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In an Upset, Gymnast Takes Russia's 5th Gold

By The Moscow Times

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Russian gymnast Aliya Mustafina performing her routine on the uneven bars in the final in London on Monday. **Mike Blake**

Aliya Mustafina upset the favorites by taking the gold medal on the uneven bars in the gymnastics apparatus finals at the London Olympics on Monday after all-around champion Gabby Douglas fluffed her routine.

Mustafina collected Russia's first gymnastics gold here, finishing with 16.133, 0.2 points ahead of defending champion He Kexin of China.

Home favorite Beth Tweddle bade farewell to the Olympics at the age of 27 with a bronze, Britain's first individual medal in women's gymnastics in the 116 years of the games.

Top 20 Medalists

American teenager Douglas, competing last, took a free swing after hesitating on the higher

bar and suffered with a score of 14.900 and last place.

The gold medal completed a set for Mustafina, 17, after she won team silver and all-around bronze last week.

Her teammate Victoria Komova, the world and European bars champion, who spent much of the first week in tears after missing out on all-around and team gold, had been expected to be Russia's biggest medal hope on the apparatus.

Judging by Komova's miserable expression as she stepped down after finishing her routine, however, the teenager already knew she had missed out again, and she ended up fifth with 15.666.

Mustafina, by contrast, was a picture of smiling delight as she finished her routine and high-fived her coach. She has now outdone her father, Greco-Roman wrestler Farhat Mustafin, who won a bronze at the 1976 Montreal Games.

China's He, who was at the center of allegations in Beijing that the home team was fielding underage gymnasts — charges China denied — set the standard when she opened the final with a dazzling routine and a mark of 15.933.

Mustafina was sixth up and then waited to see if Douglas, starting last, could follow up on her all-around and team golds. Douglas, 16, is known as the "Flying Squirrel" for the shape she makes on her favorite apparatus, but she could not reproduce her form of last week. American fans suffered with her as she averted her gaze from the scoreboard while waiting for her mark to flash up.

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The 21-year-old Roman Vlasov somersaulted across the mat and then climbed on his trainer's shoulders to salute the crowd after winning Russia's fourth gold medal at the London Olympics.

Vlasov beat Armenia's Arsen Julfalakyan 1-0, 1-0 in the 74 kg final for Greco-Roman wrestling late Sunday, adding the Olympic gold to the world championship title he won in Istanbul last year.

"I still can't quite believe it," said Vlasov, who hails from the same Siberian town of Novosibirsk that produced legendary champion Alexander Karelin. "It's just wonderful."

There was a lot of pressure on Vlasov to win gold. He didn't disappoint, and he's in position to dominate this weight class for years to come.

"It has not sunk in yet that I have the gold medal. I am just so happy," Vlasov said. "The whole country has supported me, has rooted for me. This is a success of the whole country."

Julfalakyan was trying to join his father and coach, Levon Julfalakyan, a gold medalist for the Soviet Union in 1988, as the first father-son duo to win Olympic gold medals.

Vlasov wasn't having any of that.

The Russian was shaky at the outset, dropping the first period against Denmark's Mark Madsen in his opening match.

Vlasov kept France's Christophe Guenot from scoring in the last 30 seconds of the third period to reach the semifinals, where he closed out Lithuania's Aleksandr Kazakevic 3-0, 1-0.

Julfalakyan hadn't conceded a point in reaching the finals, where he was overwhelmed by Vlasov.

"I respect him as an opponent. His father was an Olympic champion, and every meeting I have with him is a difficult one," Vlasov said.

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China's Zhou Lulu won a record-smashing super-heavyweight battle against Tatiana Kashirina of Russia on Sunday with a total of 333 kg, more than any other woman had totaled before in the two Olympic lifts.

Kashirina, who also finished second to Zhou at last year's world championships, was in first place after shattering the world record twice in the snatch.

And Russia's first weightlifting gold at the London Olympics seemed in the bag when she firmed up wobbly legs to reach a world-record total of 332 kg in her second clean and jerk.

But her celebration and world record proved short-lived.

Zhou responded by lifting 187 kg in her second clean and jerk to beat her rival's total by just 1 kg.

Exhausted from their high-octane duel, Kashirina couldn't reply and just dropped the bar in her final attempt, ceding the gold medal to her Chinese rival.

Had her coaches picked a lower weight for her second clean and jerk, Kashirina might have maintained an advantage over Zhou. That strategic decision may have cost her the gold. "I'll put it this way: My job here is just to go on the platform and do the lifting," Kashirina said. "The rest of it is decided and determined by my coach, the head coach and the rest of the people around me."

Hripsime Khurshudyan won Armenia's first medal of the games by beating defending Olympic champion Jang Mi-ran of South Korea in a battle for bronze.

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Russia's Tatyana Lebedeva finished 10th in the women's triple jump and announced shortly after that she would retire.

Kazakhstan's Olga Rypakova produced a season's-best leap of 14.98 meters to take gold Sunday, while Caterine Ibarguen of Colombia and Ukraine's world and double European champion Olha Saladuha took silver and bronze, respectively.

The 10th-place finish was disappointing for Lebedeva, 36, who has two silver and one bronze

Olympic medals and counts “winning” as one of her hobbies, along with “traveling” and “extreme and ethnic music,” according to her biography on the London Games website.

The native of Bashkortostan has two daughters, the youngest of whom was born last year.

(AP, Reuters, MT)

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