



US diver David Boudia (center) poses with his gold medal, flanked by UK bronze medalist Thomas Daley (right) and China's silver medalist Qiu Bo after the men's 10m platform final at the London Games on Saturday.

Divers meet their match

'Dream Team' looks to spring back after losing the 10m platform

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Bronze medalist and hometown sweetheart Thomas Daley appeared even happier than the cheering crowds when American David Boudia upset Chinese favorite Qiu Bo to grab the Olympic men's 10m platform title on Saturday.

Qiu buried his head in his arms, weeping, while his teammates and coaches silently walked out of the stadium with lowered heads. The glory of Chinese diving's "Dream Team" faded at the London Games.

The scene also indicated things might get even worse for Chinese diving in the future.

"The world is now slowly catching up with China, and it's exciting to see me and Tom take gold and bronze," said Boudia, who — along with Russian winner Ilya Zakharov — medaled in the men's 3m springboard, ruining China's ambition to sweep all eight gold medals.

"This was exactly our original plan going in. You just put hard training into the competition. There is no special pill. There is no magic formula. You do not need a Chinese coach to win a medal. We show what hard work we do, and what the US and the rest of world can do."

Boudia's coach Adam Soldati is a five-time Big-10 Conference diving coach of the year and an NCAA diving coach of the year. The student at Purdue University in Indiana said the men's 10m platform is very competitive now.

He said he hoped the rest of the world will rise to the challenge in all diving events.

British diving team performance director Alexey Evangulov said the better other divers do, the more nervous the Chinese will become.

"China didn't show their best. Why? They are not used to competing with someone who dives better than them. They've gotten used to being the best," Evangulov said.

After five rounds and some of the world's most difficult dives in Saturday's final, including

the front four-and-a-half somersaults, Daley led with 466.20 points and one round to go.

Qiu and Boudia were tied for second by the tiniest of margins, just 0.15 point behind Daley.

In an edge-of-the-seat final round, it was the oldest of the three divers, 23-year-old Boudia, who produced a nearly faultless back two-and-a-half somersaults with two-and-a-half twists in the pike position to score 102.60 points for gold.

Although 19-year-old Qiu, who beat Boudia to take gold at the 2011 World Championships in Shanghai, responded with 100.80 for the same dive, it was not enough.

The US celebrated its first gold in the 10m platform since Greg Louganis — one of the greatest divers of all time — won in 1988.

Boudia's thrilling victory and Daley's sensational influence on the sport are bound to inspire their countries' youth.

Evangulov, who criticized Daley for too many media commitments and social activities before the Olympics, believed the sport will enjoy a brighter future in Britain, thanks to "Daley-mania."

"This sport in Britain deserves to be one of the famous sports,"



The rise of strong rivals will push us to work harder and motivate our athletes to grow stronger mentally."

ZHOU JIHONG
TEAM LEADER OF CHINA'S DIVING SQUAD

Alexey said.

"Thanks to Tom, we are in a very good position. We have good and new junior generations now. We won (over the) Russians, Ukrainians and Germans in the European Championship. It shows we have very good generation for Rio and beyond."

China reflecting

London is the second Olympics in a row where China failed to win the men's 10m platform.

In the 2008 Beijing Games, Australian Matthew Mitcham won the event with his final dive, denying the Chinese a clean sweep of all eight medals in their home Olympics.

Qiu admitted his tense body and mind cost the gold at his

Olympic debut.

"On the fifth dive, I finished on the same score as the American (Boudia), and then we had exactly the same dive in the final round," he explained.

"I was very nervous. I have competed so many times but have never experienced that much nervousness. I think the judges have been really fair. They aren't against China."

China sent two competitors to the event. But Lin Yue finished a disappointing sixth.

However, Qiu is determined to revitalize Chinese diving.

"Chinese diving dominance is the result of everyone's contributions," he said. "Even though I didn't get gold today, it doesn't mean we'll never get another one. I believe we're strong enough to take it back."

China's diving team chief Zhou Jihong regarded the losses as tough lessons and vowed to come back stronger.

"This is a lesson that hurt us a lot," Zhou said.

"But we can learn from it. We were too optimistic about our strength in the sport and also confident that victory was just within reach. The rise of strong rivals will push us to work harder and motivate our athletes to grow stronger mentally."

China wakes strides with race walking

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China's race walking gold is being hailed as a result of updating the team's traditional method of staging intensive trainings on the high-altitude Qinghai Plateau, which hadn't reaped Olympic gold since the 2000 Sydney Games.



After the 2008 Beijing Games, the sport's governing body invited foreign coaches and sent athletes to train and compete abroad.

China's London victory in the event helped compensate for its otherwise lackluster track and field performances.

The men's team took one gold and two bronze, while Cheyang Sigya claimed bronze in the women's 20km.

A week ago, Chen Ding strode to victory in the men's 20km, becoming China's first male race walking gold medalist.

His compatriot, Wang Zhen, finished third.

On Saturday, Si Tianfeng took the bronze in the men's 50km, which was another breakthrough in this category.

"It's a great start," China's track and field chief Du Zhao-cai said.

"These results are encouraging us to stick to modern and advanced methods... (It) brought remarkable improvement."

Chinese walkers are always strong contenders in such international competitions as the World Challenges and the World Championships. But they usually lose at the Olympics because their techniques lack consistency, Du explained.

"Now, with the work we did together, they have a cleaner and effective technique. They are now more confident, as they know their chance of being disqualified is lower."

The Chinese did not have a single dismissal in London. Bronze medalist Si was pleased there was not even a yellow card in his race.

"The Italian coach improved our technique a lot," Si said. "It used to be the Chinese were frequently warned and dismissed for short and quick steps. We can see our technique was recognized by this Olympic referees."

"Race walking is a sport that blends endurance and technique," Du said.

"Once our techniques reach international standards, we can make breakthroughs."

China's 2000 Sydney victory came from Wang Liping in the

women's 20km.

Wang traveled to London to support China's team and praised its success.

"It's a tough sport because you have to undergo years of training and competition before you get a chance to stand on the podium," Wang said.

"I'm proud of them. We all know Russia is one of race walking's dominant forces. After this Olympics, China could tell the world that its race walkers are in the lead."

Italian coach

Chinese race walkers used to train in plateau camps to enhance stamina.

They are known for training extremely hard, but frequently receive red cards because of flawed techniques.

China hired 62-year-old Italian walking coach Sandro Damilano, who has been involved in the sport for 40 years, in 2009 and sent its squad abroad for overseas training and competitions.

"I did change a lot about them, both technically and mentally, and also their way of living life," said Damilano, who had 46 medals, including five gold, under his coaching belt before working with China's team.

"London is a turning point for China's race walking. In the past, even when the Chinese walkers — mostly females — were strong, they were often disqualified."

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China's Cheyang Sigya won the bronze in the women's 20km race walk on Saturday.

Zou gives his young son medal for his first birthday gift

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Chinese boxer Zou Shiming is happy to have made his country proud but is even more delighted to have fulfilled his promise to his 13-month-old son.

Zou defended his light flyweight Olympic championship by overcoming Thai Kaew Pongprayoon in a close fight.

The victory wrapped up China's London campaign by delivering the last of its 38 gold medals on Saturday night.

Zou overcame a heel injury and middle age to retain the title he won in Beijing in 2008. He said his most powerful motivator was a promise he made to his boy.

"My boy was born just one month before the London Games' one-year countdown. He is an Olympic baby, and I told him I would fight for a gold as his first birthday gift," Zou said after beating Pongprayoon 13-10 in the 49kg final at London's ExCeL Centre.

"I realized the commitment of a father to his son, and that's the most important reward for me," the 31-year-old said.

Right after stepping out of the ring, Zou rushed to his wife, who watched and chanted as he hugged his son on the tribune. He kissed his boy and held up the national flag to celebrate his victory.

Zou's second gold made him the first man to win three medals in the light flyweight. He took bronze at the 2004 Athens Games and is the oldest Olympic champion in that class.

"I am so excited to finally get here," he said.

"I've come a long way. And I just want to stay with my family now, especially my son. No one can separate us now."

Zou, who was about to retire from the sport after the Beijing Games due to injury and had left the ring for nearly two years, struggled to return. He barely saw his son since he started training in the national camp in Hainan province in January.

Zou was proud but conflicted when his son gripped a boxing glove, as well as pens, toys and books, at his 100-day-old

party — a Chinese tradition that's believed to hint to a child's future.

"He showed an inborn interest in boxing so young," Zou said.

"I'm sort of happy but actually don't want him to become a boxer. But if he insists on boxing when growing up, I'll respect his wishes and pass along what I know to him."

Zou is called the "pirate fighter" because of his iconic counterattack routine that's infused with Chinese martial arts. Many thought he lost his edge at last year's World Championships, even though he won his third amateur title there.

Zou vowed to succeed in London and modified his style to become more aggressive, which was difficult for him due to his age and injury.

Chinese Olympic boxing team leader Li Pin said after the final: "Boxing is already hard for a middle-aged man, especially one with an injured heel. We knew how tough it was for him. But he never thought of quitting and stuck to it with great faith."

Zou triumphed over a slew of good fighters at the Games,

including opening rival Yosbany Weitia of Cuba and Irish favorite Paddy Barnes in the semifinals.

But he didn't expect the final would be so challenging. His Thai rival was cheered on by the

crowd, which boomed every time Zou retreated.

Zou said attacking the Thai was too risky, as the Olympic bout was too short to make any mistakes.

"I was so eager for victory and

felt so much pressure, but I had to be patient and cautious," Zou said.

"The fight had only three rounds (at three minutes each), and I couldn't afford to take any risk while attacking."

Zou denied all interview requests from the quarterfinal on so he could remain focused for the final.

He said he "wouldn't say (his) career is over," hinting that he aspires to become China's first professional boxer.

He initially disapproved him of switching from Wushu to boxing, also opposed him going pro. She said her son's body couldn't bear more injuries.

But Zou remains as strong-minded as when he chose the sport 15 years ago.

"I will see if I can," he said.

"If I tune up well and still have the same desire, I'll try to persuade her to let me go forward."



Zou Shiming of China celebrates his win over Kaew Pongprayoon of Thailand in the light flyweight 49kg gold medal boxing match on Saturday.

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