



Yuan Xiaochao of China poses on the podium after winning the first gold of the Games in men's Wushu Changquan competition at the yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

China stamp authority

AFP, Guangzhou



Hosts China made clear who was boss on the opening day of the Asian Games Saturday by claiming 19 of the 28 gold medals on offer, including its 1,000th since first competing in 1974.

The sporting extravaganza, the most ambitious Asiad so far with some 10,000 athletes from 45 countries and territories vying for gold in 42 sports, kicked into gear after a spectacular ceremony opened the massive showpiece.

China's Yuan Xiaochao took the first honours, ensuring his name goes down in the history books as the first gold medal winner in Guangzhou by successfully defending the men's Changquan title in wushu.

It was the first of 476 golds to be decided over two weeks of competition, with China heavily favoured to top the medal table. South Korea and Japan should battle for second.

"I'm so happy to have won the first gold medal of the Games and I appreciate my coach's help. I will make it up to him by working even harder," said Yuan, who has aspirations of becoming a martial arts film star.

Swimmer Zhu Qianwei also made history by claiming China's 1,000th Asian Games gold, a feat no other nation has achieved.

The landmark was reached when she won the women's 200 metres freestyle, 36 years after China first competed in an Asiad at Tehran in 1974.

They have progressively become more dominant over the years, culminating in winning 165 golds at the last Games in Doha four years ago.

"To get this kind of achievement in my first Asian Games makes me very excited, especially in my home country," said Zhu, who was not aware of the milestone she had reached.

The pool glory went to China who won four gold to Japan's two, including victory in the women's 100m butterfly to Olympic silver medalist Jiao Liuyang.

China added to their haul on the Aoti shooting ranges, with Zhu Qinan making amends for his

bitter defeat in the Beijing Olympics. Zhu, the Athens Olympic champion who was reduced to tears after losing to India's Abhinav Bindra on home soil two years ago, hit back with a vengeance.

He won both the team and individual titles in the men's 10m Air Rifle competition as China picked up five of the six shooting golds on offer.

South Korea prevented a clean-sweep by the hosts by taking the team title in the men's 50m Pistol.

China also won all five titles in dance sport, a discipline making its Asiad bow.

But it wasn't just China enjoying success, with Hong Kong's Lee Wai Sze upsetting favourite Guo Shuang to win the first event of the track cycling, snatching victory in the 500m women's time trial.

The 29-year-old, the top ranked track cyclist in the time trial, individual sprint, keirin and team sprint disciplines, set a new Asian record of 33.945 seconds at the Guangzhou velodrome.

"I have been longing for this medal," said Lee. "I have been turning in good performances on a daily basis in training."

Japan added to their haul in the pool by Mariko Adachi easily winning the women's triathlon ahead of teammate Akane Tsuchihashi with South Korea's JangYun-Jung a distant third.

Elsewhere, Chinese showman Wu Jingbiao added the Asian Games men's -56kg weightlifting title to his world crown after outclassing her rivals to top the podiums in the women's -48kg.

China also won the men's gymnastics team final.

International cricket, meanwhile, was played on Chinese soil for the first time, with the hosts crushing Malaysia by 55 runs in a women's game.

China scored 116 for 6 in their 20 overs and Malaysia never threatened to reach their target in front of a disappointingly sparse crowd at the 4,800-capacity Guanggong Cricket Stadium.

"I don't know how far we will go in the competition but we will try our best to win," said Chinese skipper Wang Meng.



Zhu Qianwei of China competes on way to winning the women's 200m freestyle heat in the swimming event of the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou on November 13, 2010. Zhu won the gold medal in the final which was China's 1000th medal in the Asian Games. PHOTO: AFP

Siddikur slides down ladder

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman found life a bit harder at the top of golfing circuit as he finished round three of the Barclay's Open at sixty-fourth position on 1 over par 76 at the Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore yesterday.

Siddikur started the day at six under par at 14th tied on joint fifteenth position before play was stopped due to bad light on the previous day. He successfully finished the next four holes to make the third round cut of 72 players.

Australia's Adam Scott clung on to a one-shot lead over defending champion Ian Poulter of England and South Korea's Kang Kyung-Nam on the top of the leaderboard.

The six-million-dollar event is joint-sanctioned by the European Tour and Asian Tour with a first prize winner's cheque of one million dollars.

Vettel on Abu Dhabi pole

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Red Bull's title chasing Sebastian Vettel claimed pole position on Saturday for Sunday's championship-deciding season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, outpacing another title rival Briton Lewis Hamilton of McLaren by just 0.031 seconds.

Championship leader Fernando Alonso of Ferrari was third fastest just three-tenths of a second behind Hamilton with 2009 champion Briton Jenson Button fourth in the second McLaren, his presence ensuring an element of uncertainty in the fight for the title on Sunday.

Australian Mark Webber, better known for his race-craft than his qualifying, was the fifth fastest driver in the second Red Bull, the last of the four title contenders. He will share the third row of the grid with sixth-placed Brazilian Felipe Massa of Ferrari.

In a thrilling and dramatic finale to a tense qualifying session at the spectacular Yas Marina Circuit, Vettel managed to find the speed to resist a determined surge from a fired-up Hamilton who drove with real elan in his own charge for pole.

Rossi's Yamaha farewell

INTERNET

Valentino Rossi always knows how to capture a crowd's attention, and he did it again in Valencia by bidding farewell to Yamaha in style with his unique 'Bye, Bye Baby' T-shirt.

Grand Prix Legends is delighted to announce that a limited-edition run of the Italian MotoGP legend's 'Bye Bye Baby' T-shirt is now available to order online.

For any race fans that didn't catch the moment, Rossi wore this T-shirt on the podium following his final outing for FIAT Yamaha last weekend in Valencia. The 'Baby' in question is, of course, his beloved YZR-M1, on which he has scored 46 race victories and four world championships.

The T-shirt is going to be manufactured by Rossi's official clothing manufacturer, VR46, and will be released early in December.

There will only ever be one print run of this T-shirt, so numbers are going to be limited. If you want to own this piece of motorcycle history then you'd best move quickly, as they will all be snapped up.

NSU retain football title

SPORTS REPORTER

North South University (NSU) retained the Mentors' Inter-Private University Football title beating Independent University-Bangladesh (IUB) by 4-0 goals in the final at the Bir Shreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Hridoy scored on both sides of the breather while Biral and Shawon scored one each as NSU ran comfortable winners. The winners led the first half 3-0.

Reefat of NSU was adjudged the man-of-the-final while Biral the same team named the best player of the tournament. United International University received the fair play trophy.

Hosts rule pool too

AFP, Guangzhou



Swimming powerhouse China spelt out an ominous statement of intent on the opening night of action in the pool at the Asian Games on Saturday, taking four of the six gold on offer.

Hotly tipped for a tight battle with fierce rivals Japan, China won gold in the women's 200 metres freestyle, women's 100m butterfly and women's 50m breaststroke in the individual events.

They capped their night with a thrilling win over Japan -- who took the other two gold up for grabs -- in the women's 4x100m medley relay in front of fervent support from the home crowd at Guangzhou's Aoti Aquatics Centre.

Zhu Qianwei launched China's medals drive in style, clinching victory in the women's 200m freestyle and notching China's 1000th Asian Games gold in the process.

Zhu clocked 1:56.65 while compatriot Tang Yi was second and Japan's Hanae Ito took the bronze.

"I'm very happy to win the first gold in swimming at these Games. To get this kind of achievement in my first Asian Games makes me very excited, especially in my home country," said Zhu.

Olympic 200m butterfly silver medalist Jiao Liuyang won the women's 100m butterfly in 57.76 seconds, with Singapore's Tao Li taking silver and Japan's Yuka Kato winning bronze.

"First, I think that when an athlete wins two gold medals they should be happy and should smile," said Jiao, also part of the victorious relay team.

Wang Randi won the women's 50m breaststroke in 31.04 seconds, narrowly beating compatriot Zhao Jin, with Japan's Satomi

Suzuki in third.

"I am very lucky and extremely happy with the performance. The Guangzhou fans were very enthusiastic and encouraged and cheered for me," said Wang.

The final event of Saturday's action saw a tight battle between China and Japan in the women's 4x100m medley relay. Hong Kong took bronze.

China won in a time of 3:57.80, less than half a second ahead of Japan as the crowd roared Tang Yi down the final length. Other team members were Zhao Jing, Chen Huijia and Jiao Liuyang.

"I think we all swam well. I think the four of us had an excellent performance, we had confidence we could win and in the end we did this," Jiao said.

But Japan -- who finished level on 16 gold with China at the Doha Asian Games in 2006 -- also set down a marker, winning two gold of their own on Saturday.

Yuya Horihata took the men's 400m individual medley gold in a thrilling battle with China's Huang Chaosheng, winning by just 0.03 seconds, with Ken Takakuwa of Japan taking bronze.

"I was very impressed with the young Chinese swimmers, they are so good. But I strongly felt that I had to do something to get the Japanese swimmers going so I didn't give up," said Horihata.

Japan's second gold was won by Olympic bronze medalist Takeshi Matsuda in the men's 200m butterfly when he touched in 1:54.02, ahead of Ryusuke Sakata of Japan and China's Chen Yin.

China's Wu Peng was denied a third consecutive Asian Games gold by finishing fourth.

"Four years ago and eight years ago I was not able to win. It took eight years to finally win the gold medal so I am very satisfied," said Matsuda.

GUANGZHOU QUOTES

"It's the first time I've seen a cricket match. I'm a little interested but to be honest it's a bit boring."
- Student Zhen Zhilin, who listed his favourite sports as basketball and football, watching cricket make its bow in China.
"There's not a good soldier who doesn't want to be a general."
- Chinese Cricket Association secretary general Liu Rongyao on the women's team's ambitions to become world champions.
"Cricket has had enough of preaching to the converted. We want to get new people involved and people not just interested in the game but excited about it."
- Asian Cricket Council (ACC) spokesman Shahriar Khan.
"It's like thousands of pairs of eyes are on you and you are getting their energy. It's like

eggs are bursting"
- Lebanese wushu competitor Avedis Seropian
"We have prepared well through meditation. A good rest is all we need now."
- Thai snooker player Ratchapol Pu-Orm
"I was a hyper-active girl when I was very young. My mother wanted me to focus more, so she thought it would be good if I sailed."
- Cecilia Low of Singapore on her motivation for a life on the waves.
"We fall behind other teams in terms of height, but on the other hand we can move faster and are more flexible."
- Kwong Ngai Shing, the captain of Hong Kong's men's volleyball team
-- AFP

Federer inching towards Paris triumph

Tennis

REUTERS, Paris

Roger Federer showed glimpses of his brilliant best when he saw off Austrian Jurgen Melzer 6-1, 7-6 on Friday to reach the Paris Masters semifinals for the first time in his career.

It was also a good day for the French as unseeded Michael Llodra outfoxed Russian Nikolay Davydenko 7-5, 6-1 and 12th seed Gael Monfils knocked out number three Andy Murray 6-2, 2-6, 6-3.

Top seed Federer lost just three points on his serve in a 20-minute opening set, starting with an ace and following up with 17 more unanswered serves as he lined up a clash with Monfils.

Melzer read his opponent's serve better in the second set but made a big mistake in the tiebreak.

At 4-4 he netted an easy volley and Federer wrapped up victory with an ace and a service winner on the super-fast Bercy sports hall court.

"I can't say it's a relief to be in the last four but I'm happy," Federer told reporters. "I played a wonderful first set, being aggressive on the returns, serving really good. It was a perfect set."

Monfils also leaned on his big serve and a few inspired passing shots to prevail against Murray.

The Briton, who had finished his match with Croatian Marin Cilic late on Thursday night, now heads to London for the end-of-season ATP Finals which start on Nov. 21.

"I'm going to chill out for a few days ... and then try to get my body right for London," said Murray.

"When you get to bed at 3am the night before a match it's not ideal preparation." Backed by a loud partisan crowd, Monfils broke early in the first set and looked set for a straightforward win but Murray returned serve much better in the second.

Monfils then broke in the sixth game of the decider and bagged the win with a superb crosscourt passing shot.

Llodra followed his surprise win over Novak Djokovic by defeating Davydenko and next faces fourth seed Robin Soderling of Sweden who edged past Andy Roddick 7-5, 6-4.

The unseeded Llodra produced another fine display of attacking tennis to counter the 10th seed's pace from the baseline.

"It was not easy to confirm my victory against Djokovic (with another win). But I

Cricket's future in limbo

AFP, Guangzhou

Cricket's Asian Games' future was on a knife-edge Saturday when the organisers of the 2014 edition in South Korea failed to push through their bid to cut the sport from their programme.

Cricket, making its debut in Guangzhou, was targeted for the chop by the city of Incheon but the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) wants it retained because of its TV appeal.

The issue will now be decided at an OCA executive board meeting in Muscat in December.

Asian Games cricket was played for the first time in China on Saturday with the hosts comfortably defeating Malaysia in the women's tournament, although only a small crowd gathered to witness the historic moment.

Cricket was omitted from Incheon's list of events proposed for the 2014 Games when it was released on Thursday.

But Asian Cricket Council (ACC) spokesman Shahriar Khan told AFP it was "rude and presumptuous to suggest that cricket will not be part of the Asian Games anymore".

"We have heard nothing definite against cricket being part of the Games, but we do understand Korean concerns at the costing, facilities and support staff for a sport they know little about," he said on Friday.

"The ACC helped China financially and otherwise to get cricket off the ground in this country and we are ready to do the same in South Korea as well."

The OCA decided last year that the number of sports in future Games should not exceed 35, with 28 from the Olympic Games and a maximum of seven to reflect the sporting culture of Asia's five zones.

Incheon are hoping to include baseball, bowling, kabaddi, sepak takraw, softball, squash and wushu alongside the 28 sports on the list for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.



Switzerland's Roger Federer celebrates his first semifinal berth in the Paris Masters with a 6-1, 7-6 victory over Austria's Jurgen Melzer in the quarterfinal at the Bercy Omnisports Stadium on Friday. PHOTO: AFP