

Wow! Zou defends his Olympic floor title

Chinese star collects a handful of gold medals

By AGENCIES in London

China's Zou Kai successfully defended his Olympic men's floor title on Sunday to deny Japanese superstar Kohei Uchimura his second gymnastics gold medal of the London Games.

Zou's score of 15.933 was sufficient to give him his second gold medal of the competition, after his role in China's success in the team final, and his fifth Olympic gold in all.

"This medal means a lot to me," he said. "It's my fifth Olympic gold medal and I've won the most Olympic gold medals in the Chinese team now."

Zou claimed three gold medals at the Beijing Olympics four years ago and he can repeat the feat if he prevails in Tuesday's horizontal bar final.

Uchimura finished with the same score as Russia's Denis Ablyazin — 15.800 — but the Japanese took the silver medal on account of his higher execution score.

"Although I wasn't able to get gold today, I think I did really well, so I am satisfied. I have to admit that Zou Kai did very well," said Uchimura, who was crowned individual all-around champion on Wednesday.

"I can't say I'm satisfied ending up with just one gold, but it was very hard to get that one Olympic gold medal. There's something about the Olympics that is hard to predict."

Tomas Gonzalez, bidding to win Chile's first Olympic gymnastics medal, finished fourth, with America's Jake Dalton fifth.

Uchimura was the first man to take to the floor mat at the North Greenwich Arena on Sunday.

The reigning world floor champion made a confident start and closed his routine with a stuck triple twist somersault that earned him a generous round of applause.

His lead did not last for long, however, as Zou immediately bettered him.



The 24-year-old from Sichuan looked even more assured than Uchimura and stuck every landing perfectly, except for a tiny hop forward after his final tucked double somersault.

The three medalists were the first men to complete their routines, meaning Zou had a long wait until Gonzalez's score of 15.366 confirmed he was still the Olympic champion.

Meanwhile, double world champion Krisztian Berki broke British

hearts as he dramatically snatched the Olympic pommel horse gold medal on Sunday despite earning the same score as home favorite Louis Smith.

Smith had raised hopes of ending Britain's 116-year wait for an Olympic gymnastics champion after he topped qualifying but he could not match the flamboyant power and precision of Berki's routine, which edged the gold thanks to a higher execution score.

The duo both earned 16.066, leaving Smith looking rather disappointed

when his ranking flashed up but with teammate Max Whitlock earning bronze, it made it the most successful day for British gymnastics at an Olympics.

Also on Sunday, Romania's Sandra Izbasa exploited an error by American favorite McKayla Maroney to claim the Olympic gold medal in the women's vault final.

The reigning world champion, 16-year-old Maroney produced an outstanding opening vault but then



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Clockwise from top left: Chinese gymnast Zou Kai and his coach hold a banner that reads "Five Gold Crown the World" after Zou won the gold for the men's floor exercise finals on Sunday; Gold medal winner, Romanian gymnast Sandra Raluca Izbasa, performs during the artistic gymnastics women's vault final; and gold medalist gymnast Krisztian Berki of Hungary performs during the men's pommel horse final.

sat down on her landing on her second attempt, allowing Izbasa to snatch the title with a score of 15.191 points.

Maroney was left with the silver medal, while Russia's Maria Paseka came third.

It is Izbasa's second Olympic gymnastics gold, after her floor title in Beijing four years ago, and follows on from the bronze medal she won with Romania in the team final on Tuesday.

Germany's Janine Berger set the early pace with a pair of vaults that earned her a score of 15.016, before Canada's Elisabeth Black had to withdraw after hurting her left leg when she fell on her first vault.

Oksana Chusovitina moved into second place with a score of 14.783, but she was pushed into third when Paseka claimed the lead.

Maroney produced a huge Amanar vault worth 15.866 to stake a claim for gold but then disaster arrived on her second vault, as she sat down her landing before stalking from the mat in anger.

Her overall score of 15.083 took her up to first, but she was immediately pipped by 22-year-old Izbasa, who produced two solid vaults to claim her second Olympic title and leave Maroney distraught.

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**YOUR GATEWAY
To CHINA**

London

T: +44 20 7537 7156

Email: UK@chinatelecomeurope.com

Frankfurt

T: +49 69 240 032 901

Email: Germany@chinatelecomeurope.com

Moscow

T: +7 495 626 0160

Email: Russia@chinatelecomeurope.com

Dubai

T: +971 4 3756 989

Email: MiddleEast@chinatelecomeurope.com



中国电信 (欧洲) 有限公司
China Telecom (Europe) Ltd.
http://www.cteurope.net