

Qatari teen stays cool despite blushes in pool

Qatari teenage swimmer Ibrahim Al Amadi remained undaunted after finishing nearly 3 1/2 minutes behind the winner of his 1,500 meter freestyle heat at the Asian Games on Thursday.

The 16-year-old fell behind early as he struggled to a time of 19:37.04 in the slowest heat of the event — a whopping 3:25.20 behind winner Mandar Divase of India — and nearly five minutes outside the Asian record.

Al Amadi, who also swam in the men's 400m freestyle, said he was unhappy with his time but that the experience in Guangzhou would help boost his career.

"We came here to practice and to compete with the big teams," said Al Amadi.

Mirza praises husband Shoab for victory

Sania Mirza dedicated her opening Asian Games win to her husband and former Pakistan cricket captain, Shoab Malik, on Thursday as the Indian golden girl romped past Hong Kong's Chan Wing Yau.

Mirza, whose ranking has slumped to 166 following a series of injuries, needed just under an hour to clinch a 6-1, 6-0 win, showing no signs of the illness which forced her to skip the women's team event.

"I didn't feel well over the past two weeks," said the 24-year-old, who captured a gold medal and two silver at the 2006 Doha Asian Games.

"I was absent from the team event, but now I feel much better.

"My husband came here today. That made me very confident and I felt good."

Mirza next tackles Chinese sixth seed Zhang Shuai who needed just 33 minutes to defeat roly-poly Nepalese Malika Rana in an embarrassing mismatch.

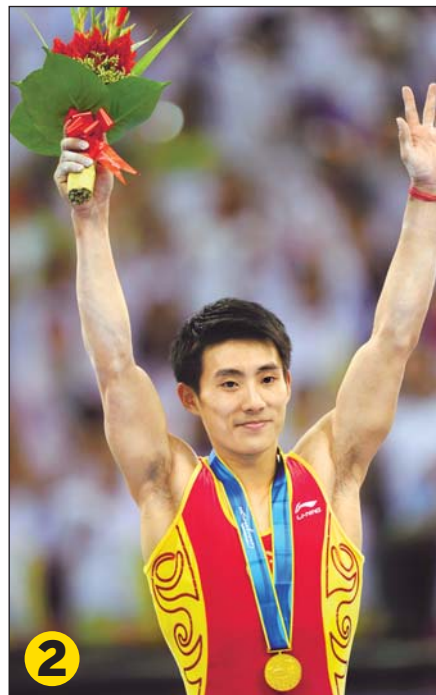


AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PHOTOS

India's Sania Mirza prepares to serve during her first round singles win.



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Olympic star Kitajima leaves Guangzhou empty-handed

Two-time Olympic double gold medalist Kosuke Kitajima ended his third Asian Games with no medals after an unexpected withdrawal in his favorite event, the 200m breaststroke, on Thursday.

He didn't take his place in the heats on Thursday morning, but swam his leg of the men's 4x100m medley relay heat for the Japanese team.

After that, he declared he would not swim in the 200m and the relay race in the evening due to a severe shoulder injury.

"Since the Pan Pacific Championships (in August), I haven't been in the best shape because of physical problems," he said. "It's not easy for me to swim so many events."

Considered the leader of the Japanese swimming team, Kitajima, the defending champion in the men's 100m and 200m breaststroke, was expected to shine in his favorite events. But due to his condition, he failed to finish better than fourth in his first two events — the 50m and 100m.

"I'm disappointed," Kitajima said. "I wanted to swim the 200m, but for now it's just hard to give the kind of performance that could give my team momentum."

He said he won't take part in any more competitions this year and will rehabilitate in Japan, before going to train in the United States.

DIAMONDS AND DRAGONS: CHINA DRESSED TO THRILL

Chinese coaches have their preferences on apparel designs as they lead their respective national squads in a gold rush at the Guangzhou Asian Games, according to designer Zhang Yu.

Lu Shanzhen, who heads the women's gymnastics team, asked for a shiny look for his gymnasts, resulting in 700 man-made diamonds adorning the costumes. The dresses cost up to 1,000 yuan (\$150) each. **(1)**

Huang Yubin, head of the men's side, a lover of calligraphy and Buddhism, asked the designer to add the calligraphic work of well-known Chinese artist Han Meilin to the costumes. **(2)**

For the all-conquering Chinese table tennis team, a dragon design was chosen at the request of Cai Zhenhua, deputy sports minister and former head coach of the team. "Cai wanted a dragon on the uniforms so that the Chinese team could be as formidable as a dragon," Zhang said. **(3)**

For the shooting team, the designers put the images of bullets and targets on the apparel, because coach Wang Yifu likes to manage the team in a military way.

As for Li Yongbo, head coach of China's badminton team, he is happy with each design as long as the uniform is yellow, his favorite color. **(4)**