



Rio 2016™



## MANY COUNTRIES COME TO RIO WITH ONE SHOT

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Majlinda Kelmendi stood on the podium with a wide smile on her face. A gold medal hung around her neck, and not just any gold medal - the first one ever for Kosovo. Kelmendi went to Rio with Kosovo's first Olympic team, and she knew she had to deliver in the women's 52-kg judo competition to make sure her nation didn't go home empty-handed.

"I was really ready for this competition," Kelmendi said. "It was the first time that Kosovo was in the Olympics. I wanted so badly to win." While so much attention is paid to the top of the medals table at the Olympics, where the athletic powerhouses like the United States and China practically need to charter another plane to bring home all the gold, silver and bronze they accumulate, there is an equally spirited competition at the bottom, where dozens of smaller countries hold out hopes of just getting their hands on one.

Newspapers back home praised Kelmendi's "historic achievement" Sunday. Hidilyn Diaz, whose weightlifting silver ended a 20-year medal drought for the Philippines, received a personal message of congratulations from President Rodrigo Duterte, who told her she brought honor to the country.

They are not global stars on par with Michael Phelps or Usain Bolt. But to the success-starved countries they represent, they may be even more important.

Coming into the Rio Games, more than 70 nations with National Olympic Committees had never won a medal of any kind. Others, like India, very rarely reach the podium. So they come to these Olympics with very few chances for glory, their collective focus pinned on one team, or one athlete, to break through. Fiji plays in the rugby semifinals yesterday in a sport that has returned to the Olympics after a 92-year absence. "We need pressure. Island life is a nice, chilled and laid-back one so if we take things too easy the boys just drop off," said Fiji rugby coach Ben Ryan, who represents a country that has never won a medal of any color. "We are embracing that pressure at the moment. The more the better. This is the strongest 12 I've ever had. There are absolutely no excuses not to perform." India has won just two medals since 1964, including one for men's field hockey in Moscow in 1980. This year's team is looking to restore the country's standing as one of the world's elite. "That's my life. It's a dream," captain Sreejesh Parattu said. "If you look at the Indian history, it is a very prestigious thing for our country." And when they finally do make it happen, the emotions can be overwhelming. Diaz openly wept after winning the silver medal in the 58kg class of weightlifting. It was the country's first medal in any sport since the Atlanta Games in 1996 and helped her overcome failures in Beijing and London.

"I have tried so hard. I have stumbled many times," Diaz said. "I wanted to quit, but now all of my sacrifices have paid off."—AP



**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Australia's Andrew Bogut, center, United States' DeAndre Jordan (6) and United States' Klay Thompson (11) scramble for a rebound during a men's basketball game at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Wednesday. —AP

# CARMELO POWERS USA OVER SPIRITED AUSSIES



## BASKETBALL

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** With the United States in danger of losing for the first time since 2006, NBA stars Carmelo Anthony and Kyrie Irving took command Wednesday to subdue stubborn Australia at the Rio Olympics. The Americans outlasted the upset-minded Aussies 98-88 as Anthony scored a game-high 31 points, 14 of them in the fourth quarter, and Irving sank 12 of his 19 in the last period.

"At the end of the day I was in my zone," Anthony said. "My teammates found me when I was open."

The Knicks star is seeking to become the first three-time gold winner in men's Olympic basketball. His 31 points leave him as the all-time USA scorer at the Games with 293 points, surpassing LeBron James. San Antonio Spurs guard Patty Mills helped keep Australia in the preliminary-round game with 30 points.

The Americans improved to 3-0 in Rio and 83-1 under coach Mike Krzyzewski, who took over not long after the last US loss at the Olympics, a 2004 semi-finals

defeat to Argentina that still stings.

Australian teams are 0-19 against the US, but the full-game test they posed may fuel belief among other teams that the US squad can be threatened and perhaps denied a third consecutive gold medal.

"We're a bit disappointed. We lost," star Aussie center Andrew Bogut said. "We had every opportunity to win the game. That's an attitude change. We have a different feeling now and we want to keep that going." The Aussies have four NBA champion players and established themselves as perhaps the Americans' biggest rivals for gold.

### 'IT GOT REAL'

Asked if the game was a USA wake-up call, US guard Paul George said: "It definitely got real." "We're probably going to see them again and we've got to do a better job of matching them," he said.

The Americans did not shoot well in the first half and trailed for significant stretches in the game.

But they scored the first nine points of the third quarter for a 58-54 lead and stayed in front until Joe Ingles' lay-up put Australia ahead 72-70 with nine minutes to play. A 10-2 US run, including eight points from Anthony, made it 80-74 and

the persistent Aussies never got closer than four after that. Bogut had 15 points for Australia and Matthew Dellavedova 11 points and 11 assists.

"A few mental lapses in the last quarter but we understand what we need to do to beat a great team like the USA," Mills said. In other Group A play, four-time NBA champion Tony Parker hit a game-winning jumper with 31 seconds remaining to give France a 76-75 victory over stubborn Serbia. Parker, 34, Mills' Spurs teammate, capped a game-ending 10-2 run by the French. "It's awesome," Parker said. "It's not everyday you hit a game-winning shot. It was great." The victory leaves France, which lost its opener to Australia, at 2-1 in Group A, with Serbia falling to 1-2. "We had a rough start," Parker said. "Now I feel we're back to our identity and we're playing a lot better." The victory means France, which has yet to face China or the Americans, is likely to finish third in the table and face a possible semi-final against the USA. In a battle of winless teams, Venezuela outlasted China for a 72-68 win, dealing a potentially fatal blow to China's hopes of advancing. Nestor Colmenares lead the Venezuelans, now 1-3, with 16 points, while China's Yi Jianlian had 18 points and 10 rebounds in defeat.—AFP