

Sports



US punch Sweden to win first gold medal

Last-rock magic from skip Shuster

GANGNEUNG: The United States delivered a gold-medal knockout punch, scoring five in the eighth end to crush Sweden 10-7 and claim their first ever Olympic men's curling title yesterday. With the score deadlocked at 5-5, United States skip John Shuster provided some last-rock magic with a pinpoint double take-out for five that left their Swedish opponents stunned as the Gangneung Curling Centre erupted into chants of "USA, USA" led by US President Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka.

The gold was just the second Olympic curling medal won by the US men, following a bronze at the 2006 Turin Winter Games which Shuster was also a part of. Switzerland beat Canada 7-5 on Friday to win the bronze. "I think during the entire (eighth) end we could feel it building," said Shuster. "Their margin for error was incredibly small. I can't tell you how un-nervous I was." The victory capped a remarkable comeback for the United States who sputtered through early preliminary-round play with a 2-4 record before rattling off three straight wins to make the playoffs where they beat twice defending Olympic champions Canada in the semi-finals before seeing off the top-ranked Swedes.

The only real miscue involving the Americans yesterday came when officials mistakenly presented them with the women's gold medals but that error was quickly corrected and switched for the correct ones. "We've played our best when our backs were up against the wall," American second Tyler George. "We took it to

another level this week. "Usually we're fighting and scrapping to get into the playoffs but for five days we were the best team in the world and we did it at the right time."

The result meant more Olympic disappointment for Niklas Edin who had skipped Sweden to world championship titles in 2013 and 2015 and a bronze at the Sochi Olympics but could not grab the one medal to elude him. The contest got off to a tactical start with the Swedes blanking the first then scoring a pair in the second only to have the US hit right back with a two on another brilliant last-rock shot from Shuster.

The US stole a point in the fourth after a measurement to determine shot stone to take their first lead, 3-2. The Swedes would not be rattled, answering with two in the fifth as the seesaw battle continued with the US replying with a pair in the sixth and Sweden getting one back in the seventh to leave the teams deadlocked on 5-5 with three ends to play.

After the US scored their five a reeling Sweden chipped two off the deficit in the ninth but there was too much damage to repair and the Swedes finally conceded. "In the eighth end we don't exactly get the rocks where we wanted them and they put a lot of rocks in the house and we were forced to go all in," explained Edin. "That last shot if it curls three centimeters more it's probably good for them to draw for two or something but when that misses and they make that double we knew we were going to lose." —Reuters



GANGNEUNG: Team USA competes during the curling men's gold medal game between the USA and Sweden at the Gangneung Curling Centre in Gangneung yesterday. —AFP



Ivanka Trump leads cheers for US team

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'Miracle on snow' as Ledeska seals Olympic double

PYEONGCHANG: Ester Ledeska completed a historic Olympic double yesterday when the Czech star romped to snowboarding parallel giant slalom gold to add to her shock super-G title in alpine skiing. The 22-year-old world champion became the first woman to capture gold medals in different sports at the same Winter Games after beating Germany's Selina Joerg by almost half a second in the Pyeongchang final.

"It was quite tough to change myself back into a snowboarder today," said Ledeska, already the first athlete to compete in snowboard and alpine skiing at a Winter Olympics. "But suddenly the snowboarder girl showed up and today was a big day for snowboard Ester! "It was something very special," added Ledeska, who wore her goggles throughout her press conference as she had after her astonishing ski victory.

"I'll think about this moment until the end of my life." One week ago, Ledeska stunned a strong field including defending champion Anna Veith and American Lindsey Vonn to win the super-G, becoming one of the fairytale stories of the Games. Ledeska now joins Norwegians Thorleif Haug and Johan Groettumsbraten as the only athletes to do a multi-sport double at the same Olympics.

Haug did the cross-country and Nordic combined double at the 1924 Olympics and Groettumsbraten won the same events at the 1928 Games. Ledeska never looked threatened in a giant parallel slalom competition she was expected to dominate, beginning the day by overpowering 2014 gold medalist Patrizia Kummer to avenge her loss to the Swiss in the Sochi quarter-finals. The Czech, dubbed a "miracle on snow" by her national media, dealt equally ruthlessly with Austrian Daniela Ulbing, who had narrowly avoided running over a squirrel in winning her first race.



PYEONGCHANG: Czech Republic's Ester Ledeska competes to win the big final of the women's snowboard parallel giant slalom event at the Phoenix Park yesterday. —AFP

'Once in a lifetime'

Ramona Hofmeister was no match in the semi-final, wiping out as she tried to keep up with Ledeska. The German finished with the bronze. "In the super-G I really didn't believe what happened," said Ledeska when asked which gold tasted sweeter. "My plan is to stay with my heart, so for now I think I'll continue to do both because I love both," she added. "I'm in my skin and doing what I love." Ledeska started skiing aged two and first strapped on a snowboard at five, going on to compete at world championships in both disciplines though she had never medaled on skis before the Pyeongchang Games.

Two other athletes have won multi-sport gold medals at the Winter Olympics Finland's Heikki Hasu won the Nordic combined title in 1948 and cross country four years later, while Russian Anfisa

Reztsova bagged cross country gold in 1988 and biathlon titles in 1992 and 1994. Ledeska's snowboarding coach Justin Reiter revealed that the Czech snow queen had been under intense strain all week.

"The amount of pressure that was on her was pretty incredible," said the American. "But she's very focused on her goals. She's once in a lifetime and she's got a great heart. She's not just like a champion that's kind of a jerk-she's a really incredible human being." Joerg also paid tribute to Ledeska. "She's incredible! I've heard of people competing in summer and winter Olympics, but never in two sports in one Olympics," said the silver medalist. "It's more than a full-time job. I think she shows what's possible in sports, she's an amazing athlete and she deserves it. She's the girl for the future and the world is looking to Ester now." —AFP

Swiss win inaugural team gold, Norway set medals record

PYEONGCHANG: Wendy Holdener led a strong Switzerland team to alpine team skiing gold yesterday, as Norway took bronze to set a new record of 38 medals at a Winter Olympics. Switzerland won the final 3-1 against an Austrian quartet missing double gold medalist Marcel Hirscher for the inaugural title as the event made its debut. Holdener, who had already won slalom silver and combined bronze, Denise Feierabend, Daniel Yule and men's slalom runner-up Ramon Zenhausern held their nerve after the two Austrian men failed to finish the mixed-sex final.

"I enjoyed it a lot. We had a cool team, the spirit was here but everybody was really focused," said Holdener. "It's really nice to get a gold medal after a silver and bronze." Holdener and Zenhausern were both undefeated in racing at the Yongpyong Alpine Centre as the Swiss overcame Hungary, Germany and France on their run to the final. Austria, boasting individual slalom bronze medalists Michael Matt and Katharina Gallhuber, Katharina Liensberger and Manuel Feller overcame South Korea, Sweden and Norway before the match-up with the Swiss.

Sweden had been fancied for a podium spot given they fielded individual slalom gold medalists Frida Hansdotter and Andre Myhrer, but they went down 4-0 to the Austrians in the quarter-finals. Norway won bronze, Leif Kristian Nestvold-Haugen beating France's Clement Noel in the fourth and final run to win by a tie-breaking 0.12sec after two victories to each team. It was a record 38th Winter Olympics medal for Norway, beating the record set by the United States in 2010. Norway and Germany top the medals table on 13 golds, although the Norwegians have more medals overall. —AFP

Germany seek their own 'Miracle on Ice'

GANGNEUNG: Nearly 40 years after the United States stunned the Soviet Union in the 1980 Miracle on Ice, a gritty German squad is trying for their own "Wunder auf Eis" at the Pyeongchang Olympics. Germany will face the Olympic Athletes from Russia, trying to end a 26-year gold drought, in today's gold medal men's hockey final after three shocking one-goal playoff upsets, including a 4-3 semi-final ouster of Canada.

"Half the team just cried on the ice because we just made history," German forward Dominik Kahun said. "It's unbelievable. It just shows what kind of team we have. We play for each other." It sets up a fairy-tale story not unlike the US collegians who dethroned the Soviet juggernaut in Lake Placid 38 years ago. The unlikely German league all-star unit are into their first Olympic final and will face the top hockey talent outside the NHL, which unusually refused to release its players for the Olympics.

"Anything is possible," Kahun said. "Russia is the favorite, everybody knows it, and if you lose the game, we got silver medal. We're going to do everything to win gold, but we have no pressure so we can play our best." From the emotional high of the greatest victory in German hockey history, players must regroup to face the top talent from Russia's two best clubs. "For German hockey, this is unreal," Marcel Goc said. "We're in the final against the superstars from Russia. I'm still waiting to get poked and somebody wakes me up and tells me, 'Hey, you're late for the bus to the game.' But we made it to the final."

'Huge for the country'

The Russians boast the most potent Olympic offence, including former NHLers and five-time Olympians Ilya Kovalchuk and Pavel Datsyuk. They are seeking their first gold since the 1992 Unified Team won at Albertville just weeks after the breakup of the Soviet Union. "It would just mean everything to us," said Russian forward Mikhail Grigorenko. "It's huge for the players and the country." Russia are also waiting to see if officials will lift their suspension from the Olympics over mass doping in



PYEONGCHANG: Canada's Andrew Ebbett (2nd right) scores against Czech Republic's Pavel Francouz in the men's bronze medal ice hockey match between the Czech Republic and Canada during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games yesterday. —AFP

time for today's closing ceremony. Germans took Olympic bronze in 1932 and 1976, the latter as West Germany.

Germany's top finish at the world championships was second, last achieved as West Germany in 1953. Just playing for gold is a shocker. "We are super-happy and super-excited. We couldn't even imagine this. It's like a dream," German forward Frank Mauer said. "We're just going to enjoy the final, do our best and see what happens." It's not like German sports don't offer examples of shock wins. The 1954 FIFA World Cup final saw West Germany beat heavily favoured Hungary 3-2 in the Miracle of Bern. —AFP

Russians reel over doping

PYEONGCHANG: A despondent mood swept through Russian athletes at the Pyeongchang Winter Games yesterday, their hopes of being able to fly the Russian flag at the closing ceremony deflated by a second positive doping test. "They were due to look at how we behaved here and decide, but as we've got two doping cases I don't think they will allow us to be at the closing with the flag," alpine skier Anastasia Silanteva said.

Russians are competing as neutral athletes at the Games due to allegations they ran a systematic drug-cheating program at the 2014 Sochi Games. They have been unable to wear national uniforms or have the Russian anthem played at medal ceremonies. But the International Olympic Committee (IOC) held out the prospect of lifting its suspension of their Olympic status and allowing them to carry the Russian flag at today's closing ceremony, on condition they behaved well at Pyeongchang.

Silanteva said the entire Russian team were upset at the prospect of leaving the Games without flying the flag or wearing the Russian uniform. It would have shown "we are a strong country and we will achieve everything we want", she added. This week, it emerged that a Russian medal-winning curler and bobsledder had failed tests for performance-enhancing drugs. Curler Alexander Krushelnitsky, who won bronze in the mixed doubles event, agreed to return his medal along with his wife who is his curling partner. —Reuters