



Golden girl Deng hopes win will urge more kids to fall in love with BMX

By **SUN XIAOCHEN** in Paris
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

Furious, aggressive, gentle and elegant all at once — that’s the message China’s BMX freestyle cyclist Deng Yawen delivered with her history-making golden run at the Paris Olympics.

For those back home who tuned in to watch a sport with no clue what to expect, teen rider Deng dazzled them, no doubt eliciting “oohs” and “aahs” from China’s night owls as she lit up the Place de la Concorde under the scorching sun of Paris on Wednesday, performing some of the most spectacular BMX freestyle runs that the world has ever seen in the final of the women’s freestyle park event.

With bar spins, high-flying flips, and then the killer trick of double tail-whips — twice — the Chinese favorite, a runner-up in qualifications, literally soared across a course set up with jumps, ramps and rails, exhibiting the best of what bicycle motocross — or BMX — has to offer.

Roared on by the enthusiastic crowd in the iconic Paris square, Deng landed on top of the podium after leading the eight-woman field with a near flawless 92.6-point second run, securing China’s first medal of any color in the youthful urban sport that debuted at Tokyo 2020.

It was also China’s third Olympic cycling gold across all disciplines overall, following back-to-back titles in the women’s track cycling team sprint at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

The “kingdom of bicycles” has emerged as force on the highest sporting stage, yet Deng took more pride from setting a brave example for China’s daring youth — boys and girls — to valiantly try new things.

“I was overjoyed, and only truly felt like an Olympic champion when I sang my national anthem with the Chinese flag raised, during the medal ceremony,” said a proud Deng, an



Gold medalist Deng Yawen of China (center) poses with silver medalist Perris Benegas of the US and bronze medalist Natalya Diehm of Australia following the BMX freestyle women’s park event on Wednesday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY AND REUTERS

HEAD OVER WHEELS



18-year-old native of Southwest China’s Sichuan province.

“I am so proud to show the world that I am from China, and I am even happier that I managed to change some opinions about young people, especially girls, that they should not try this or that because of danger, fear or any other perceived obstacles.

“BMX cycling used to be a very niche sport in our country. My gold medal today proves that we can develop a strong program quickly.

“I hope more fans will become interested in BMX, and that more young people will try it to make it more popular,” said Deng, who won the World Cup series’ Bazhong leg in her home province.

BMX freestyle park involves athletes taking a 60-second run over a rugged park course, performing a variety of tricks.

The Olympic final features the top-eight qualifiers and ranks riders by their best run out of two attempts.

Deng set the tone with an impressive 92.5 in her first run, building an early lead in the field. But, she had to deliver under pressure in her second, after runner-up Perris Benegas scored 90.7 points in her second run to close the gap and Deng’s teammate, Sun Jiaqi, fell on both of her runs.

Deng rose spectacularly to the occasion, though, holding her nerve to improve her score to 92.6 points on her second attempt, finishing higher than Benegas and bronze medalist Natalya Diehm of Australia.

Courageous decision

Overwhelmed with pride and joy, Deng, in a post-final interview, expressed appreciation for all the support from her coaches and association officials, before she took the opportunity to thank herself for making a bold decision seven years ago.

“Looking back, and regardless of what the future holds, it was definitely the best decision of my life,” said Deng, a junior javelin thrower, who chose to join the new Chinese BMX freestyle program in 2017.

“As uncertain and risky as it looked back then, it has paved the way to where I am now, and I really appreciate myself for having the bravery to make the switch, and for all the hard work I’ve put in along the way,” said Deng.

The dramatic shift from throwing a javelin far, to riding a bike high, and having to suffer falls off ramps and walls, was so tough that Deng almost cried every day trying to master some of the world’s most difficult tricks.

“Countless falls and bruises here and there have almost been my daily routine. I still have that fear today, like when I pushed for big double tail-whips just now in my second run. That fear factor helps me stay as focused as I need to be, and keeps me sharp throughout the run,” said Deng.

The rapid improvement of Chinese women’s riders owes a lot to the Venezuelan legend Daniel Dhers, who has been coaching the Chinese national team over the past year.

Known as the “Godfather of BMX”, Dhers, as an active athlete himself, has been riding together with his Chinese pupils and passing on his nearly two decades of experience in the sport to China’s talented young riders.

With the national program mainly drafting hard-working athletes from other sports since its inception in 2018, Dhers said he had a good start to his tenure after accepting the coaching role, adding that it didn’t take long for his lessons on technique, trick selection and the sport’s culture to trickle through.

“He really helped us avoid making a lot of mistakes in training with his vast experience. He was instrumental in our technical breakthroughs,” Deng said of Dhers’ guidance.

‘Flying fish’ lands two more medals for HK

By **ATLAS SHAO** in Hong Kong
atlasshao@chinadailyhk.com

Hong Kong’s “flying fish” Siobhan Haughey won her second bronze of the Paris Games on Thursday, this time in the women’s 100m freestyle, becoming the first athlete from the region to clinch four Olympic medals. It also takes the total number of medals won so far by Hong Kong, China, at this summer’s Olympics to four.

Its first two were individual gold medals in fencing — won by Vivian Kong Man-wai in the women’s epee, and Edgar Cheung Ka-long in the men’s foil — followed by Haughey’s bronzes in the 200m and 100m freestyle.

In the 100m freestyle final, Haughey finished the first 50 meters in 25.09 sec, putting her in second place, but dropped back to

third, taking the bronze in a time of 52.33 sec.

After the finals, Haughey spoke to the media, saying that although medals are important, what matters most to her is that she has put in a tremendous amount of effort and truly enjoyed this competition.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government officials, including Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu, sent congratulations to Haughey and her coach.

“Siobhan has maintained a high level of performance and remained fearless against the world’s best athletes throughout the competition,” Lee said, adding that all Hong Kong residents, including himself, are proud of Haughey.

Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kevin Yeung Yun-hung said that Haughey demonstrated extraordinary skill, and emphasized

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John Lee Ka-chiu, chief executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

that the city is both thrilled and proud of her.

During the women’s 200m freestyle on Tuesday, Haughey finished third with a time of 1 minute 54.55 sec.

Kong, who won the team’s first gold at the Paris Olympics on Saturday, returned to Hong Kong on Thursday morning and received a rapturous welcome at the airport. The 30-year-old fencer expressed her gratitude to the public, and thanked everyone for supporting the athletes.

“It is a blessing to be an athlete in Hong Kong, especially in fencing,” Kong thanked her predecessors for their efforts, which she said have enabled the current generation of athletes to enjoy greater resources to pursue their dreams.

She also congratulated Cheung and Haughey on their achievements,

and emphasized that the efforts and passion of athletes cannot always be measured by their results.

Regarding the prize money of HK\$6 million (\$769,000), awarded under the Jockey Club Athlete Incentive Awards Scheme, Kong expressed her intention to set up a charity fund aimed at supporting more children to engage in fencing. She aspires to increase the exposure of sports, with the hope that more individuals will discover one they enjoy and excel at.

Kong’s brilliant performance also garnered plaudits from the Chinese mainland. In Mandarin, she expressed gratitude for the support, and said that all athletes deserve to be appreciated.

At the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, held three years ago, Hong Kong secured six medals, including one gold by Cheung and two silvers by Haughey.



Siobhan Haughey of Hong Kong, China, poses on the podium with her bronze medal for the Paris 2024 Olympics women’s 100m freestyle swimming event on Wednesday. AFP