



'I won a bronze, not lost a gold'

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM from London

Yelena Isinbayeva clearly remembers the moment she began to ask herself the most basic and existential question of them all.

It was at a dinner following a Diamond League meet in Monaco and Isinbayeva was approached by an IAAF statistician who indulged her in conversation.

"The statistician told me that apart from Olympic gold medals that I had won, I had also managed to break the world record 28 times (30 now including her indoor records).

"At that point I began to ask myself, Why do this anymore? Why go on pole-vaulting? I have achieved everything that I had ever wanted to achieve."

So the Russian took a year-long sabbatical to figure herself out. London 2012 seemed like it might not happen, but then she met her old coach, Yevgeny Trofimov, again.

"He said to me, 'Yelena lets try again, lets try to go for gold once more.'"

And Isinbayeva listened. So despite a hole in her thigh that limited her preparation for the Games to just ten days, she decided to come to London to try to win gold in a sport she has made her own.

She failed, falling two short of her usual colour, but managed to capture a bronze medal. Isinbayeva was hardly disappointed though.

"I think you can say that I won this bronze, not lost a gold," she said when asked how bronze tasted after so many golds.

"Very tasteful. Honestly, the bronze

medal is like a gold," she said.

"In the past years since Beijing to London it was so difficult life for me. A lot of difficulties to overcome both physical and mental. I am just glad the Olympics are finished as it was so stressful."

It did indeed look like Isinbayeva was glad. For a champion, she did not seem disappointed at not having made gold and she was in a cheerful mood throughout the press conference, which was the last of a long day and went on past midnight local time.

Isinbayeva admitted that she had come to London to win gold, but the injury and the conditions made it difficult.

"The conditions today were extremely difficult, the weather was not just bad, it was terrible, absolutely terrible for pole-vaulting," she said. It was a fact with which both her other podium sharers agreed.

But if you thought that this was just a washed-up swansong from Isinbaeva, you would be mistaken. The Russian is already mulling her future, after declaring before the Games that this would be her last. Rio 2016 though was already on her mind.

"My decision changes everyday," she said laughing. "One day, I think, Yelena, that's it, no more, and then the next day I wake up and say, yes, I can go on till Rio," she said.

One thing is for sure though. Isinbayeva intends to stick around till the World Championships at her home in Moscow in 2013.

"I hope Jennifer will be there," she said, pointing to the American Jennifer Suhr who had just snared the gold medal from her.

"I can take revenge," said Isinbayeva. True champions never lose their thirst.



Russian diva Yelena Isinbayeva might have failed in her pursuit to win a record third pole vault gold in Olympics, but she still looks happy with her bronze in the winners' podium at the Olympic Stadium in London on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Brownlee brothers winners

AFP, London

British favourite Alistair Brownlee shattered pre-race warnings of plots to stop him as he stormed to victory in the Olympic triathlon Tuesday, with his younger brother Jonny finishing third.

Spain's Javier Gomez, two-time world champion split the British brothers as he finished second, 11 seconds off the winner, after the 1.5km swim, 43km bike-ride and 10km run at London's scenic Hyde Park.

The Brownlees' rivals had formed alliances aimed at breaking their dominance but Alistair, 24, was among the leaders from the outset and he seized gold with a blistering run around the park's Serpentine lake.

Alistair Brownlee clocked 1hr 45min 25 secs for the race while his brother, forced to serve a time penalty for mounting his bike too early, held on to third as he finished 31 seconds behind.

The elder of the Brownlees, who grew up fell-running and cycling in their hilly home county of Yorkshire, had time to grab a Union Flag and stroll across the line before collapsing to the deck in celebration.

The Brownlees now claim Britain's first Olympic triathlon medals.



Feng king of parallel bars

AFP, London

China's Feng Zhe took the honours in the men's parallel bars final on Tuesday to succeed his countryman Li Xiaopeng as Olympic champion.

Germany's Marcel Nguyen came second, adding another silver medal to the one he won in the individual all-around final earlier in the competition, while Hamilton Sabot of France finished third.

Feng, parallel bars world champion in 2010, now has two gold medals at the London Games, having already played a part in China's victory in the men's team final.

His score of 15.966 saw him finish 0.166 points above Nguyen, with Sabot posting a score of 15.566 to succeed compatriot Benoit Caranobe -- the all-around bronze-medallist in 2008 -- as an Olympic medal winner.

Japan's Kazuhito Tanaka finished in fourth place, with his brother, Yusuke, seventh.

After his team-mate Zhang Chenglong had fallen from the apparatus in the opening routine, Feng followed Sabot onto the bars and smoothly established a score that would not be beaten.

Liu's nightmare in hurdles

AFP, London

Liu Xiang's bid to banish his Beijing Olympics nightmare ended in disaster Tuesday as the Chinese athletics icon crashed out of the 110m hurdles when he smashed into the first barrier.

The 29-year-old former world record holder -- winner of the 2004 Olympic crown -- had been left distraught four years ago after he was forced to withdraw just moments before his opening race in front of his home fans.

But his return to the Olympic arena on Tuesday lasted only a split second when he ploughed into the first hurdle with his left leading leg and crashed heavily to the floor.

Liu -- who has been troubled by back and foot problems in the past month -- eventually got up and hopped down the track to be embraced by his fellow competitors.

He was helped off the track by Britain's Andy Turner and Spain's Jackson Quinonez and then taken to the medical centre in a wheelchair.

Fellow competitor Balazs Baji of Hungary had waited for Liu at the finish line, taking the Chinese star's hand in his and raising the former champion's arm to the stunned crowd.

"When I was a kid I saw him break-

ing a world record, winning the Olympic Games in Athens, so he's a great idol for me. I'm sorry that he fell. It must be really bad for him," he said.

American Aries Merritt, the leading hurdler this season, said he felt sorry for Liu but didn't see anything untoward about him physically at the warm-up.

"It was just terrible. For that to happen to one of the best hurdlers of all time is just a tragedy and I hope he's OK," said Merritt, whose achievement in running the fastest ever Olympic heat of 13.07sec was overshadowed by Liu's distress.

"He looked fine before the race, like nothing was wrong with him. He warmed up great. He always has a good warm-up and he was happy and so I don't think anything was wrong with him going into the race.

"I just think he made a small mistake, like he ran up on the hurdles a little bit too quickly and he wasn't prepared to take the hurdle at such velocity. He hit it and if you hit a hurdle in the fashion that he hit it there's no way to recover from something like that."

Turner had been racing in Liu's heat and waited for him to hobble down the track before helping him into the wheelchair.

"I have Achilles problems as well," said the 31-year-old, who won a bronze

medal behind Liu at the world championships in Daegu last year.

"I know what it feels like to be in pain like that. I regard him as probably the best hurdler in history. I have so much respect for him so it was horrible seeing him limp off like that.

"When you medal with people you have a kind of connection and after last year in Daegu we always say hello, try and have a chat in what little English he speaks but he's a nice guy and I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy."

Liu's dream of winning gold in front of his home crowd at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 ended in one of the great Olympic anti-climaxes as he turned up for his heat but failed to clear a hurdle, clearly hindered by his Achilles tendon injury.

His career has been hampered by injuries ever since he took gold and equalled the then world record held by Colin Jackson of 12.91sec at Athens in 2004.

He was to go on and better it with a time of 12.88sec and also win a world title in 2007 but a succession of injuries have taken their toll.

However, he showed the old spark in the world championships last year and was flying when he was twice hindered by 2008 Olympic champion Dayron Robles and ended up third only to be promoted to second when the Cuban was disqualified from top spot.



China's star athlete Liu Xiang takes a tumble during the men's 110m hurdles heats at the Olympic Stadium in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kenny stuns Bauge

AFP, London

Britain's Jason Kenny claimed his first individual gold medal Monday when he stunned Frenchman Gregory Bauge 2-0 to win track cycling's Olympic sprint title.

Australian Shane Perkins beat Trinidad's Njisane Phillip to the bronze.

Kenny was given the nod over defending champion Sir Chris Hoy to defend Britain's chances of sprint gold at his home Games after the rules were changed to limit each nation to one rider per event.

Four years after finishing second to Hoy in Beijing, Kenny did not turn his nose up at the opportunity.

After his runner-up place to Bauge at the Melbourne world championships in April, the 24-year-old from Bolton signalled his intent from day one by qualifying fastest in the 200m flying lap.



ESPN & STAR Sports
London Olympic Games
Day Twelve

Aussies rout Pakistan

AFP, London

The Netherlands defeated South Korea 4-2 Tuesday to top their Olympic Games hockey pool with a fifth successive win which also allowed defending champions Germany to enter the semifinals.

World champions Australia also advanced to the last four by hammering Pakistan 7-0 to move to the top of Pool A.

Netherlands, assured of a semifinal spot before Tuesday's game, spiked a late rally from Asia Cup holders South Korea to complete an all-win record in the preliminary round-robin league.

Pakistan had no answer for the pace set by Australia for whom six players featured among the scorers.

Liam de Young opened the scoring with a penalty corner in the second minute.

Chinese gymnast Feng Zhe performs in the men's parallel bars of the artistic gymnastics at the O2 North Greenwich Arena in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

USA reach final

AFP, London

The United States advanced to the final of the Olympic women's football tournament on Monday after an Alex Morgan goal in the last minute of extra-time clinched a dramatic 4-3 victory over Canada.

In one of the most extraordinary matches in the history of the tournament, the American women came from behind three times to level at 3-3 in 90 minutes before Morgan's 120th-minute clincher at Old Trafford.

Canada -- who had taken the lead three times thanks to a magnificent hat-trick from captain and striker Christine Sinclair -- were left shattered by the agonising nature of the loss.

The United States will now play Japan in Thursday's final at Wembley in a rematch of last year's women's World Cup final won by the Asian giants.

The game had gone to extra-time after an extraordinary period of 90 minutes which saw Sinclair almost single-handedly take Canada to the brink of the greatest result in their history.