THE OLYMPIC GAMES (13)

The 2008 Olympic Games of Beijing, China

Athletes from all over the world trained hard and patiently waiting for the XXIX Olympic Games to open on magical 08/08/08 and now the Games are over. The spectacular Opening Ceremony featuring two thousand and eight drummers, tons of fireworks and a large innovative LED scroll upon which dancers performed and sketched symbols expressing China’s five thousand year history and culture choreographed by filmmaker Zhang Yimou. Li Ning, a popular Chinese Olympic gold medal gymnast from the 1984 Games, ascended and glided around the top of the Bird’s Nest with a torch in hand supported by a wire technology that made him appear to defy gravity. Finally, Li Ning ignited the Olympic Calderon marking the opening of the Olympic Games.

The final unofficial medal count with the United States winning 110 and China winning 100 was expected to be close. The Chinese had fifty-one gold medals to the USA thirty-four. Eighty-eight countries won medals. Nearly six hundred American athletes took part in competitions. Final results of drug testing and age verification matters could alter some of the medal count results.

Michael Phelps of the United States won eight gold swimming medals to go with his six gold and two bronze from the 2004 Athens Games. If Michael decides to compete in London in 2012, he could surpass gymnast Larysa Latynina (eighteen medals) for the most medals won in the Olympic Games. He would need to win three more medals. He surpassed the most medals by a man in the Olympics when he passed gymnast Nikolai Andrianov who had won fifteen. He also surpassed Latynina, Carl Lewis, Paavo Nurmi and Mark Spitz who were all tied at nine for gold medals won. Michael has already appeared in London indicating that he will try to make the US swimming team and compete for more medals. Most certainly Phelps will go down in history as one of the greatest, if not the greatest Olympian, of all times sharing that honor with Jim Thorpe and Jesse Owens of the United States. In women’s swimming, Natalie Coughlin matched her 2004 Games medal count of five with another five in Beijing. She should not be overlooked with her own ten medals just because of Phelps accomplishments.

Twenty-two years of age and at six feet four inches tall, Usain Bolt of Jamaica won three gold medals in the 100 meters, the 200meters and the 4x100 relay all in world record time. The Jamaican women sprinters took all three places in the 100meters. Jamaica won eleven medals overall good enough for the twentieth best medal count in the world.

American Brian Clay won a gold medal in the Decathlon after having won a silver medal in Athens in 2004. The US men took all three medals in the 400 meters and won the relay as well. The US women also won the 400x4 meter relay. Dawn Harper won the 100 meter hurdles.

In artistic gymnastics, the US women placed second to China in the team competition; but, Nastia Liukin and Shawn Johnson won gold and silver medals in the most important all-around event. Liukin ended up with five medals and Johnson with four. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has asked the International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG) to confirm that all the women on the Chinese gymnastics team met the age requirement of sixteen during the Olympic year. Any confirmed age
requirement violations could change the team, the all-around and individual event results. The US men’s gymnastics team took a bronze medal and Jonathan Horton won a silver medal on the horizontal bar event. The gymnasts are to be commended for their medal performances after losing Paul Hamm, arguably the best male gymnast on the planet and his outstanding twin brother Morgan to serious pre-Olympic injuries.

In beach volleyball, the US teams had great results. Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh and Todd Rogers and Phil Dalhausser won gold medals respectively in women’s and men’s beach volleyball. In team volleyball, the US men upset Brazil to take the gold medal and the US women took silver losing to Brazil in the final. The US women took home gold in soccer, a gold medal in basketball and a silver medal in softball. The US men’s teams won basketball, placed silver in water polo and took bronze in baseball.

The US women swept the medals in the fencing competition. Mariel Zagunis (gold), Sada Jacobson (silver), and Becca Ward (bronze) swept the saber competition.

Several women athletes excelled in their events in spite of their age. In the women’s marathon, Constantina Tomescu-Dita of Romania ran away from the field at age thirty eight. Former Uzbekistan gymnast Oksana Chusovitina became a German citizen due to a decision to receive expert medical attention for her son who was diagnosed with leukemia. At age thirty-three Oksana won her first Olympic medal, a silver medal, in vaulting executing her handspring to a one and a half twisting front vault and her two and a half twisting Yurchenko vault. This was her fifth Olympic Games appearance and she is twice as old, if not more, than any of the Chinese team members. Forty-one year old Dara Torres competed in her fifth Olympic Games and won silver medals in the fifty meters freestyle and the freestyle relays. Also a mother, Dara just completed surgery to her shoulder. What fine role models these women Olympic athletes are for all young women?

I hope you have enjoyed the thirteen part series on The Olympic Games and have considered the rich history which I was able to present to you on a limited basis. If you have favored “Olympic boycotts” in the past I hope I have given you substantial reasons for resisting efforts that would attempt to boycott future Games. As with all things in life, there is the good and the bad. Don’t allow the bad to destroy the good. The Olympic Games is one of the few spectacles in the world where mankind and womankind for sixteen days can showcase the accomplishments of peoples of the world regardless of their age, their race, their nationality, their gender or their economic condition! By the way, since Russia has invaded Georgia hasn’t someone already called for a boycott of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi?

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