

Sports



Japan's Nao Kodaira wins gold in women's 500 metres

Defending champion Lee Sang-hwa takes silver

GANGNEUNG: Nao Kodaira stormed to gold in the women's 500 metres in an Olympic record time of 36.94 seconds at the Gangneung Oval yesterday, becoming the first female speed skater from Japan to win an Olympic title in an individual event.

Defending champion Lee Sang-hwa of South Korea settled for silver, while Karolina Erbanova of the Czech Republic won the bronze medal. Kodaira, the reigning world champion who has dominated the distance over the past seasons, shaved 0.34 seconds off the previous record set by Lee at the Sochi Games four years ago and is the first woman to finish the race in under 37 seconds at sea level. The Japanese spoke to Lee after the race and the two skaters raised the Korean and Japanese flags together. "Sports can make the world one together. It's simple," Kodaira told reporters, speaking through an interpreter. "She was under big pressure. She fought well. I told her, 'I respect you still and a lot.'"

The 31-year-old came into the race with huge expectations of herself due to her sheer domination of the distance in recent seasons—she has won in each of her last 15 World Cup appearances stretching back to 2016. "I was the captain of the whole Japanese delegation this time. I know a lot of attention comes from the Japanese people. I knew that," she added. "All I had to do is skate as I am supposed to skate." Lee, who won back-to-back titles in the shortest speed-skating dis-

tance at the last two Olympics, suffered a chronic knee injury last year and though Kodaira won the day, it was the Korean who drew the loudest cheers from the packed Oval. "It doesn't matter, I still have two gold medals and I still have the world record," said Lee, who was in tears after her lap. "I was between nervous and excited before racing and when I finished everything, I was really happy."

"It was the first time my mother saw me competing in the Olympics, I think she cried too. I had a goal of coming in at 36.8 seconds, that didn't happen... well it's over, I still achieved everything I could as a skater."

Kodaira, who also won silver in the women's 1,000m on Wednesday, joins Tomomi Okazaki, who won bronze at the Nagano Games in 1998, as the only Japanese skaters to win a medal in the event. She got off to a lightning quick start over the first 100 metres and flew around the track and although Lee started quicker than her rival, she could not maintain her momentum on the back straight.

The 28-year-old crowd favourite still managed to finish 0.01 seconds ahead of Erbanova for her first medal of the Games. The race was the first speed-skating event at the Oval in which no Dutch skaters finished on the podium. The United States endured another day of disappointment, with Brittany Bowe ending in fifth place, ahead of the highest-placed Dutch skater, Jorien ter Mors, who beat Kodaira to gold in the 1,000m. —Reuters



PYEONGCHANG: Japan's Nao Kodaira competes in the women's 500m speed skating event during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Oval in Gangneung yesterday. — AFP

“ I was the captain of the Japanese delegation ”

Russian Olympic athlete involved in meldonium doping case

PYEONGCHANG: A Russian athlete at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics has been implicated in a doping case involving the banned substance meldonium, a source close to the situation told AFP yesterday. It comes after a spokesman for the Olympic Athletes from Russia said one of its competitors committed a "possible violation of anti-doping rules", according to Russian media. If the case is confirmed, it will come before the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which is handling doping matters at the Olympics and has an ad hoc division in Pyeongchang.

Russia are banned from the Olympics over systemic doping, but 168 Russian athletes deemed clean are competing in Pyeongchang under the neutral banner of Olympic Athletes from Russia. A fresh doping case would be deeply embarrassing and could affect deliberations on whether to lift Russia's ban in time for the Pyeongchang closing ceremony.

"Today the headquarters of our delegation received an official notice from the IOC regarding a possible violation of anti-doping rules," Konstantin Vybomov, spokesman for the Russian team, was quoted as saying by Russian media. "We are not naming the athlete or the discipline until the B-sample results, which are expected within approximately 24 hours." The International Olympic Committee suspended Russia in December after revelations of a widespread and highly orchestrated doping conspiracy, which first emerged before the Rio 2016 Summer Games. Investigations found that the doping plot, straddling several years, culminated when Russia hosted the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, where they topped the medals table.

Russian athletes in Pyeongchang are under strict instructions to honour the "letter and spirit" of guide-



PYEONGCHANG: In this file photo taken on February 9, 2018, the Olympic Athletes from Russia delegation parades during the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games. A Russian Olympic curler has been implicated in a doping case. — AFP

lines governing their participation, including not waving the Russian flag or wearing its colours.

An IOC implementation panel is due to consider how well the Russian team has observed the guidelines before making a recommendation on whether to lift the ban. Meldonium was added to the World Anti-Doping Agency's list of banned substances in 2016. Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova, a former world number one, served a 15-month ban after testing positive for meldonium early that year.

Russian short track speed skater Semen Elistratov, who won bronze in the men's 1,500m in Pyeongchang, served a brief ban for the same substance in 2016.

Richard Budgett, medical director for the International Olympic Committee, said it seemed that Elistratov took the drug before it was banned. "Because of the way it's metabolised, it can stay in the system for many, many months, even nine months after it had been taken," Budgett told journalists last week.

He added: "We have to be realistic—meldonium was used in a widespread way throughout Eastern Europe and Russia and was considered to be a tonic, a type of cardiac stimulant that was not prohibited."

"But of course, quite rightly it was then prohibited and because it was such widespread use there were a large number of cases." — AFP

Klaebo's nerves of steel fetch Norway's relay gold

PYEONGCHANG: Norway's 4x10km cross-country relay team did not just have to contend with the other 13 teams in the field in yesterday's race - they also had to ski with their nation demanding an Olympic gold medal that they had not won since 2002.

They delivered that gold in a thrilling race, with the last leg anchored by the callow, confident Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo, who held his nerves before a spurt that will immediately go down in Norwegian sporting history.

"I didn't sleep well last night and I haven't eaten much either, but at the end it's just a normal ski race and you have to just take it down to the simple things," the ice-cool Klaebo told Reuters. "I felt a little bit of pressure, but I think it's good if you are a little bit nervous—then you are a little bit more sharp. I think that's great and I think we all did a very good job," he explained.

"At the end, to win an Olympic gold medal with our team, it's unbelievable." Cross-country skiing is not so much a national sport as an obsession in Norway, and millions will have risen early to watch a race that started just after 7 a.m. (0600 GMT) back home.

Lead-off man Didrik Toenseth was 10-year-old the last time Norway won this race, and he was well aware of how important winning it would be for the Norwegian people. "It's not that they want it (gold) - they expect it from us. Then the pressure is on, this is a day that you have to succeed, nothing can go wrong," he said.

For Martin Johnsrud Sundby, who won silver in Vancouver as part of the only relay team to medal since that 2002 victory, the relief was palpable, especially since bitter rivals Sweden won gold in 2010 and 2014. —Reuters

Abramenko wins aerials gold after tense final

PYEONGCHANG: Oleksandr Abramenko pulled off one of the best jumps of his life to win the aerials competition in the freestyle skiing yesterday and become the first Ukrainian man to collect a Winter Olympic gold medal.

China's Jia Zongyang took home the silver medal, while Olympic Athlete from Russia Ilia Burov secured the bronze. Abramenko said he had tried his winning jump, a back full-full-double full, only 15 times, adding: "This was one of the best jumps of my life."

The final consisted of three rounds, with the three lowest-scoring athletes being eliminated at each stage. The highest score from the final round won gold.

Once the field was reduced to the final six, the tension was palpable as each athlete took their final jump. Abramenko raised the bar, scoring 128.51 to lead going into the final three jumps.

He still led as Jia took to the hill on the last jump of the final. The Sochi bronze medallist landed his jump but could not usurp the Ukrainian, scoring 128.05 to take silver. The result meant Belarus did not have a man on the aerials podium for the first time since its Olympic debut in 1994.

The Belarusian gold medallist from Sochi, Anton Kusnir, failed to progress from qualification, while Australia's David Morris, the silver medallist from four years ago, went out in the first round of the final. —Reuters

Medals Table					
Olympic Games complete medals table on day nine in Pyeongchang:					
Rank	Country	G	S	B	Total
	Norway	9	9	7	25
	Germany	9	4	4	17
	Netherlands	6	5	2	13
	Canada	5	5	6	16
	U.S.	5	3	2	10
	Sweden	4	3	0	7
	Austria	4	2	4	10
	France	3	2	4	9
	South Korea	3	0	2	5
	Switzerland	2	4	1	7
	Italy	2	1	3	6
	Japan	1	5	3	9
	Czech Republic	1	2	2	5
	Slovakia	1	2	0	3
	Belarus	1	1	0	2
	Britain	1	0	3	4
	Poland	1	0	0	1
	China	0	4	1	5
	Olympic Athlete from Russia	0	3	7	10
	Australia	0	2	1	3
	Slovenia	0	1	0	1
	Finland	0	0	3	3
	Spain	0	0	2	2
	Liechtenstein	0	0	1	1
	Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1
	Total	58	58	59	175

G = Gold, S = Silver, B = Bronze

Czechs beat Swiss 4-1 to win group

GANGNEUNG: The Czech Republic scored three third-period goals to beat Switzerland yesterday and win their group in the preliminary round of the men's Olympic ice hockey tournament, earning a spot in the quarter-finals.

Forward Michal Repik scored twice, including an empty netter inside the last minute of the game, and goalkeeper Pavel Francouz stopped 28 shots. Dominik Kubalik and Roman Cervenka each scored for the Czechs. "It is the toughest game of the Olympics," Kubalik said of the coming quarter-finals round. "But we are very happy we have a day off and that is huge. We can relax and be ready for the quarters." Thomas Rufenacht scored for the Swiss. The win gave the Czechs the top seeding coming out of Group A with eight points. Canada, who play South Korea later on Sunday, are currently second but with only four points cannot overtake the Czechs.

The winners of each of the three groups in the men's tournament are awarded a bye directly to the quarter-finals. A fourth bye is awarded to the best second-place team among the three groups. The remaining eight teams play in a qualifying playoff on Tuesday for the right to advance to the quarter-finals. Final group-stage rankings will be determined later. — Reuters

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Zob Ahan Isfahan v Lokomotiv Tashkent	15:30	beIN SPORTS HD 4
Al Wahda SCC v Al Duhail	17:50	beIN SPORTS HD 3
AlGarrafa v Tractor Sazi Tabriz	18:00	beIN SPORTS HD 2
Alahli v AlJazira	20:10	beIN SPORTS HD 2
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Getafe v Celta de Vigo	23:00	beIN SPORTS HD 3
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Lazio v Hellas Verona	22:45	beIN SPORTS HD 4
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Eintracht Frankfurt v RB Leipzig	22:30	beIN SPORTS HD 5