WORLD’S FASTEST BOY

Sprint sensation Odane Skeen lays all speculation to rest as he grabs gold, leaving his competitors in his wake to win athletics’ premier sprint

BY BHAVAN JAI PRAGAS

Jamaica’s meteoric rise as a sprint powerhouse was furthered last night as Odane Skeen clinched the gold medal in the boys 100 metres finals — undoubtedly the blue ribbon event of the Games.

Odane was second fastest off the blocks and capitalised on his near perfect start with an explosive final thirty metres.

The 15-year-old finished with a personal best timing of 10.42 seconds and the title of the world’s fastest boy. Calling the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore “the best ever competition”, Odane was visibly ecstatic when speaking to reporters after the event.

“It is the most amazing feeling and it was great to do a victory lap,” Odane, who was draped in the multicoloured Jamaican flag, said.

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Odane Skeen was visibly ecstatic after the event. (PHOTO: Xin Hua/SYOGOC-Pool/4IU JIE)

He said: “I was just keeping my focus before the race and thinking about getting a good start.”

The faster heats timing of Great Britain’s David Bolarinwa clearly did not faze Odane, who was oozing confidence even as he prepared for the race at the starting blocks.

Odane said: “I didn’t give it my all in the heats but I made sure I had a good run tonight.”

Pre-race favourite David who edged Skeen out by a hundredth of a second in the heats, was a figure of utmost composure.

This despite dropping behind surprise silver medallist Japan’s Masaki Nashimoto to finish third. David attributed several factors for his poor showing in the race.

The 16-year-old said: “It was difficult to adapt to the time difference in Singapore and the heat.” He was keen to share with reporters how Jamaica’s weather was getting a good start.

David’s slow reaction off the blocks cost the British favourite dearly.

“The Japanese was out like a rocket, as was the Jamaican,” lamented David. It was evident at the 50-metre mark that David was struggling to keep up with Masaki and Odane.

“I knew I was down at 50 metres but if I had another five to ten metres I would have taken it,” said Odane when asked about his poor start.

There is no pressure being liked to the legendary Bolt Odane said. There is no looking back for the charismatic Odane.

His win will fuel widespread comparisons between him and his compatriot Usain Bolt, a titan in the sprint circles and the current world record holder for the men’s 100 metres.

“I am chasing him down and I want to win the gold medal in London 2012,” Odane said.

For now at least, Odane can breathe easy, having gotten the upper hand in front of a world audience.

Responding to a Barbados reporter who asked what he wanted to say to people in his hometown of St Catherine and the rest of the Caribbean, Odane replied with his trademark coolness: “I’m number one baby!”

“I am chasing him down and I want to win the gold medal in London 2012.” — Odane, on being compared to Jamaica’s sprint king Usain Bolt

Jamaica’s Odane Skeen celebrates after the boys’ 100m final A, beating his personal best with a time of 10.42s. PHOTO: XINHUA/SYOGOC-POOL/4IU JIE

He was quick to add, “He’s a good boy and had a great run today.”

Jamaica’s Odane Skeen (left) and Japan’s Nashimoto Masaki win gold and silver respectively. PHOTO: XINHUA/SYOGOC-POOL/4IU JIE
**MEDALS WON YESTERDAY**

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**USA & FRANCE**

France and the United States of America were the first countries to be recognised by the IOC.

**DENMARK**

Inga Sorensen from Denmark is the youngest Olympian medallist. She was 12 when she won bronze in the 200m breaststroke event in the 1936 Olympic Games.

**KOREA**

October 3 is celebrated in Korea as Dan Gun (taekwondo yellow belt) day.

**BANGALADESH**

YOG archer Ray Beauty from Bangladesh is the shortest competitor in the event, standing at just 1.4m tall.

**FACTS OF THE WORLD**

**708**

708 B.C. — The year the first documented pentathlon is said to have occurred at the Ancient Olympic Games.

8

The number of Olympic medals — six gold and two bronze — won in the equestrian event by German dressage rider Reiner Klimke (1936-1999). It is the most Olympic medals won by a rider.

200

200m — The only event in the 776 B.C. Olympic Games. The race length was based on a legend that Hercules had run it in one breath.

2012

The year the first Winter Youth Olympic Games will be held, in Innsbruck, Austria.

**COLUMN**

**Makings of a sports fan**

**BY CLARA CHAN**

It was 9pm and I was at the Jalan Besar Stadium watching 22 boys chase after a ball. Suddenly, the crowd was on their feet, an explosion of jeers burst out and hands were being frantically waved at a particular man in the middle of the field. “Offside man, offside!” I heard a teenage boy seated behind me bellow as he glared at the man with authority. As my eyes shifted between the referee and the spectators, I stood there clueless, wondering about the meaning of the term the teenager had just shouted. Having grown up with an ardent Manchester United fan as a brother, I should have some understanding of football. It is after all the world’s most popular sport. But the sad truth is, I don’t.

However, that does not mean that I enjoy the match any less than a fan would, and that’s the beauty of sports. You need not be an expert, especially in terms of technicality, to appreciate its essence — the unity, triumph and anguish being played out. While comprehending the rules of the game is indeed important, it is not the primary core of sports. Anyone would be able to understand the coming together of strangers to celebrate the victory of another, or the rallying of support to keep the loser’s chin held high.

In these Games, the intense engagement of people from all walks of life is clear as they scream in elation at a point earned and moan in frustration at a point lost. Not all are clear about the rules of the game and yet they actively participate in the exchange of emotions. At the conclusion of every match, there is always the applause that celebrates the efforts of the athletes. Sports is after all universal, and the only cardinal rule is to appreciate the display of human strength, tenacity and respect. This can be understood by anyone, fan or non-fan.
India’s Yuki Bhambri deals with lost chances and injury in the dramatic tennis singles finals

BY CASSANDRA YEAP

Near-misses. Self-doubt. Injury. He may be only 18, but yesterday India’s Yuki Bhambri handled the disappointments of champions with the grace of one.

He retired in the boys’ tennis singles finals due to a leg cramp, relinquishing the gold medal to Juan Sebastian Gomez of Columbia.

Minutes after his decision was announced, Yuki requested to address the crowd.

“I’ll have to be happy with a silver this time, but hopefully gold next time.”

The injury was not the only letdown the crowd favourite had to deal with. Earlier, Yuki twice failed to convert ear-misses. Self-doubt. Injury.

Though winning by default, Juan Sebastian fought hard. The first set and after Yuki staged a comeback in the second: “I always kept calm, never lost control and concentration.”

Speaking to reporters afterwards, sixth-seed Yuki was calm and positive. “I think I’ll have a lot of opportunities this year and in the coming years, and hopefully get a medal in the London Olympics.”

The unseeded player came into the action.

Every dive may only last a few seconds but time does little to reflect the subdued intensity of this beautiful sport. Photojournalist Ivan Tan soaks up the atmosphere at the youth women’s 10m platform finals.

8.02pm I arrive at the main entrance of Toa Payoh Swimming Complex.

8.15pm The crowds, consisting mostly of families and students, begin to amass.

8.19pm The emcee introduces the 12 divers to a huge cheering crowd.

8.20pm Divers start their quick warm up.

8.31pm The deejay alternates tunes of Gorillaz and Keane after each successive dive.

8.47pm Singapore’s Myra Lee dives despite sustaining a back injury since the preliminaries.

“I think I’ll have a lot of opportunities this year and in the coming years, and hopefully get a medal in the London Olympics.”

· Tennis player Yuki Bhambri

Travelling took on new meaning yesterday in basketball when USA captain Sterling Gibbs took superhuman attempts to retrieve the ball. Careening out of court, he stepped on several people, including a table of event delegates.

Spirited fight among paddlers

Singaporean paddler Isabelle Li put up a fierce fight against Japan’s Tanioka Ayuka at her second match of the table tennis women’s singles. The thrilling encounter dragged the match to over an hour. Isabelle eventually lost the last set by 6-11.

Isabelle eventually made it past the first stage after a win over New Zealand’s Julia Wu with a score of 3-0.

Victory overturned

Hayden Daniels from Canada struggled with balance in his new boat in the Canoe-Kayak Men and Women Preliminary Sprint. Athletes in the Men’s C1 head to head canoe sprint round one had to balance on one knee throughout the race. In the C1 Men’s repechage round two, Hayden Daniels capsized his boat.

Suokas Elvis from Lithuania also capsized his boat while Sokol Patryk from Poland took the wrong course and got disqualified.

T-30 MINUTES TO...

Diving into the action

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Chat with a champion

Charmaine Crooks
Athletics
Canada

Born in Jamaica, Charmaine Crooks moved to Canada when she was six years old. She is a five-time Olympian and an Olympic silver medallist in the 4x400m relay in 1984. She is the first Canadian woman to run 800m under two minutes.

11
The number of time she has been Canadian champion.

16
The age Crooks took up running seriously.

17
The number of years Crooks represented Canada in Track and Field.

“I will continue to pursue Judo and improve myself because I know I am not at my ‘peak’ yet.”

—Jing Fang, on how she feels about her progress

Profile

TANG JING FANG
JUDO
SINGAPORE

“I will continue to pursue Judo and improve myself because I know I am not at my ‘peak’ yet.”

—Jing Fang, on how she feels about her progress

By Yu Shasha

It there is one thing Tang Jing Fang inherited from her father, it is the love of Judo.

Her interest in the sport started at the age of 11 under the influence of her father, Tang Soon Onn, a Gold medallist Judo athlete in the 1989 Southeast Asian Games and the current coach of schools like Nanyang Technological University.

As a father and a coach, Mr. Tang has been Jing Fang’s inspiration all these years. She started off joining Judo recreational clubs and taking Judo up as a co-curricular activity in her school.

“As I progressed, I feel a sense of achievement and had a desire to do even better. I will continue to pursue Judo and improve myself because I know I am not at my ‘peak’ yet,” she says.

Jing Fang reveals that her father trusts her to make sure that she maintains her weight below 52kg. However, there was one instance that her father blew his top when he found out that Jing Fang went ice-skating with her friends, just before she boarded a plane to Korea for her competition as he was afraid it might jeopardise her winning chances.

Standing on the battle stage, she mentally notes down her opponent’s favourite throws and actions while staying focused on her own attack, seeking out the first opportunity to unleash her “Ippon Seoinage,” a one-arm shoulder throw which requires plenty of technical proficiency to execute correctly. It is her determination and fighting spirit that helps her to excel in the Judo arena.

However, off the battle stage, Jing Fang is a humble and cheerful girl who generously shares her experience as a Judo athlete. To her, Judo is a sport that trains both the mind and body. It differs from other martial arts because there is a certain set of etiquette to adhere to. For instance, Judo athletes pay respects to their opponents by bowing before they fight.

She also believes that talent plays quite a big part for Judo in areas such as body coordination. Of course, a lot of hard work is involved as well.

Looking back on the day she was notified about the YOG athlete selection results, she recalls her joy and excitement. “It feels great to know that my efforts paid off,” she says.

When asked for her thoughts on her mentor, coach and father, Jing Fang says: “Daddy, thank you for being my inspiration. Even if sometimes you are strict and fierce, I know that you have my best interest at heart. I love you Daddy and Mummy for your support!”

Like Father, Like Daughter

Carrying on her father’s legacy is Singaporean judoka Tang Jing Fang who was elated when she was selected for the YOG.

Photos by Eunice Chan

BY YU SHASHA

“I will continue to pursue Judo and improve myself because I know I am not at my ‘peak’ yet.”

—Jing Fang, on how she feels about her progress

“Never give up and continue to challenge yourself, expand your horizons and try new things.”

—Charmaine’s advice to young women
It is easy to mistake Japan’s artistic gymnasts Yuya Kamoto and Natsumi Sasada for siblings. The pair were seen engaging in conversation and sharing smiles.

It is hard to believe Yuya when he says that prior to the Youth Olympic Games, the both of them had never heard of each other.

They may have been strangers in Japan, but Yuya, 15, and Natsumi, 14, share several similarities. Despite their young age, both of them have had many years of experience in gymnastics. Their success in the sport can perhaps also be attributed to the fact that both of them have parents who were gymnasts. After his recent win, Yuya credits his gymnast dad as his biggest motivation. Meanwhile, Natsumi’s mother is a gymnast who has been on five Japanese World Championship teams.

Both of them seem shy and soft-spoken, a far cry from the confident persona they display at the gymnasium. Yuya had won the gold medal in the men’s all-around competition on Wednesday and Natsumi had come in fourth in the women’s event.

On whether she feels pressured by Yuya’s performance in the Games, Natsumi admits that she was but she was quick to point out Yuya’s strength. “Yuya is very confident and I think that is a good point about him,” she says.

Both of them have different ways of handling the pressure resting on them as the artistic gymnasts representing Japan.

Natsumi says: “I get nervous but I will just think about the encouraging words from my friends and relatives and that helps to lessen the nerves.” Yuya, on the other hand, says that he will just focus on his competition.

With the Games ending next Thursday, what is the one thing that they will remember about their YOG experience?

Natsumi says: “My best memory is taking part in the very first YOG, which is different from the competitions in Japan. Also, life in the Youth Olympic Village was very fun.”

As for Yuya, there is no question about what his best memory is. “Winning the gold medal!” he said with a smile.

Japanese gymnasts Natsumi and Yuya have won scores of fans with their dazzling smiles. PHOTO: LAM YARN
Mingling over music
Athletes take a break from sports and unite through music at the Evening Festival

Youth athletes were spotted loosening up and unwinding after days of gruelling training and tough competition in their various sporting fields last Friday evening.

Many went to the Evening Festival in the Youth Olympic Village comfortably dressed in their T-shirts, bermudas and slippers. A crowd had already formed before the festival started, and boys of different nationalities entertained themselves by passing a soccer ball around, while others were cheering, dancing in circles.

The evening was filled with vibrant displays of music by Pop Shuvit from Malaysia, STARCH from Switzerland, Jalebee Cartel from India and Singapore’s percussion group, Rhythm De Pasión.

For Lourdes Villasenor, a 17-year-old Mexican swimmer, it was a wonderful way to combine sports and culture. “I am very happy with the performances tonight!” she said.

Mongolian swimmer Ulziibadrakh Gantulga, who only came halfway through the evening, rushed to the staging area to find out what was going on. He had just returned from a competition at the Singapore Sports School. “I am going to have my meal quickly and come back here later. I do not know who is performing but it sounds great!” said the 18-year-old. He added that he did not have much time to attend concerts back home due to sporting commitments, so the evening was a good time to relax and mingle with the others.

Majduleen Milud, an air rifle shooter representing Libya said: “I am not used to this loud music but it is good to see other youths and cultures.”

Even local percussion group, Rhythm De Pasión faced challenges. One of the eleven members in the group, Suhaimi, said: “Most of the group members are Muslims and since it is Ramadhan (the Muslim fasting month), it is a little challenging to go through rehearsals while fasting.”

The Evening Festival is part of the Art and Culture activities under the Culture and Education Programme.

The importance of exchanging cultural experiences was supported by Malaysian band, Pop Shuvit. The band performed “Sizuka”, a Malay song about a Japanese girl, as they believe that music is an excellent unifying medium as “there is no language barrier in music.” And they were right.

Despite the different languages featured in the performances, the athletes showed that they could appreciate good music and have a grand time being typical teenagers for the evening.

“K’am not used to this loud music but it is good to see other youths and cultures.”

- Majduleen Milud

YOVoice Shout-outs and dedications

To Joachim OfosuhenA-Wise
Good luck man, do your best!
Ralph Benjamin Quaye, Swimming, Ghana

To Dai Jun
这次不错哦！大家很棒！
He Jiantao, Swimming, China

To Harry Mulenga & Ben Teddy
All the best ba Zambia. Enjoy the YOG :)
Natassya Chemu, Athletics, Zambia

To Yara Hансsen
Good luck!! :) I know u’ll do your best.
Jonathan Lawrence Thackray, Cycling, Zimbabwe

To Team Canada
Go hard, go fast and do your best!! Go Canada!!!
Jaymee Bentolander, Canoe-Kayak, Canada

By Siti Latifah

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The evening was filled with vibrant displays of music by Pop Shuvit from Malaysia, STARCH from Switzerland, Jalebee Cartel from India and Singapore’s percussion group, Rhythm De Pasión.

For Lourdes Villasenor, a 17-year-old Mexican swimmer, it was a wonderful way to combine sports and culture. “I am very happy with the performances tonight!” she said.

Mongolian swimmer Ulziibadrakh Gantulga, who only came halfway through the evening, rushed to the staging area to find out what was going on. He had just returned from a competition at the Singapore Sports School. “I am going to have my meal quickly and come back here later. I do not know who is performing but it sounds great!” said the 18-year-old. He added that he did not have much time to attend concerts back home due to sporting commitments, so the evening was a good time to relax and mingle with the others.

Majduleen Milud, an air rifle shooter representing Libya said: “I am not used to this loud music but it is good to see other youths and cultures.”

The 17-year-old believes that it is important for young people like her to be exposed to people of different cultures and backgrounds as it broadens one’s horizon and perspective.

It was not only the athletes who had a good time. Chris RaxX, a member of STARCH said: “It is a great honour to be invited to perform in front of the world.” This honour was clearly displayed when they gave out their CDs for free to the athletes after their performance.

However, some difficulties were faced by the bands. RaxX who plays the saxophone said that the band had to rush for flights in order to perform in Singapore.

Even local percussion group, Rhythm De Pasión faced challenges. One of the eleven members in the group, Suhaimi, said: “Most of the group members are Muslims and since it is Ramadhan (the Muslim fasting month), it is a little challenging to go through rehearsals while fasting.”

The Evening Festival is part of the Art and Culture activities under the Culture and Education Programme.

The importance of exchanging cultural experiences was supported by Malaysian band, Pop Shuvit. The band performed “Sizuka”, a Malay song about a Japanese girl, as they believe that music is an excellent unifying medium as “there is no language barrier in music.” And they were right.

Despite the different languages featured in the performances, the athletes showed that they could appreciate good music and have a grand time being typical teenagers for the evening.

“I am not used to this loud music but it is good to see other youths and cultures.”

- Majduleen Milud

By Siti Latifah
OVERCOMING THE ODDS

BY YU SHASHA

Coming from different backgrounds but with a common passion for their sport, these athletes emerge victorious in the face of adversity.

LEANNE MURRAY
BELIZE, ATHLETICS

There is only one 400 metre running track available in Belize for runner Leanne Murray. “The other running tracks are unfit for proper training,” she said. Also, there is no digital stopwatch to time the runners.

Despite these challenges, Leanne Murray never gave up her passion for running.

She would run barefoot on the grass and cement in Belize. “It is not painful running on the grass because of the fast speed when you run. If I run on the hard surface cement floor, it is easier to get blisters,” she explained. “In fact, I run faster without shoes.”

For YOG, runners are required to wear shoes with spikes. Her coach, Miss Cassidy Jackson-Carroll, bought her spikes at the Singapore Queensway shopping centre once they arrived in Singapore.

Other than having to adapt to running in shoes on hard surfaces, the starting block is also new to her. She recalled that she cried the first time she used it because it was just way below what she can achieve.

It is a great learning curve for this 16-year-old as she had less than a week to train with spikes and get accustomed to the starting blocks.

She has been preparing for YOG since the day she qualified. “I am the only girl representing Belize for track and field. I want to show Belize and the world what a girl can do,” she proclaimed.

After YOG, it will be Leanne’s high school graduation and she plans to study abroad to gain more athletic experience from around the world.

“I want to enrich myself and contribute back to Belize because many Belize athletes do not have opportunities to go out of the country and compete internationally,” she said.

YARA HANSEN
ZIMBABWE, EQUESTRIAN

Just earlier this year, equestrian Yara Hanssen had a ghastly fall from her horse during cross country training. It left her suffering for almost two weeks in hospital with a punctured lung and three cracked ribs.

“I could only recognise my mum and grandma. My friends were so shocked and worried for me because I could not recognise them at all. My mum bought me a book so that I could write down whatever I remembered.”

“Looking back at the book, I find it so silly,” she said.

Despite the accident, Yara returned to horse riding as soon as she recovered from her memory loss.

Although there is still some fear and doubt of her own capabilities, her phobia in riding horse again, “I fell in love with horses when I was little but back in the rural village, there were only donkeys and cattle. I only want horses. They are animals who can communicate with you and understand you,” she said.

Living in the small African nation makes it hard for Yara to compete at bigger competitions. Also, it is a hassle if the horses fall ill from travelling to competitions.

“Still, I want to see how much I can achieve. I look forward to competing in South America and come back to Singapore as she had less,” she said.

“Singapore’s riding arena is very nice.”

NTS’EKE SETHO
LESOTHO, SWIMMING

Nts’Eke Setho had no coach, no place to train for the past three months, and the only 25-metre pool in his hometown Lesotho is unheated.

Not only did his parents support his training financially, they also accompanied him to trainings and made sure he followed his daily schedule.

Before a competition, Nts’Eke would pray and relax while in the water, his mind solely concentrated on defeating the other opponents.

Although he came in last for the 100 metre breaststroke swimming competition on August 15, he is determined to work harder and not disappoint anyone. “If I lose a competition, I will only blame myself but I will never give up,” he said.

Nts’Eke garnered the loudest cheers at the Singapore Sports School that day because he completed the competition despite the lack of proper training.

Other than a hat that he brought from his hometown during cross country training, Nts’Eke wears neither adornments nor lucky charms.

“The fighting spirit in me is enough,” he said.

“I think it is good that I forgot how the accident happened so that I do not have phobia in riding horse again,” she said.

Now, Yara takes more precautions such as wearing her riding hat at all times during training.

Her journey with horse riding began at the age of five in rural Zimbabwe where she lived. About one year later, she moved to town and received proper equestrian training. “I fell in love with horses when I was little but back in the rural village, there were only donkeys and cattle. I only want horses. They are animals who can communicate with you and understand you,” she said.

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SPORTING CLASS AND COOL

Sometimes, that old sport jersey and that pair of running shoes are simply not stylish enough. Photojournalist Eunice Chan and reporter Clara Chan headed into the Youth Olympic Village to keep an eye out for anyone who stood out from amongst the masses.

LEFT: 17-year-old Isatu Fofanah (black top) and Shai-Anne Davis (purple top) from Canada excitedly pulled fellow athletes Odane Skeen (grey hoodie) and Stefan Fennell (green vest) from Jamaica to take this photo. Like professional models, they gamely posed for a shot, showing off their muscles and smiles.

ABOVE: Russian NOC assistant Nelya Filippova’s lace mini dress and denim vest, along with her fuchsia sling purse and gold hoop earrings give her a touch of retro and sets her apart from the crowd.

ABOVE: While pin collecting might be the trend in the Village, 17-year-old athletes Radawie Faber Sanchez and Yunier Duran Llamo from Cuba decided to go against the norm and collected wristbands instead. The vibrantly-coloured rubber rings take their otherwise casual attire to a whole new level.

RIGHT: Who says fashion is only reserved for the young? Iran team official for volleyball boys, Hossein, was smartly dressed in his blue-on-blue suit jacket with matching black pants and shoes. A man dressed appropriately for his age, he exudes style with class.

FAR RIGHT: 16-year-old athletes Rachael Ekoshoria from Nigeria and Mariama Kadijatu Conteh from Sierra Leone are walking fashionistas. Rachael wears badges instead of pins and Mariama uses a flattened football as a hat. A little wacky, but innovative.