

Special edition



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Fotos courtesy of M. Domokos.



**The fresh Olympic Champion:
Ryu Seung Min from Korea**

Six Butterflies with medals in Athens

Ryu Seung Min and Zhang Yining receive Olympic Gold for perfect performance

Athens. The gods themselves play Butterfly! This is the resume of the Olympic summer games in Athens, where the Butterflies settled in the Olympus with the total of six medals. Ryu Seung Min and Zhang Yining made their names almost immortal at this antique location: Both Tamasu-stars highlighted their careers by winning Gold in the singles. Further on Zhang Yining leaves Athens as the outstanding player of the tournament. Next to her predecessor Wang Nan she won the final in the Women's doubles. Silver and Bronze for her country and for Butterfly were conquered in the Women's singles by North-Korean Kim Hyang Mi and South-Korea's defence-ace Kim Kyung Ah. In the Men's doubles Denmark's Michael Maze (with Finn Tugwell) won Bronze as only medal for Europe – the rest of it went to Asia.

The king of the games is without doubt named Ryu Seung Min. The twenty-two year old Nr. 3 of the World's Ranking List was accounted as medal candidate, but nobody really believed he would be the one to prevent the expected triumph by China with the fourth Gold medal in the Men's singles. Even before the final against the two years younger Wang Hao he was accounted outsider, for the balance sheet was 6:1 for the Chinese.



16 years after the triumph of Yoo Nam Kyu in Seoul he didn't care about statistics and won Gold in the Men's singles for South-Korea for the second time in history.

The final in the Galatsi-hall of Athens offered Table Tennis in perfection for six games. With the fascinating athletics within the topspin duels both penholder players gave a preview of the expected high-speed Table Tennis of the future. „It was a high class match, Ryu played very hard and well placed against Wang“, South-Koreas Coach Kim Teak Soo stated. Soo himself had been winner of the Bronze medal for Butterfly in Barcelona 1992 and had been member of South-Koreas team up to the WCC 2004 in Qatar. „Wang was very fast, but not faster than us.“

With his rocket-like topspins produced by the 2.1 millimetres of his Bryce-rubber he constantly troubled Wang Hao. „This was the game of a lifetime“, the new Olympic Champion stated. The next goals are already in his mind: „I will continue to train hard and analyse me and the players of the other nations and hopefully become World Champion.“ More nervous than about the next final Ryu Seung Min is about his return to Seoul. Before departure to Athens he had smilingly announced to his long term girlfriend he'd be marrying her in case he'll return as Olympic Champion. At the press conference after the golden match he left this private matter open before the journalists: „We're both very young. I hope we will be together for a very long time.“

Ryu played almost without mistakes in Athens and had only gone through all seven games once in the round of the best sixteen against Tamasu-player Chiang Peng-Lung (Taiwan). In the semi-final Ryu had prevented the total return of Jan-Ove Waldner in a 4:1 success. The Swedish Table Tennis monument, meanwhile aged 38, had won Gold in 1992 in Barcelona and Silver 2000 in Sydney. Before he had impressively confirmed his nickname „Mozart of Table Tennis“ and his reputation as best player ever by beating German Butterfly-star Timo Boll (Quarter Final) and Gold favourite Ma Lin (China).



Timo Boll himself, who had been handicapped in his Olympic preparation by long term back problems, had decided the Butterfly-duel against World Champion Werner Schlager (Austria) to his favour. In the match against Waldner especially the second game was crucial, where Boll left out six game-points when leading 10:5 – four of them with own service. „This is bitter, but this is what makes Waldner exceptional. I can't blame myself, for in this phase he played incredibly well. My performance in Athens was okay, I have beaten the World Champion and advanced a round further than at my first Olympic Games in Sydney“, Boll said. Entering the Quarter final made Boll best European player behind Waldner: „My back problems prevented a prefect preparation. Therefore I'm satisfied.“ This does not count for WCC-Third Kalinikos Kreanga, who dropped out in round three. Greece's hope for a medal, wearing the Butterfly-tricot, stayed without a game against Swede Jörgen Persson: „I was well prepared and not nervous. But I did not find into the match at all.“



One who celebrated happily in spite of dropping out early in the singles (best 32 against Leung Chu Yan from Hongkong) was the Dane Michael Maze. „Up to today my title at the Europe Top 12 in February was my most important personal success“, Michael Maze rejoiced. „Now this Bronze medal in the doubles is the greatest to me. Only a few players win a medal at the Olympics throughout their career. I hope my hard work

continues to pay off and I will climb further to the World's top.“ Butterfly star Maze and his Partner Tugwell had banned Tamasu-partner Dimitrij Mazunov (with Alexej Smirnov) to the ungrateful fourth rank. Before the Danish duo had announced their claim for a medal by beating Schlager/Jindrak and Waldner/Persson and loosing unbelievably tight against the later Olympic Champions Ma Lin/Chen Qi.

An impressive demonstration of strength was given by the Butterflies in Athens especially in the Women's singles, where all medals went to material out of the house of Butterfly. Ahead of all the gods favoured Zhang Yining. Without danger World's No.1 dominated North-Korean Kim Hyang in four games in the final. Before in the quarter- and semi-final she had kicked out two further Tamasu-stars – Europe's only hope Tamara Boros and defensive artist Kim Kyung Ah.



Zhang's triumph was the 100. Gold medal for China at Olympic Summer Games in total. „Luckily I was told this after the final. This is something very special.“, Zhang said. The shy super-technician dedicated her medal to National Coach Sheng Luyuan. „He's been my coach for ten years and is the most important person in my career. And of course the right material is of importance as well. With Butterfly I have an excellent partner, on which I can rely on“, Zhang declared. Her Gold medal were won with her blade Zhang Yining concave and the rubbers Tackifire C (forehand) and Sriver EL (Backhand).

With her two Gold medals the 22-year old finally stepped out of the shadow and into the footsteps of her partner in doubles, Wang Nan, who failed in the singles on Li Jia Wei from Singapore. So far Zhang had only won Silver at top events, recently at the WCC 2003 in Paris, where she lost to partner Wang Nan just as two years before in Osaka. „It has been frustrating always to become second“, she admitted, „but I allways went on . One has to think positive.“ Ahead of Athens the view of Zhang Yining goes to her hometown Beijing, where the next Olympic Games will be held in four years. „I'm really looking forward to this for I love home. It's hard to win Gold – and it's even harder to defend it. We will see.“

North-Korea celebrated the special success of little Kim Hyang Mi, World's No. 37, just like a Gold medal. Missing out most international competitions for political reasons the country celebrated the entry of the offence player into the final as the so far greatest success in it's Olympic history. In the semi-final Kim was behind 1:3 but still prevented the entry of Singapore into the final of the Olympics, which would have brought Li Jia Wei the sum of between 500.000 up to one Million Dollar. This would have been what Singapore was willing to spend for the first Medal at Olympic Games for 44 years. Playing for Bronze it then was South Korea's Kim Kyung Ah, who withstood all attacks with her Tackifire- and Feint-combination and finally shattered Singapore's expensive dream of a medal.

In summary of the fifth Olympic Table Tennis competitions one has to note, that China's superstars are not unbeatable in the most important discipline – the Men's singles – in major tournaments as Olympics of World Championships. This was proofed by the triumphs of the Butterfly stars Ryu Seung Min (2004 in Athens), Werner Schlager (WCC 2003 in Paris) and Timo Boll (World Cup 2004) in an impressive manner. The pressure on the Chinese athletes and coaches will now increase even more. China's public expects Gold by their Table Tennis stars at the WCC 2005 in Shanghai and at the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. In their home country they are celebrated stars alike the elite of the NBA basketball players in the USA. Silver is almost worthless in a country with an estimated 50 million active players and a multiple number of fans.

Eleven of twelve positions on the pedestal were reserved for Asia. This was no surprise at the Women. But the early failure of the best European men and the demonstration in terms of speed in the final of the Men's singles leads to the apprehension, that the superb technique of Europe's best players might not be enough in the long term, if not combined with an improved athletics. Only this combination will allow Europe to stand up against Asia in 2008.



The „Butterfly“ medals in Athens 2004:

Men's Singles

Gold: **Ryu Seung Min KOR** (Blade: Kim Taek Soo, Pen; FH: Bryce 2,1 rot; Penholder)

Men's Singles, final

Ryu Seung Min KOR - Wang Hao CHN 4:2 (3,-9,9,9,-11,9)

Women's Singles

Gold: **Zhang Yining CHN** (Blade: Zhang Yining concave; FH: Tackifire C max red; BH: Sriver EL max black)

Silver: **Kim Hyang Mi PRK** (Blade: Tamca Gergely; FH: Sriver L 2,1 red; BH: Raystorm 1,9 / 2,1 black.)

Bronze: **Kim Kyung Ah KOR** (Blade: Diode st.; FH: Tackifire D 1,7 red; BH: Feint long II 1,3 black.)

Men's Doubles

Bronze: **Finn Tugwell/Michael Maze DEN** (Blade: M. Maze st.; FH: Bryce 2,1 red; BH: Sriver EL max black)

Women's Doubles

Gold: **Wang Nan/Zhang Yining CHN**

All results on www.ittf.com

Interview with Ryu Seung-Min

„Now I want to become World Champion“

Question: Winning the Olympics in Athens is your greatest success. What are your feelings?

Ryu Seung-Min: I'm very happy. The final was the best match of my life.

Question: What was crucial for you when playing against Wang Hao?

Ryu: My victory was a result of much hard work and of luck, of course. Also the support of the Korean fans gave much motivation and strength to me. And I think that Wang Hao had more pressure than me in the final.

Question: China's players had quite a few problems in Athens. Is the dominance of China ebbing off?

Ryu: One can't say that for sure, for with three Gold and one Silver medal China still is the dominating nation at the Olympics. China will stay it, I believe.

Question: How will your country react to your great success?

Ryu: In South-Korea the people are very happy, for it's the first Gold medal in Table Tennis at the Olympics for 16 years. I hope my victory will play a role in increasing the popularity and attractiveness of our sports in South-Korea.

Question: As Olympic Champion you will now be chased by the other players. How will you deal with this?

Ryu: I won't sit down and wait. I'm still young and want to win some more titles. Therefore I will try to improve my play further and to analyse the strength of the players from other nations precisely. My next goal is to become World Champion.





Zhang Yining – The „all-time second“ finally on top

The change in power coincided with an important anniversary: With her second triumph at the Olympic Games Zhang Yining not only took over the role of her partner in doubles Wang Nan, who surprisingly had failed. Zhang also won the 100. Gold medal for China since the return of the Asians to the Olympics 20 years ago. „For my country of course this is a special medal, but for me it's even more special – no matter if Nr. 99 or 101.“, the 22-year old described the importance of the Olympic victory in the singles to her: „In this Gold medal there is much physical and mental preparation and labour. But all of it is justified by the feeling of success at this Olympic Games.“

Eindhoven 1999 and Paris 2003 – at the WCC it was allways the second rank for the small right-hander behind all-mighty team-mate Wang Nan. In Athens, after Wang dropped out in the Quarter-final, it was time for Zhang. Though being No.1 of the World's Ranking List the pressure yet increased and Zhang was aware of it: „I can feel the great responsibility even so short after the success. But I want to stand up to it and soon focus completely on the next Olympics 2008 at home in Beijing.

All of China had expected all four Gold medals in Athens by the Table Tennis team and so by her. Zhang Yining found her own way of dealing with this pressure in the final against the North-Korean Kim Hyang-Mi: „I tried to turn this into further motivation. I fought against any thought of loosing.“ As Athens had showed the new „Queen of Table Tennis“ was quite successful.

Interview with Kim Hyang-Mi

„I will give everything for a Gold medal!“

Question: Your entry of the final was a total surprise. Nobody had accounted you. Though you lost the final against Zhang Yining with Silver, you still won the first medal in Table Tennis for North-Korea. How do you feel?

Kim Hyang-Mi: I'm happy, though I expected to win the Gold medal.

Question: In spite of your focus on the final you sure realized, that next to your fans spectators from South-Korea supported you. What do you think about that?

Kim: This was a major support for me. I have to admit that it helped a lot to give my absolute best. Unfortunately not enough to make the audience happy.

Question: During the ceremony you chatted with the South-Korean Bronze-medal winner Kim Kyung-Ah. What did you talk about?

Kim: She talked to me like a sister and reassured me. She said, she wished I'd win Gold next time.

Question: The next Summer Games are in four years time in China. Is another Olympic medal your goal?

Kim: Yes. Hereby I promise to give everything to be on the top of the pedestal and win Gold the next time.

www.butterfly-world.com

Kim Kyung-Ah provides a novelty

The defence play is alive – especially in South-Korea. About one year after the entry of Joo Sae-Hyuk into the final of the men's Singles at the WCC in Paris Kim Kyung-Ah provided a novelty at the women. For the first time since the establishment of Table Tennis in at the Olympic programme a defence-specialist won a medal at this most important tournament of all. That the 27-year old, who before had only been able to win two Pro-Tour tournaments, did not have a chance against later winner Zhang Yining in the semi-final, did not spoil the joy about the first medal for South-Korea since the third rank of former World Champion Hyun Jung-Hwa in 1992 in Barcelona. The opposite – with the medal around her neck Kim set up the next goal for Peking: „2008 I will try once again to reach Gold.“

Interview with Michael Maze:

„We not yet have realized the meaning of Bronze“

Question: What's the importance of the Bronze-medal in the Men's doubles for you?

Michael Maze: So far winning the Europe Top-12 beginning of the year in Frankfurt was my greatest success. But Bronze at the Olympic Games – this is worth much more. It's a great feeling and we have not yet realized it's meaning.

Question: Did you expect a medal before start of the tournament?

Maze: When playing a tournament one allways wants to get to the top. But we were seeded in the half with the Chinese doubles, so we had to be realistic. Entering the Quarter final would already have been a great success. The more of a dream came through, though in the Semi-final the other Chinese double might have been better for us.

Question: Your Bronze is the first medal for Denmark in Table Tennis...

Maze: We are a small country and so it is a major success for the Danish Table Tennis, which can provide a boost, especially because the European Championships in 2005 will be held at home in Aarhus.

Question: For Europe your third rank was the only medal at the Olympic tournament. Did you prepare different?

Maze: That's hard to say. Everyone has his own way for perfect preparation. For me it's very important to have enough time for training and for regeneration and not such a stress with frequent competitions. I have to focus, especially because my body is sensitive. My club Borussia Düsseldorf understands this and cooperates a lot in terms of schedule and matches. I'm very thankful for this. Without it Bronze would not have been possible.

