

Bresset storms to gold

AFP, Hadleigh Farm

France's Julie Bresset stormed to victory in the women's mountain bike cross country race to claim her maiden Olympic title on Saturday.

Germany's Sabine Spitz claimed the silver with Georgia Gould of the United States winning the bronze.

Bresset was among an early group of pace-setters on the Hadleigh Farm course and their pace steadily thinned out the field over the first two of the race's six laps.

By the end of the third lap the 23-year-old Frenchwoman had opened up a slight lead on Spitz and the rest, and a lap further on she had increased her advantage to 33secs.

Only a mishap on one of the several technical sections on the course looked likely to threaten Bresset's charge towards the gold medal.

But she avoided the potential dangers in the 'Rock Garden', 'Dean's Drop', 'Snake Hill' and the 'Rabbit Hole' to leave her rivals playing a desperate game of catch-up.

Bresset went on to finish the race in just under 90 minutes, with Spitz coming over the finish line at 1min 01sec and Gould crossing several seconds later.

At 40 years and 228 days old on Saturday, Spitz became the oldest medal winner in an individual cycling event since Jeannie Longo won time trial bronze in Sydney 2000 at the age of 41.

Bahamas stun USA

AFP, London

The Bahamas shattered the United States' decades-old dominance of the 4x400m relay here Friday, storming to victory on the final leg to snatch a dramatic gold.

The Bahamian quartet clinched the Caribbean nation's first ever Olympic gold medal in a men's athletics event after Ramon Miller overhauled American great Angelo Taylor on the home straight to cross in 2mins 56.72sec.

It was the first time an American team contesting an Olympic 4x400m relay final had been beaten since the 1972 Munich Games.

The United States took silver in 2:57.05 while Trinidad and Tobago took bronze in a national record of 2:59.40.

Double amputee Oscar Pistorius's hopes of a historic medal never looked likely as South Africa, who had only reached the final after appealing when they failed to finish their heat, finished eighth and last.

Taylor, 33, was unable to find the required speed and stamina and missed out on a fourth Olympic title, having won two 400m hurdles titles and the 2008 4x400m relay gold.

Miller, 25, said that this moment had been coming.

"The US guys know we've been just behind them or thereabouts for a long time, but it's amazing we are finally taking home the gold," said the 2010 Commonwealth Games individual bronze medalist.

"This is for everyone back home. We can't wait to celebrate."

For their 33-year-old veteran Chris Brown it meant a second relay gold to go with the world championship he won 11 years ago but since then he has only experienced frustration picking up several minor medals.



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Carmelita Jeter of the US women's relay team exults after ensuring gold in the 4x100m relay at the Olympic Stadium in London on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

USA smash relay record

AFP, London



The United States smashed one of the oldest world records on Friday when they won the women's Olympic 4x100m relay title in 40.82sec.

The quartet sliced more than half a second off the 27-year-old record of 41.37sec set by the former East Germany in 1985, beating home arch-rivals Jamaica, who timed 41.41sec, while Ukraine took bronze in 42.04sec.

The Americans' 100 metres silver medalist and 200 metres bronze medalist Carmelita Jeter anchored the team to gold with a devastating burst down the final stretch and screamed for joy after she crossed the line.

Jeter, the 32-year-old who has become a leading sprinter late in life under the auspices of legendary coach John Smith, said she had no doubts about the ability of her three teammates.

"I knew that these girls were going to run their hearts out," said Jeter.

"I knew we were running fast. I was already pointing at the clock, saying 'there it is'.

"There was a cloud hanging over us, with people saying 'they can't do this, they're going to drop the stick' but we did it.

"I knew that if we got the stick around

then all I had to do was to bring it home."

It was a second gold at the London Games for 200m champion Allyson Felix while Tianna Madison and Bianca Knight completed the quartet.

"It's an honour to be part of this team. Who would have thought that we would have had a world record tonight? It's amazing," beamed Felix, who had ended her drought in the Olympic 200 metres at the third attempt.

"Our names are going down in history," she added.

It was the United States' first Olympic gold in the event since the 1996 Atlanta Games and only their first medal since the 2000 Sydney Games, where they took bronze.

"It's a relief," said Felix.

"When we went into this, we were the most comfortable I have seen this team. We were laughing and smiling and I have never seen the team like that."

"It was a combination of practice and being comfortable with each other. Everyone has been having fantastic years," added the 26-year-old.

The previous record was set by a team produced by the East German sporting machine. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the extent of systematic doping in the Communist country emerged.

Alptekin leads Turkey

AFP, London



Asli Cakir Alptekin led a shock 1-2 for Turkey when she won the women's Olympic 1500m on Friday in 4min 10.23sec, handing her country a first-ever gold medal in track and field.

European champion Alptekin, who served a two-year doping ban from 2004-2006, kicked for home and held her nerve for gold ahead of fast-finishing teammate Gamze Bulut.

Bulut, who also took European silver behind Alptekin in Helsinki and has improved her time in the event by almost 15sec this season, took silver in 4:10.40.

Bahrain's Ethiopian-born import Maryam Jamal claimed bronze a further 0.34sec adrift.

The Turkish medal haul doubled the two silvers Ethiopian-born Elvan Abeylegesse won in the women's 5000 and 10,000m in 2008.

Turkey's two other Olympic track and field medals were bronzes won by Esref Apak in the men's hammer in 2004 and Ruhi Sarialp in the men's triple jump in 1948.

"We came here to take the gold and silver medals for this competition," said Alptekin, who was caught doping after racing in the steeplechase in the world junior championships in 2004.

"We wanted two medals and we got them. It's like gaining two gold medals. Every ath-

lete dreams of a medal in the Olympic Games. This is the Turkish power.

"I began athletics in the 1500m and when I came to junior level, the entry standard was so high that I tried steeplechase.

"Then my husband and coach said I am stronger in the 1500m so we made a choice to change."

Bulut said she was happy to have clocked a personal best alongside her close friend Alptekin.

"I was not the favourite before this competition but I did run a 4:06 in qualification and 4:01 in the semi-final and now this is my personal best," she said.

"We take home two medals and I would like to say again, this is the Turkish power.

Of Alptekin, she said: "We are like sisters and we run every competition together."

Jamal said she was satisfied to have gone two better than in the Beijing Games in 2008, the two-time world champion in 2007 and 2009 having suffered with a string of injuries in recent seasons.

"I'm really happy with the bronze position," said Jamal.

Originally known as Zenebech Tola, she moved to Lausanne in 2002 seeking Swiss citizenship but failed before turning to Bahrain.

"Four years ago I finished number five and now I'm number three so I'm happy.

"In my last 150m, I made a small mistake and bumped into Bulut so had to start my stride again."

China loses appeal

AFP, London

China lost their appeal seeking to have hammer thrower Zhang Wenxiu awarded the bronze medal over an unusual technical glitch during the women's final here on Friday.

The 26-year-old Asian record holder had thought that despite a foul throw in the final round she had won her second successive Olympic bronze medal with a mark of 76.34 metres.

While she set off to celebrate the drama was unfolding.

Germany's world record holder Betty Heidler had been allowed two throws in the fifth and penultimate round

The first one had not been able to be recorded owing to a technical error with the measuring equipment and her second one was a foul.

However, after the competition was over officials returned to the infield and found the mark of Heidler's initial fifth round throw and were able to measure it at 77.13 (later adjusted to 77.12) which saw her edge the Chinese athlete out of the medal positions.

"I'm very upset and I'm very shocked," said Zhang after she heard the bad news but prior to the appeal being lodged.

"I don't know where I finished. I'm worried.

"I do not understand it, especially as the result was announced. I took my flag around the field. I thought I was a bronze winner and now I do not know what is happening."

However, their appeal failed to convince the appeal jury of the sport's governing body the International Association of Athletics Federations.

"The Chinese team lodged a protest after the end of the competition, considering their athlete had been seriously disadvantaged by not knowing, when she took her last attempt, that she was out of the medal positions," read the IAAF jury statement.

The Jury of Appeal rejected the Chinese protest.

Lavillenie pole king

AFP, London



Frenchman Renaud Lavillenie won Olympic pole vault gold on Friday after Australia's reigning champion Steve Hooker bombed out of the final without clearing a single height.

The in-form Lavillenie claimed his first global outdoor title with a new Games record of 5.97m, while German pair Bjorn Otto and Raphael Holzdeppe took silver and bronze respectively after both cleared 5.91m.

The battle for gold was whittled down to a three-man tussle after Lavillenie, Otto and Holzdeppe all notched 5.85m.

The German pair then both went over at 5.91m at their first attempts to crank up the pressure as the European champion failed in his only attempt at that height but, facing elimination, he kept his calm to produce a best of 5.97m.

"I can't really believe it," said Lavillenie. "Maybe tomorrow I will wake up and realise that I am an Olympic champion. The Germans were very strong and they pushed me to my limits. This has to be the best thing in my life."

It was France's first gold medal in athletics at the London Games, and follows a rich French tradition in the men's Olympic pole vault after victories for Pierre Quinon in 1984 and Jean Galfione in 1996.

Lavillenie, 25, has been a consistent performer over the past three years.

He also cleared 5.97m at the 2012 European championships to claim his second continental gold medal after his victory in 2010. He is also the world indoor champion and won world championships bronze medals in 2009 and 2011.

Australia's Hooker, 30, failed with three attempts to clear 5.65 metres, a full 35cm under his personal best outdoors, and could only look on ruefully as the competition unfolded without him.

A clearly rattled Hooker failed to complete his first two efforts at the height and pulled up on his third attempt with only 50 seconds to go after a botched run-up, leaving himself under time pressure as he crashed into the bar.

Hooker's failure at the London Games comes after he crashed out of last year's world championships in Daegu, South Korea, where he failed to register a mark in qualification.

"It wasn't exactly the same as last year at the worlds. I felt completely different to how I felt at the worlds last year. I jumped well in qualifying. I jumped well in my warm-up today," said Hooker.



France's Renaud Lavillenie competes to win the men's pole vault final at the Olympic Stadium in London on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Korea take bronze

AFP, Cardiff



South Korea's men beat fierce Asian rivals Japan 2-0 in the play-off for bronze on Friday to claim the country's first ever Olympic football medal.

Japan were bidding to emulate the Japanese team of 1968, who won bronze at the Mexico Games, but despite enjoying more possession, the Asian champions were twice unpicked by their opponents' clinical counter-attacks.

Arsenal striker Park Chu-Young and captain Koo Ja-Cheol scored either side of half-time, as the Taeguk Warriors claimed a measure of revenge for the senior side's penalty shoot-out loss to Japan at last year's Asian Cup.

"This is one of the most special moments for me and my team," said Koo.

"I'm very proud to be one of the first footballers to become medalists in Korean history."

South Korea's government had promised to spare the players military service if they won the bronze medal and the final whistle sparked wild celebrations from the victors, while Japan's players slumped to the turf in despair.

The intensity of the rivalry between the sides, and the bumpy nature of Cardiff's Millennium Stadium playing surface, did not make for a high-quality first half.

The first opportunities that arose fell Japan's way, but Hiroshi Kiyotake's low curler was turned away by Jung Sung-Ryong and Hiroki Sakai's header from a right-wing corner flashed narrowly wide of the far post.

The Koreans, who eliminated hosts Great Britain in a quarterfinal penalty shoot-out, went ahead against the run of play in the 38th minute.

Park endured a dreadful debut campaign with Arsenal last season, making six appearances and scoring only one goal, but he looked every inch the international goalscorer as he put Korea ahead.

Receiving the ball with a trio of retreating defenders blocking his path to goal, Park wrong-footed them all by sharply sweeping the ball to his right before beating Suici Gonda at his near post with a low shot.

Japan showed more enterprise after the interval but in the 57th minute they were caught cold by another South Korean sucker-punch.

Park's flick-on found Koo and the captain nudged the ball away from Daisuke Suzuki before drilling an unerring shot into the bottom-left corner.

Coach Hong Myung-Bo's side almost killed Japan off moments later, but Kim Bo-Kyung's bending left-foot shot was superbly tipped onto the post by Blue Samurai goalkeeper Gonda.