



US swimmer Michael Phelps at the start of the men's 200m individual medley final on Thursday. Phelps won his 20th career Olympic medal and completed a historic third consecutive 200m IM Olympic victory. He has two events remaining.

FABRICE COFFRINI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Phelps completes unique hat-trick

US superstar glides to his 20th Olympic medal and third straight 200m IM title

By REUTERS in London

Michael Phelps became the first male swimmer to win the same event at three successive Olympics when he clinched the men's 200m individual medley gold medal at the London Games on Thursday.

Phelps, who won the event at the Athens and Beijing Games,

relegated compatriot and world champion Ryan Lochte to silver while Hungary's Laszlo Cseh took bronze.

Phelps led all the way and got his giant hands on the wall first in a time of 1min 54.27 sec, just outside Lochte's world record of 1:54.00 that he set last year in the final at the Shanghai world championships.

Lochte, close to exhaustion

after winning bronze in the 200 backstroke half an hour before the medley, held on to finish second, just 0.63 behind his teammate. Cseh clocked 1:56.22 for the bronze.

Phelps had joined forces with Lochte on Tuesday to win gold in the 4x200 freestyle relay and claim a record 19th Olympic medal and the 200 individual medley victory on Thursday gave the 27-year-old his 16th Olympic gold medal and 20th overall.

Only two swimmers had ever won the same individual event at three successive 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 had eluded generations of the best male swimmers until Phelps, who had the chance of doing it in four different events in London.

He came fourth in the 400 individual medley and looked to set to achieve the feat in his favored 200 butterfly but was pipped by South Africa's Chad le Clos on the final stroke.

Phelps still has the 100 butterfly to come on his program. He was the

fastest qualifier going into Friday's final.

Tyler Clary upset his American teammate Lochte to win the men's 200m backstroke gold medal on Thursday.

Lochte led at all the turns but faded on the last lap as Clary drew level with him, then got his hands on the wall first in a tight finish to win his first Olympic gold medal 1 min, 53.41 sec.

Japan's Ryosuke Irie, runner-up to Lochte at last year's World Championships, also made a late charge to grab the silver while Lochte claimed the bronze.



PHIL NOBLE / REUTERS

Gold medal winner Gabrielle Douglas of the US performs her floor exercise during the women's individual all-around gymnastics final in the North Greenwich Arena on Thursday.

Vault: Douglas outduels Komova for gold medal

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Raisman banged her foot on one of the asymmetric bars in the second routine and began to look concerned. Douglas, for all her prowess on the apparatus, was beaten by the two Russians, with Mustafina scoring a high 16.1, but the American stayed in the lead.

With Douglas and the 17-year-old Komova dueling for the gold, their teammates were left to fight for bronze and Mustafina looked to have thrown away her chances when she came off the beam attempting to complete a twisting somersault.

Her score was a low 13.633 and Raisman took to the narrow piece of wood knowing she could take advantage. Her hopes shriveled, though, when she only just saved herself from overbalancing and then wobbled precariously on a spin and she dropped to fifth place.

Though she recovered with 15.133 on the floor, where she won a world bronze medal last October, it was not enough to put her ahead of 2010 world all-around champion Mustafina.

Komova was last on the floor and Raisman stood with her arm around Douglas as they waited for the giant scoreboard, high above them, to show their fate. Seconds later, only Douglas was celebrating.

As Raisman bit her lip and Komova slumped in a chair and covered her face with both hands, Douglas climbed onto the dais by the vault run-up and waved to the wildly cheering and flag-waving American fans.

Her victory was another feather in the cap of Chinese-born coach Liang Chow who coached another American, Shawn Johnson, to all-around silver and beam gold at the Beijing Olympics four years ago.

Ho-hum, more gold for China

By STEPHEN WADE in London
Associated Press

China, no surprise, continues to dominate the Olympic table tennis tournament.

On Thursday, Zhang Jike won the men's singles gold medal, beating teammate Wang Hao 4-1 in the all-China final.

Li Xiaoxia defeated teammate Ding Ning in Wednesday's women's final, which means the Asian power has claimed 22 of 26 gold medals since ping-pong was introduced at the 1988 Olympics.

Dimitrij Ovtcharov of Germany defeated Chuang Chih-yuan of Chinese Taipei 4-2 for men's bronze.

The 24-year-old Zhang was too much for Wang, who lost his third straight Olympic final. Zhang also beat Wang in the final of last year's World Championships.

Zhang celebrated by jumping over the 1-meter barrier surrounding the court and racing to the nearby medal podium, where he knelt down and kissed the top platform designated for the gold medalist.

In his first Olympics, Zhang has been brash, predicting for days he'd win. He won a marathon first game 18-16 and hung on after Wang rallied to win the fourth game. Zhang closed it out in the fifth winning 13-11.

The two team events start next with China expected to complete its four-medal sweep of gold, matching Beijing four years ago.

The governing body of table tennis — the ITTF — has tried tinkering with rules to give others a chance. This time only two singles players are allowed from a nation — down from three in Beijing. That guarantees at least one nation other than China would win bronze. That added to the

crushing pressure for the Chinese to deliver in what is the national pastime for 1.3 billion.

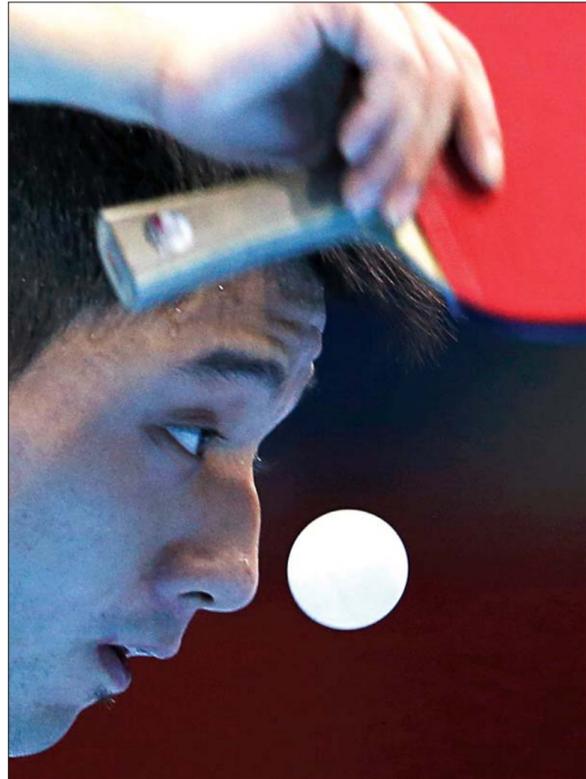
At the World Championships China enters seven or eight players in singles. There was no cushion with only two in the Olympics.

China men's coach Liu Guoliang, a double gold medalist in 1996, would like to see a bit more competition.

"I'd be happy to see the overall standard improve," Liu said. "But, of course, I want Chinese players to stay on top."

Liu, who was on the bench to coach Zhang and Wang in the other matches, watched from the stands in the sold-out 6,000-seat venue — huge by table tennis standards.

"One is like an elder son, and the other is like a younger son," Liu said.



GRIGORY DUKOR / REUTERS

China's Zhang Jike serves to fellow countryman Wang Hao in their singles gold medal match at the ExCel Centre on Thursday. Zhang won 3-1.

From Putin with love for Russian judoka

By TIM REYNOLDS in London
Associated Press

He clenched his fists at times, leaned back nervously at others. And when his compatriots won Olympic gold, he leaped from his seat and thrust his arms skyward.

A common fan reaction — from an uncommon fan.

Vladimir Putin was one thrilled Russian president on Thursday.

The longtime judo enthusiast had a VIP seat to watch Tagir Khaibulaev win the 100-kilogram gold medal. When the match ended, Putin led the celebration. He slipped back into his suit jacket, met Khaibulaev moments after he walked off the mat, wrapped him in a warm embrace, and tousled his hair.

"You should be proud," Putin was heard telling Khaibulaev.

Later, Khaibulaev acknowledged the obvious, saying he was "honored".

"The president congratulated me," Khaibulaev said. "He said, 'Well done.' He was very pleased, especially since he was with us these past four years. He came to us and trained with us. He was very nervous for us."

Putin arrived on Thursday in London, heading first to No 10 Downing Street for a talk with British Prime Minister David Cameron. The heads of state met for about 45 minutes before heading out to the Olympic judo venue, taking second-row seats just after the 78-kg women's semifinals.

Putin spent time appearing to educate Cameron on the finer points of judo — after all, Putin is a black belt, serves as the honorary president of the International Judo Federation and even wrote a book about the sport called *Judo: History, Theory, Practice*. With a translator leaning over their shoulders, Putin would lean in toward Cameron, talk a bit and make a few gestures with his hands, the prime minister mostly nodding.

There also were moments where Putin got serious.

When Khaibulaev faced Dmitri Peters — who was born in Russia and now competes for Germany — in the semifinals, the chatting stopped. Putin watched almost entirely in silence, took a deep breath when the scoreless bout went to overtime, then showed a broad smile when Khaibulaev was announced as the winner after no points were awarded in the extra period.

Khaibulaev went on to win the final, much to Putin's delight, of course.

"It came all together," Khaibulaev said. "I won and this is also nice for him."

Cameron did not have the same luck. Britain had a finalist in the 78-kg women's event — but Gemma Gibbons lost to American Kayla Harrison, the first judo gold for the US.

"I had the great privilege of meeting her afterwards, she was very emotional, very excited," Cameron told Britain's Sky News television.

Politics has often been in the spotlight at the London Games.

First lady Michelle Obama spent three days at the Olympics to cheer on the American delegation. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney — who led the 2002 Salt Lake Games — was criticized in the British press as the Games opened by saying problems facing Olympic organizers were "disconcerting". Hours before Putin arrived at judo, Ann Romney, the candidate's wife, cheered on a horse she partly owns as it competed in the equestrian dressage event.

Putin has been a judo competitor since his childhood. His interest in sports is well-known and widespread — he's driven race cars, is a soccer fan, enjoys downhill skiing and in recent years has even tried to add ice hockey to his athletic repertoire.

Russia has long been a global sports power, and is about to step even further into the forefront by hosting the 2014 Sochi Olympics and 2018 World Cup.