay heat in Beijing 2008 Olympics at the National Stadium yesterday. The drop of the baton meant a first round exit of US relay team from the competition.

ATHLETICS

AP, Beijing

With the clank of a baton, the American track team suffered an unexpected disappointment Thursday night at the Olympics.

Another disappointment, that is.

Darvis Patton and Tyson Gay misconnected on the final pass in preliminaries of the 400-meter relay, knocking the U.S. team out and meaning Gay will leave Beijing not just empty-handed, but with-outeven running in a final.

"I take full blame for it," Gay said. "I kind of feel I let them down."

Had they advanced, the Americans may not have been favoured to win gold considering the world records Jamaica's Usain Bolt has set in the 100 and 200 over the past week at the Bird's Nest. Still, it would have been an interesting race.

Not anymore.

And yet another gold medal opportunity slipped away for the American team.

Moments before the relay, American Allyson Felix finished

second behind Jamaica's Veronica Campbell-Brown in the women's 200, adding her name to a long list of U.S. women who have failed.

Felix (200), Gay (100), Bernard Lagat (1,500), Brad Walker (pole vault) and Rees Hoffa (shot put) are American world champions who failed to win gold in their events this year. Lolo Jones and Sanya Richards were other American favourites who came up short.

Indeed, Gay may not have even been running in the first round had he done better in the men's 100. But he failed to make it out of semifinals a stunner of sorts and a sign that the hamstring he hurt at Olympic trials may not be fully healed.

Gay skipped the American training camp in Dalian, China, earlier this month where the team spent two long sessions working on handoffs. American coaches said it was no big deal. Gay said he and Patton worked on exchanges in Beijing and didn't miss a single handoff in practice.

Patton said he was every bit as much to blame.

"That's Tyson Gay. He's a humble guy, but I know it's my job to get the guy the baton and I didn't do that."

Patton leaned over and retrieved the stick. He got to the baton and then walked away. Then he didn't do that.

After gold, time for family

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

AP, Beijing

Kerri Walsh celebrated her second straight Olympic gold medal with her husband, Casey Jennings, a fellow beach volleyball pro who failed to qualify for the Beijing Games but made the trip anyway to cheer on his wife.

Misty May-Treanor, Walsh's teammate, hadn't even talked to her husband an hour after their victory, let alone seen him.

"I'd like to see my husband for more than a day," May-Treanor said Thursday after she and Walsh played through a driving rainstorm to beat China and repeat their victory in Athens. "It would be nice to walk in the door and say, 'Honey, what's for dinner,' instead of having to make food for myself."

Walsh is eager to return, but she has the advantage of working with her husband. May-Treanor wonders about the demands of motherhood and how it will fit with the pro tour and the Olympic qualification process.

"I'm not done, and I hope Misty isn't done yet, either," Walsh said. "I can't imagine playing without her."

The former Misty May is married to Matt Treanor, who is a catcher for the Florida Marlins and thus spends most of his summer playing and travelling, just like his wife. The two usually spend just a few days together from February to November, when both sports are in season, and that more than anything else could break up the most dominant pair in the history of women's beach volleyball.

"I want to talk to my husband," May-Treanor mock-whined. "It's

not easy. I wouldn't wish it on anybody. But it's the careers we have and we have to make the best of it."

May-Treanor finally got to talk to her husband when she was going through standard post-match drug testing. He told her he was able to watch the gold medal match over the Internet from the visitor's bullpen in San Francisco, where the Marlins were playing the Giants; he did not play. She said he "cried like a little baby."

Treanor told reporters after the Marlins game, "It's been hectic."

"It's been a long road," he said. "What she did was special. I don't think that's a record that will ever be broken. You can say they are the best ever at beach volleyball."

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