

# Unbeaten US one step closer to gold in volleyball

By ASSOCIATED PRESS  
in London

The unbeaten US women's volleyball team will get another chance at its first gold medal.

The Americans advanced to the Olympic final with a straight-set victory over South Korea on Thursday. The team will play for the title Saturday against the winner of a later semifinal between Brazil and Japan.

The top-ranked US has dropped just two sets in London. In the latest victory, Destinee Hooker scored 24 points in the 25-20, 25-22, 25-22 win at Earls Court.

The American women made it to the final at the 2008 Beijing Games but settled for the silver medal after falling 3-1 to Brazil. The team has won silver twice and the bronze once since volleyball joined the Olympics in 1964. But the gold has eluded the team.

The US got an emotional boost for the match with the return of captain Lindsey Berg, who was held out of the team's straight-set quarterfinal victory over the Dominican Republic with an injury to her lower left leg.

Fifteenth-ranked South Korea upset No 4 Italy in four sets on Tuesday to advance. The team's best result in Olympic play came at the 1976 Montreal Games.

The United States has a 6-2 record against South Korea in Olympic matches, including a 3-1 US victory in the opening match of the tournament.

The semifinal was tight at the start, but the United States pulled ahead 20-16 in the first set on Hooker's kill.

The South Koreans denied the US team its first chance at set point before Kim Yeon-koung's serve sailed out to give it to the Americans.

South Korea took a 14-11 advantage in the second on Jung Dae-young's kill, but mistakes cost them in the end. Kim's misplayed spike gave the United States a 23-22 lead, and Han Yoo-mi's kill went wide for set point.

Jordan Larson's spike made it 15-10 in the third set but South Korea fought back to even it at 18 on Kim's ace. The US wouldn't let the South Koreans take the lead. Hooker's monster spike set up Logan Tom's kill for match point as the crowd at Earls Court chanted "U-S-A! U-S-A!"

Kim scored 20 points for the South Koreans.

Berg, a three-time Olympian, hurt her leg in the Americans' final preliminary-round match against Turkey on Sunday, and the US was tightlipped about the timetable for her return because it could give its opponents a competitive advantage.

Berg warmed up before the US women's volleyball straight-set victory the Dominican Republic in the quarterfinals on Tuesday night but didn't play. Courtney Thompson started in her place.

After the match, US coach Hugh McCutcheon made a point of embracing Berg.

It will be the second straight Olympic final for McCutcheon, who guided the American men to a gold medal in 2008.

South Korea went 2-3 in the preliminary round, sweeping Brazil and beating Serbia 3-1. It lost to China, Turkey and the United States.



US' Destinee Hooker goes up for a smash in front of South Korea's Han Song-yi during their women's volleyball semifinal match on Thursday. The US won 3-0.

CHRIS O'MEARA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Synchronized swimming not as easy as it looks

By CLARA FERREIRA-MARQUES  
in London  
Reuters

Imagine yourself dancing the tango, for four minutes, in a 3-meter deep pool, in full make-up and in perfect time with seven others. Upside down, without ever touching the bottom.

Now make it look effortless.

Synchronized swimming is one of the most easily maligned of the less common Olympic sports. With its nose clips, sequins and heavily gelled hair, it is a far cry from the overt power, aggression and testosterone of the 100m final.

But, as the swimmers do not tire of telling reporters on the pool deck, it takes a lot of work to make it look this easy.

A routine playing on folk themes and military music took defending champions Russia to the top of the

scoreboard after Thursday's technical round, leading a group of eight teams battling for Olympic gold.

China, who narrowly missed out on silver in the duet segment of the competition, came second with 97 points thanks to a crisply executed entry. Spain, with a dance of intricate legwork set to the fast-moving guitar rhythms of Mexican duo Rodrigo y Gabriela, were third, just 0.8 points behind.

Home team Britain, making their first Olympic appearance, scored 87.3 points, placing them sixth.

Synchronized swimmers train for longer than many Olympic athletes — as much eight to 10 hours a day, six days a week. They spend long hours in the pool, working on flexibility, endurance, sometimes swimming with weights of up to 3kg to gain the strength required to keep themselves high in the water, their arms free for graceful balletic movements.

"We work six hours in the morn-

ing and another four in the afternoon," said Russian swimmer Alexandra Patskevich, dancing in the team segment. Russia, famous for precision and technique, have won every Olympic gold since 2000 and took all seven golds in the 2011 world championships.

"It is very tough, but in our sport there is no other way — everything depends on synchronization. There are eight of us and we have to be identical, in everything we do," she said, removing some of the dozens of pins holding in an intricate, gelled bun and gold-sequined hair piece.

Synchronized swimming, which has its origins in the water ballets popular in the 1900s, builds on swimming basics, such as front crawl or backstroke, and adds balletic arm movements, backflips or leg raises to create carefully choreographed routines, often with acrobatic lifts and floating patterns.

Much of the work — as much as

two-thirds of the three or four minute sequences — is under water, a lung-busting amount for routines that have become increasingly fast.

"It is obviously very difficult. Just trying to tread water — how difficult is that — and that is when you are trying to get your oxygen back in," said Adele Carlsen, a former synchronized swimmer who now works with the British team.

"If you imagine doing an 800m run, holding your breath for two-thirds of it, with power movements in there and trying to synchronize with several other people, then you kind of have an idea of how difficult it is. And you have to make it look easy."

Synchronized swimmers currently compete in the Olympics as pairs, for the duets, and as a group of eight for teams.

Working together is part of the challenge.

"You have to keep an eye on someone, you have to keep count-

ing — you have to do a lot of things at the same time. You also have to remember all your corrections from training to bring them into the performance," Katie Dawkins, of the British team, said. "So it is physically tiring, but mentally as well."

With a chunk of points — as much as half in the "free", or non-prescribed, routine — down to artistic impression, swimmers also work to achieve original choreography and expression. Entries in 2012 have included a human body themed routine with "brain" caps from the Brazilian duo, and a football routine, with referees' whistles and soccer ball caps, from Canada.

The Russian team, the dominant force in the sport, say they keep their Olympic sequences under lock and key, demonstrating them only once — at closed-door event back home.

"As soon as we show our programs, there are elements that are taken and copied," gold medalist Svetlana Romashina said.

## China finds home away from home in London

By CECILY LIU and  
ZHANG CHUNYAN in London

The China House in central London's Waldorf Hilton is the Chinese Olympic Committee's main hospitality and business center through the London Olympics — and it has been bustling.

"The China House aims to increase communication between China and the world in both sports and culture," Ma Jilong, head of the COC's marketing department, told China Daily.

Since the Games began, many Chinese athletes have been coming to the China House to relax and take media interviews after competitions, including Olympic shooter Yi Siling, swimmer Ye Shiwen, and divers Wu Minxia and He Zi.

Many famous Chinese athletes also came to the China House to show their support for the Olympics, including basketball player Yao Ming and diver Tian Liang.

China House is also the venue where the COC plays host to representatives of other countries' Olympic committees.

"The American Olympic Committee visited us twice, and we held great meetings despite the fact that China and America are fighting fiercely on the gold medal table," Ma said.

When the Bulgarian Olympic Committee visited, the China House displayed the Bulgarian flag on its TV screens to make its guests feel welcome, he said.

"Although a flag may be a small detail, to see one's flag in a foreign

country is a touching experience," Ma said.

"We arranged this to show respect to our guests."

The China House first appeared during the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and then during the 2010 Singapore Youth Olympics and the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou.

But Ma says the China House's arrival in London marks an important milestone, because the Summer Olympics are far more influential.

"We want to make use of this great opportunity to showcase Chinese culture, which is far broader (a goal) than winning sports medals," Ma said.

The China House is featuring Olympic exhibitions on one wall to highlight Chinese athletes' achieve-

ments over the years.

In addition, China House is hosting many live cultural events, including a solo concert by young Chinese singer Dou Dou, who made her name by performing the Beijing Olympics' theme song *We are the World*.

Another is the release of a Coca-Cola-sponsored inspirational song, *The Beats of China, Move the World*, by China's flamboyant pianist Lang Lang and Hong Kong singer-actor Jacky Cheung.

"Chinese culture has so much to show, and the link between sports and culture is inevitable," Ma said.

He believed improving coordination among various cultural events will enhance the influence of the China House during future Olympics.

For example, Beijing's and Jiangsu's

governments have each organized a cultural week in London during the Olympics. Both feature similar performances, which Ma believes can be coordinated.

"A foreign audience may feel strange attending one gala after another, because they can't tell the small differences between the shows," Ma said.

"Therefore, we should unite all the resources to create a more holistic program."

Another area for improvement is the China House's cooperation with sponsors, Ma said.

"Cooperation is not just about the financial support we receive from them, but also, they could use their extensive networks to help us invite influential guests and increase our outreach," Ma said.



HOTONWEB

@SUN Yujie

"Time difference! It is all because of time difference. I can't sleep at night and can't wake in the daytime."  
**Chinese epee gold medalist Sun Yujie after returning home from the London Olympics**

@Scola

"Wow, another Olympic semifinal, I'm proud and happy. The medals are only one game away. I'm so anxious."  
**Argentine basketball player Luis Scola on the national team entering the top four**

@Xie Wenjun

"A little pity, but no regret. Fighting for the next four years! Go fighting!"  
**Chinese hurdler Xie Wenjun on losing in the 110m hurdles semifinal**

@Feng Zhe Xiao Pang

"I'm leaving London! My feelings on this Olympics: long replay (the time of preparation), quick climax (competition), lower quality (mistakes made by organizers) and insufficient aftertaste (unbearable memories)."  
**Chinese gymnast Feng Zhe talks about the London Games**

@He Zi

"Little Pig (Show Lo) is not only handsome but also very nice."  
**Chinese diving Olympic champion talks about a photo taken with Taiwan-based singer Show Lo in London**

@Pique

"I missed the finals. I was preparing the match against Manchester U. Congratulations to Liu Guoliang and his team for another Gold Medal!"  
**Barcelona star player Gerard Pique on China winning the men's table tennis team championship**

@Ma Lin

"I have found a nickname of mine: chef Ma. Ha ha ..."  
**Chinese table tennis player Ma Lin jokes about the nickname given to him by the rest of the team**

@MichaelOwen

"GB won the gold medal that all my daughters want most. My eldest promises me that she will win an Olympic Gold at Dressage in 12 years time!!!"  
**Manchester United player Michael Owen on Britain's gold medals at the London Games**

@Jiao Liuyang

"I feel so good at home."  
**Chinese swimmer Jiao Liuyang on returning home**

@Zhou Jie1107

"A guy who was born in early 1988 looks younger than a girl born in later 1991. Should the girl be very sad?"  
**Chinese gymnast Zhou Jie, Olympic gymnastic champion Zou Kai's girlfriend, on her and Zou's age**

@AndyMurrayAndiMulei

"The Royal Mail are making stamps for all of the British Gold medalists. Pretty proud moment!"  
**British tennis player and gold medalist Andy Murray on the stamp featuring him**

@amhurdestar



"Words can't even explain how I feel right now! Giving God all the glory. Thanks to all that supported and believed in me."  
**US hurdler Aries Merritt on his win in the men's 110m hurdle, in a time of 12.92 seconds**

@officialasafa

"Confident that Team Jamaica will deliver a great 4x100 relay. Join me in cheering them on!"  
**Jamaican sprinter Asafa Powell**

lolojones

"Stressed. 5am no sleep post race. Almost went @britneyspears on ya & shave my head til I read ur tweets. Thx 4 lifting me up during this time"  
**US hurdler Lolo Jones feels low after he finished a disappointing fourth in the 100m hurdles**