

Galstyan Dedicates Russia's First Gold to Flood Victims

July 29, 2012



Arsen Galstyan kissing his gold medal from the men's 60kg judo competition Saturday at the London Olympics. **Paul Sancya**

Arsen Galstyan has become Russia's first Olympic judo winner since the Soviet collapse, and he dedicated his gold medal to those affected by recent floods in the Krasnodar region.

"I feel absolutely wonderful," said Galstyan, 23, who stunned firm favorite and world No. 1 Rishod Sobirov of Uzbekistan on his way to victory Saturday. "My medal will mean a lot, especially [to] people who are suffering from the flood."

Flash floods earlier this month killed at least 171 people and damaged more than 4,000 homes in the Krasnodar region.

Galstyan's route to gold could hardly have been more difficult. Having only just overcome South Korean Choi Gwang-Hyeon, his close encounter with Sobirov, who had been aiming to add an Olympic gold to his two successive world titles, was only settled with a waza-ari throw in the extra time golden score period.

Top 20 Medalists as of 4 p.m. Moscow Time, July 30

In the final, it was a different matter, beating Japan's Hiroaki Hiraoka, silver medalist at last year's world championships, with an ippon, an automatic winning score, just 40 seconds into their clash.

Galstyan, who was born in the Soviet republic of Armenia, joined jubilant Russian teammates in celebrations in front of a standing ovation from a crowd that included a large number of disappointed Japanese fans.

"I always imagined this situation. I always had hope," Galstyan said. "My medal will show that Russian judo athletes and Russian sport should be No. 1."

Hiraoka, who suffered disappointment when losing in the first round in Beijing four years ago, was unhappy to only take silver in London.

"I worked really hard for the last four years and still I'm not satisfied with the color of my medal, but I did the best that I can," he said.

President Vladimir Putin, himself a judo enthusiast and former champion, missed the weekend competition but will make a "short working visit" on Aug. 2 to see British Prime Minister David Cameron and take in some Olympic events, the Kremlin said Friday.

Cameron had earlier confirmed that Putin would visit Britain during the Olympics, saying they would watch part of the judo competition together.

Russia took a second medal on Sunday – the bronze in the women's cycling road race. Olga Zabelinskaya placed third at the end of a 140.3-km ride starting and ending on The Mall, central London. Gold went to Dutchwoman Marianne Vos.

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Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who is representing Russia at the games, watched his country's women's volleyball team begin their Olympic quest with a commanding victory over hosts Britain on Saturday.

Medvedev, who is also expected to meet Cameron in the next few days, attended the opening day of the volleyball event at the Earls Court arena in west London on Saturday.

Flanked by several security staff, Medvedev joined Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko, Russian Olympic Committee chief Alexander Zhukov and 15,000 fans to see world champions Russia romp to a 3-0 victory against the British side making their Olympic volleyball debut.

"We knew he would be at the game," player Maria Borisenko told reporters. "But more important was the game itself. We were really pleased to have him here and he said congratulations to us at the end."

Russia's next match will be against the Dominican Republic on Monday.

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A pair of Russian newcomers upset Beijing bronze medalists Zhang Xi and Xue Chen of China in a close Olympic women's beach volleyball opener on Saturday that set pulses racing.

The surprise result spiced up the first day of competition, in which the top attraction will be a clash between double gold medalists Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh of the United States and Australians Natalie Cook and Tamsin Hinchley.

Low-ranked Anastasia Vasina and Anna Vozakova beat the Chinese pair, who are among the favorites to win gold in London, in three sets.

"We won't look back on this match. I wear a lucky jade necklace but it wasn't lucky for me today," Zhang said.

Beach volleyball is scored using a best-of-three-sets system. The first two sets are played to 21 points and if each team wins one, a third set is played to 15. All sets require a two-point advantage to win.

Vasina and Vozakova beat Zhang and Xue 2-1 (18-21, 21-14, 16-14).

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American-born Becky Hammon scored eight straight points down the stretch to help her adopted nation of Russia rally for a 58-53 victory over Canada on the opening day of Olympic women's basketball.

Trailing 50-40 with six minutes left, Russia closed the game with an 18-3 run led by Hammon. Anna Petrakova hit a 3-pointer and a lay-in to get the spurt started. Then Hammon took over, after struggling in the first three quarters of the Group B game.

"You just keep playing and good things will happen," said Hammon, who plays for the WNBA's San Antonio Silver Stars. "Defensively, we got a lot better in the fourth quarter. We got some deflections and were able to run."

Hammon is playing in her second Olympics for Russia, the European champions. The South Dakota native became a Russian naturalized citizen before the Beijing Games and helped Russia win the bronze there. Because she hadn't played for the United States in any major FIBA-sanctioned international events, she is allowed to compete for Russia in the Olympics.

And she delivered when Russia needed her most.

"We found good balance only at the end and we went to our leader," Russia coach Boris Sokolovskiy said. "Becky understood that her 3-point shot was not good tonight so she went under the basket and created many opportunities for us."

✉(Reuters, AP, MT)

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