

Boxer Zou ready to defend his title

Chinese star topples Irishman to advance to light flyweight title match

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in London

Defending champion Zou Shiming of China narrowly advanced to another gold-medal bout with a tiebreaker victory over Ireland's Paddy Barnes on Friday in the first of 20 semifinal fights in the Olympic boxing tournament.

Bantamweight John Joe Nevin of Ireland stunned top-seeded Lazaro Alvarez of Cuba 19-14 to advance to the final against Britain's Luke Campbell, who beat Japan's Satoshi Shimizu 20-11.

Ukraine light welterweight Denys Berinchyk and Mongolia's Munkh-Erdene Uranchimeg put on perhaps the best fight of the tournament, with the relentless Berinchyk rallying from a second-round deficit to score a jaw-dropping 17 points in the third round

of a 29-21 victory. Berinchyk will face Cuba's Roniel Iglesias in the final.

Berinchyk will be joined in the finals by heavyweight teammate Oleksandr Usyk, who trounced Bulgaria's Tervel Pulev to earn a gold-medal bout. He'll meet Italy's Clemente Russo, who beat top-seeded Teymur Mammadov of Azerbaijan in yet another hold-filled bout for two fighters whose styles don't please many fight crowds.

Ukraine's powerful team placed a tournament-high five boxers in the semifinals, with lightweight champion Vasyly Lomachenko and the rest fighting Friday night. The Ukrainians are distinctive for more than their boxing acumen and those blue-and-yellow outfits: Both Berinchyk and Usyk cut their hair into a chub, a traditional Cosack haircut featuring a shaved head with one long, flowing lock on top.

Barnes hoped to bounce back from four years of embarrassment after Zou

beat him 15-0 in the semifinals in Beijing, and the energetic Irish fighter nearly knocked off the champ. After three rounds of strong exchanges, the bout was scored level at 15-15, but Zou edged Barnes on the countback tiebreaker that tallies up a more complete total of punches landed.

"I'm not going to cry about it," said Barnes, a personable, popular fighter who spent much of time in the Olympic Village trying to take photographs with famous athletes. "He's a world champion, and he got that for a reason."

While this is Zou's last Olympics, Barnes said he wouldn't mind coming back in Rio, "unless someone offers me a million pounds."

Zou will meet Thailand's Kaeo Pongprayoon in the final after his 13-12 win over Russia's David Ayrapetyan.

Nevin had shockingly few problems getting rid of the top-seeded Alvarez, who beat talented U.S. bantamweight Joseph Diaz Jr. in one of the tournament's better fights last week. Nevin even showboated a bit for the hun-

dreds of fans who mobbed the square of his hometown to watch the fight on televisions, doing a little shuffle-step move dubbed the Mullingar Shuffle by his coaches.

"I think he kind of gave up a little halfway into the last round when he couldn't get to me," Nevin said.

Campbell easily took care of Shimizu to set up a rubber match with Nevin. The pair split two recent fights, including a meeting at the world championships.

Campbell's teammate, middleweight Anthony Ogogo, got knocked down and never got rolling in a 16-9 loss to Esquivia Falcao, who will fight Ryota Murata for Brazil's first boxing gold medal. Falcao's brother, Yamaguchi, also reached the light heavyweight semifinals.

Murata, who rallied in the third round to beat Uzbekistan's Abbas Atoev 13-12, will attempt to win Japan's second Olympic boxing gold medal — the first since the 1964 Tokyo Games, when Takao Sakurai won at bantamweight.

Berinchyk and Uranchimeg com-

bined for an all-out brawl, with Berinchyk relentlessly pushing forward while Uranchimeg picked him apart with hooks and counterpunches. Both fighters took numerous clean head shots, but Uranchimeg — who upset Britain's Tom Stalker two days ago — got caught with a combination and a standing-eight count in the third round.

Berinchyk was relentless, recording another eight-count on the dazed Uranchimeg before finishing strong. The serious-faced Berinchyk then did a joyful dance in the ring after advancing to face Iglesias, whose win over Italy's Vincenzo Mangiacapre wasn't nearly as entertaining.

Usyk had the best showing of the four fighters left in the holding-dominated heavyweight division, where many fights have been booed by fans bored with constant clinches and wrestling. Mammadov and Russo both advanced to the semifinals after holding-plagued victories that drew protests from the losers, but Beijing silver medalist Russo was slightly better than the top-seeded Azeri.

REPORTER'S LOG |
MU QIAN

You don't need a ticket to get in on action

It was announced in Wembley Stadium that 80,203 spectators were attending the London Olympics women's soccer final.

I was one of them. I was lucky enough to have bought the ticket online a week ago. Most of the games had been sold out months ago, and only a very small number of tickets were released after the Games started.

It was the United States versus Japan. I didn't know which teams would face off when I bought the ticket.

Nobody did. Most people in the stadium were, like me, from neither country.

But the mood was electric. We applauded and screamed for good performances from either side.

It was not uncommon for someone to wave a Japanese flag before cheering for a beautiful shot by the Americans.

It was one of the most light-hearted finals I've seen. When neither of the teams is from one's home country, one becomes more focused on the beauty of the sport itself.

Both teams did good jobs, although the US won 2-1. We gave a standing ovation to all the athletes at the awarding ceremony, including the Canadians, who got the bronze.

The Olympic Games is a party of peace and love.

Although this was the first game I saw in person during London 2012, I had been watching live broadcasts on big screens in Hyde Park.

As each athlete was introduced before a track and field event, a group of people in the crowd would shout and cheer. I did so when Chinese competitors appeared onscreen.

Even if you don't have tickets, you can still get involved.

On July 27, 2.9 million people participated in artist Martin Creed's Work No 1197: *All the Bells in a Country Ring as Quickly and as Loudly as Possible for Three Minutes* to herald the 2012 Olympic Games' start.

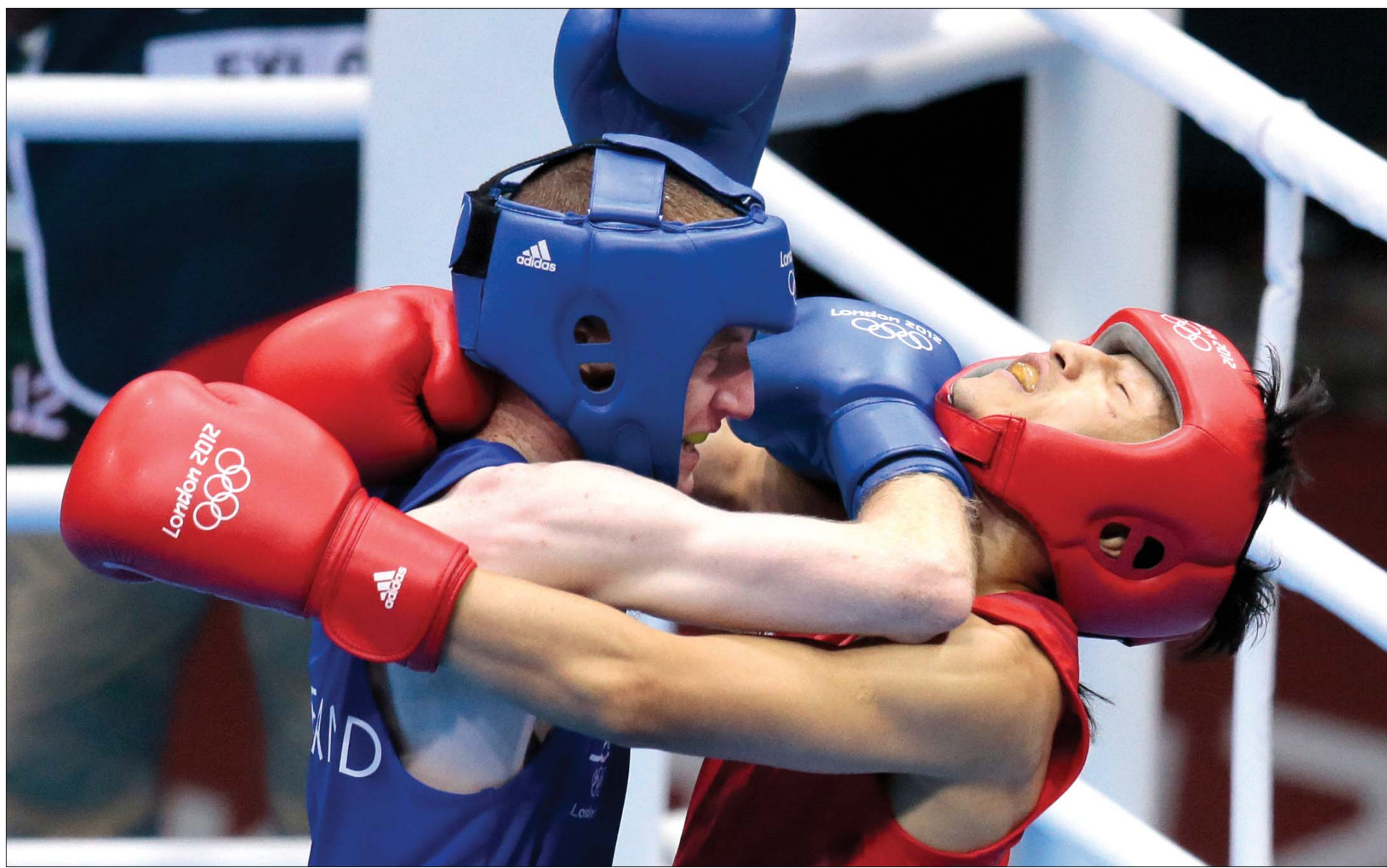
There are also many free games, like the cycling road race, the race walk and the marathon. They all happen in the streets of London and make the city a unique stage for athletes' performances.

On Sunday, the men's marathon will be the last chance for everybody in London to see the Games without a ticket.

I cheered for marathon runners in the streets of Beijing in 2008. It was one of my best memories from that Games.

I'm going to relive that moment on Sunday.

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IVAN SEKRETAREV / ASSOCIATED PRESS

China's Zou Shiming (right) is locked up with Ireland's Paddy Barnes during their men's semifinal light flyweight boxing match on Friday.

First Muslim woman referee at Olympic beach volleyball

By JIMMY GOLEN in London
Associated Press

The dancers are dressed to titillate, and the players wear even less: bikinis that reveal every movement of their muscles as they dig and dive for the ball.

Amina El Sergany does not need a referee's platform to be noticed on a beach volleyball court.

The first Muslim woman to officiate the sport at the Olympics, El Sergany worked the London Games dressed in a hijab that, when covered by the standard referee's uniform, showed only her face and hands. From her elevated position beside the net, she stood in stark contrast to the beach party wardrobe worn by the Horse Guards Parade Dance team and the athletes themselves.

"It doesn't matter for me. It is normal for me," the Egyptian said this week in an interview between assignments. "I think first they (the players) were afraid of me, but after that they got used to me and deal with me in a good way. Nobody talks to me about that. They respected me like every other referee."

It's been said that the ideal referee is the one that's unnoticed. But El Sergany said she hoped her visibility would encourage women from all cultures to take up the sport.

"The most important thing is not to win or lose but the participation in these games, to be involved in world

actions, not to be isolated," she said. "I'm proud. It will help lots of women, not only Muslim women."

In an Olympics with unprecedented participation by women, including the first-ever female athletes from Saudi Arabia, beach volleyball has been fighting the perception that its athletes are more about sex appeal than sport. Patiently tolerating the questions about their bikinis — athletes insist it is the logical choice for a sport born on the beach — players say they are willing to accept the leering because it gives them a chance to win new fans for their game.

The skimpy uniforms are no doubt one reason why beach volleyball is the rare sport where the women's competition is at the forefront, with TV ratings better for the women than the men. And when the Daily Mail newspaper ran a photo spread about the event on its website, it included 16 pictures: 15 of them were of bathing suit-clad women, including three of the dance team, with one picture of the British men's team, way at the bottom.

But even as women approached — or surpassed — equality in the competition, FIVB President Wei Jizhong knew there was still work to be done. In January, he was asked by the United Nations sports adviser to make the sport more welcoming to Muslim women who, for cultural reasons, would not compete in the traditional bikini. The result: a new rule that allows women to wear shorts

and T-shirts.

"After the changes, the reforms, women all over the world will be part of this," El Sergany said. "We do not have any women players back in Egypt. But after the regulations, I will try."

Wei knows that it will take years for women just starting the sport to compete for spots in the Olympics, so he also looked for other ways to get more women on the sand. He set a goal of 30 percent female referees at the Olympics — as it turned out, four of the 16 in London were women — and gave national federations money so they could help get them the experience they needed to officiate at the highest level.

"To encourage the women officials, we need a political decision, not a technical one," Wei said in an interview at the FIVB hospitality suite between beach volleyball sessions.

And he wasn't done. In London and at other FIVB events, male and female referees are assigned to matches by the officiating supervisor without regard to gender.

"In other sports, women only officiate women's games. I want it different," he said. "Women referees can officiate men's sports. That makes it really equal."

A volleyball referee for 17 years, El Sergany out went on the FIVB tour to prepare for the Summer Games, working semifinals at events in Gstaad and Moscow and as the second referee



DAVE MARTIN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Amina El Sergany of Egypt helps officiate a beach volleyball match on Aug. 4.

in Beijing and Shanghai. She was the first referee, the one that stands on a platform beside the net and has the final say on all calls, for the women's final of an under-19 tournament in Cyprus.

In London, she worked matches in the preliminary and knockout rounds but not any in the medal rounds. Although there were several controversial referee decisions during the tournament — including a close sideline call to end the men's gold medal match on Thursday night — there was nothing unusual in El Sergany's.

"It's nice to see people here from different cultures, but she definitely doesn't get treated any differently," said American Misty May-Treanor, calling El Sergany one of the easiest officials to deal with.

"She's so nice," May-Treanor said. "How could you yell at her?"

Games: Coaches must protect athletes, says Wei

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Chinese officials questioned the scoring system but were gagged from appealing because rules stipulate execution scores cannot be altered.

Wei said rules must be changed. "It should be the responsibility of the event's governing body. They should revise the rules to make them compatible with the sport's development and try to introduce high-tech systems to assist the judges," the 72-year-old said.

Wei had urged the International Volleyball Federation to introduce a TV analysis system on volleyball courts at the London Games to help referees make better decisions.

"Bad calls will put athletes' four-year efforts in jeopardy and it's the responsibility of every single sport's governing body to make the judging more scientific," Wei said.

Wei also suggested the Badminton World Federation revise its competition format to prevent the match-fixing scandal that banned eight players from Asian countries, including Wang Xiaoli and Yu Yang from China.

"Throwing the matches for a better spot in the knockout stage, the players' behaviors have violated the sportsmanship spirit and should be punished. But we also have to notice that it happened because the rules allowed it. It's also a problem for the event's governing body, which didn't set the format properly," he said.

Wei said a redraw after the group stage should solve the format problems.

The former COC official said Chinese sports officials should take more responsibility to protect athletes from injuries.

China's superstar hurdler Liu Xiang unexpectedly bowed out of the 110m hurdles because of an old Achilles tendon injury on Tuesday. Wei said it was a shame to let him compete while injured.

"Athletes will always fight to the end for good results regardless of his sweat and pain. But coaches and officials should call him off once it's too tough for him to compete. They should try to avoid unnecessary further hurt for the players," he said.

As for the competition between nations in the Olympic medal tally, Wei said the United States would claim the top spot because Western countries boast major advantages in mainstream events, such as track and field and swimming.

Still, Wei applauded China's breakthrough in swimming at the Games. Chinese swimmers took home five gold, two silver and three bronze medals, their best haul in history.

"It's a result of the combination of modern developing philosophy and the budding of local talent," he said.

Meanwhile, Wei threw his full support behind swimmers Sun Yang and Ye Shiwen, urging them to ignore doping suspicions.

"The fact tells everything. We don't need to be bothered by the doubts without proof. We should just stay focused and work even harder," he said.