



PIERCING EXULTATION

PHOTO BY ALBERTO PIZZOLI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's Lei Sheng celebrates his victory over Egypt's Alaeldin Abouelkassem at the end of their men's foil gold medal bout in the London Olympics on Tuesday at the ExCeL Centre.

Li's star quickly fading with Olympic flops

2011 French Open champ admits she was not at her best in London

By CHEN XIANGFENG
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China has a few notable international stars who are able to draw global limelight at the London Olympic Games.

Yi Jianlian, who plies his trade in the NBA, is battling it out with the national basketball team;

Sun Yang and Ye Shiwen have risen to superstar status in the swimming pool and 110m hurdler Liu Xiang is gearing up for next week's track and field competition.

But as their stars continue to rise, 2011 French Open champion Li Na's appears to be sinking as she appeared to be totally

lost at the All-England Club in Wimbledon.

Her aura continues to diminish after her Olympic journey ended in disastrous style.

Li, who lost her first-round singles match Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia on Saturday, also fell early in the doubles competition compatriot Zhang Shuai on Tuesday as they crashed 6-3, 6-1 to Andrea Hlavackova and Lucie Hradecka of the Czech Republic in the last 16.

Li said she was aware of the importance of the Olympics and admitted she was not at her best in London.

"I don't think Olympic is only important for Chinese people, otherwise we would

just call it the China Open," Li said. "Every athlete in every sport is fighting for their country," said the No 10 seed, who finished fourth at the Beijing Games four years ago.

"There is no easy match at the Olympics. I know we are professional players, but the Olympics is different. I tried hard here but it did not work out."

Li expressed her strong desire to deliver something for her country in what might be her last Olympic Games, but Wimbledon turned out to be a sad place for her—again.

Li lost to Sorana Cirstea in the second round of Wimbledon in June.

Adding to her misery may be a souring relationship with Chinese media and local tennis authorities.

When asked if she felt uncomfortable on the grass compared to hard and clay surfaces, she retorted, "Please

do not ask such questions just because I lost a match on grass.

"I was just losing a match. It's a matter of losing to another person, is not it?"

The relationship soured more when she refused to answer questions from media back home after her Wimbledon flop.

Furthermore, her relationship with the Chinese Tennis Association is also tense as she reportedly didn't want to play in the doubles in London in order to concentrate solely on the singles.

"I did not try to boycott the doubles competition," Li said recently. "The problem is they (CTA) did not notify me before making the announcement (to make me play with Zhang in London). It made me feel uncomfortable."

Li and the CTA have not made any public comments on the issue since.

However, Li said this would

be her last foray into doubles.

"It's my first doubles event in the Olympics. I tried my best and it's a happy experience. But I will not try anymore."

Meanwhile, Li also announced she has found a new coach — former world No 1 Justine Henin's mentor, Carlos Rodriguez.

"Rodriguez will join my team before this year's US Open (later this month)," she said.

Her current coach is her husband Jiang Shan.

Li said the move was not made because her husband was not qualified for the job.

"It's not his problem. We just have too many relationships. Coach and player, husband and wife, employee and employer. Sometimes, it's too difficult to find the balance between us," said Li.

"I think the change will be good for both of us."

RAISING THE BAR FOR CHINA'S LIFTERS

PHOTO BY HASSAN AMMAR / AP

Lin Qingfeng of China competes during the men's 69-kg weightlifting competition on Tuesday in London. Lin won the gold medal.



Drugs: Chinese doctor casts doubt on American performances

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"Some people are just biased," the official Xinhua News Agency quoted Jiang as saying. "We never questioned Michael Phelps when he bagged eight gold medals in Beijing."

Australian coach Ken Wood, who has a contract with the Chinese Swimming Association and has trained 20 of China's swimmers in London, accused Ye's doubters of double standards.

"They are just laying it on, especially the Americans because they are losing the whole damn meet," Wood told

the AP by phone from Australia. "They are creating double standards."

He said China is extremely strict about adhering to its anti-doping rules. He said a group of about a dozen Chinese swimmers — including those who came to his academy to train a few years ago were temporarily suspended from competing after drug testers couldn't find them where they had said they would be. The swimmers mistakenly listed the pool, instead of their nearby rented accommodation, as the place to find them for drug tests, he said.

"What happened was the drug testers came around and said, 'Where are the Chinese?' I said they are not training now," Wood said. "They couldn't find them when they wanted to."

"So the Chinese Swimming Association immediately banned them and said, 'Right. Oh, they can't swim anymore,'" he said. "That's how stringent they are."

He wrote to the CSA explaining that the mistake was a language issue and that the swimmers had given the wrong address. Chinese authorities later wrote back saying they accepted his explanation, and

the swimmers were reinstated, he said.

"They did suspend them and I had to write a letter," he said.

"They reinstated them and sent me a letter and said, 'Thank you very much. We have no reason to doubt the veracity of your statement.'"

He said the Chinese swimmers are subjected to frequent doping tests.

"They hit them all the time," he said. "Some of the swimmers got tested three times in one week."

Sebastian Coe, head of the London organizing commit-

tee, said it would "very unfair to judge an athlete by a sudden breakthrough."

"What you tend to forget is probably the 10 years of work that's already gone in to get to that point," he said on ITV News.

"You need to look back through her career. I think you've got to be very careful when you make judgments like that, but, yes, it is an extraordinary breakthrough."

John Brewer, a board member of UK Anti-Doping and director of sport at the University of Bedfordshire, also talked down doubts about Ye.

Phelps has to settle for silver in shocker

US swimmer misses out on favorite race but still has two individual events left

By JULIAN LINDEN in London
Reuters

South Africa's Chad le Clos upset Michael Phelps to win the 200 meters butterfly final at the London Olympics on Tuesday.

Phelps, who was bidding to become the first male swimmer to win the same individual event at three Olympics, led all the way but messed up his touch allowing Le Clos to get his hands on the wall first in a time of one minute 52.96 seconds.

Phelps took the silver medal in 1:53.61 while Japan's Takeshi Matsuda was third in 1:53.21.

The lone consolation for Phelps in suffering the shock defeat was that his second placing lifted his career tally to 18 medals, 14 gold, two silvers and two bronze, joining Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina as the most decorated Olympian, though not for long.

The 200 butterfly is one of

the most physically demanding events in swimming but is also Phelps' favorite and ironically, he is known as the best finisher in the business, famously winning the 100 butterfly final in 2004 and 2008 when he was behind.

He swam the 200 at the Sydney Olympics when he was just a 15-year-old and set his first world record and won his first world title in the exhausting four-lap race.

Only two swimmers have ever won the same individual event at three Olympics, Australia's Dawn Fraser, in 100 freestyle in 1956, 1960 and 1964, and Hungary's Krisztina Egerszegi in 200 backstroke in 1988, 1992 and 1996.

It is a feat that has eluded generations of the best male swimmers until Phelps, who had the chance of doing it in four different events in London.

He failed at his first attempt when he came fourth in the 400 individual medley but still has the 200 individual medley and 100 butterfly to come.



MATT SLOCUM / ASSOCIATED PRESS

United States' Michael Phelps (front) and South Africa's Chad le Clos race to the finish in the men's 200m butterfly swimming final at the Aquatics Centre on Tuesday. Le Clos won gold, Phelps silver.

US dominant in women's gymnastics

By TOM WILLIAMS in London
Agence France-Presse

The United States triumphed in qualifying on Sunday but unlike its male counterparts, who finished a disappointing fifth in Monday's men's final, it reproduced the same high performance level when it mattered.

Russia, runners-up to the US at last year's World Championships, finished second, with European champions Romania pipping 2008 Olympic champion China to the bronze medal.

The US had dominated in qualifying on Sunday but unlike its male counterparts, who finished a disappointing fifth in Monday's men's final, it reproduced the same high performance level when it mattered.

Its winning score of 183.596 points was even more handsome than its qualifying tally and gave it a comfortable advantage of 5.066 points over the Russians, some of whom were reduced to tears.

Victory was particularly sweet for Jordyn Wieber, who had lost out on a place in the individual all-around final to team-

mate Alexandra Raisman but played a key role in Tuesday's triumph.

Great Britain was unable to repeat the success that the bronze medal-winning men's team enjoyed on Monday and finished in sixth place behind Canada, with Italy seventh and Japan last.

The US team had set the tone in both podium training and qualifying with assured performances on the vault and once again they asserted their authority with three superb Amanar vaults in the first rotation.

Two days on from her individual qualifying heartache, Wieber led the way with a vault that earned her a score of 15.933, before Gabrielle Douglas (15.966) and McKayla Maroney (16.233) followed suit to give the US an ideal start.

The Russians could not compete on the vault, with Maria Paseka almost stumbling off the mat with her attempted Amanar, and the US led China by 1.733 points after the first rotation, with Russia third.

However, the Russians impressed on the bars — Viktoria Komova top-scoring with 15.766 — and the US' lead had been eroded to 0.399 points by the half-way stage.