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Russian Figure Skater, 15, First Woman to Land Quad Jump at Olympics

By Rebecca Bailey for AFP

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ROC athlete Kamila Valieva. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russian teenager Kamila Valieva made figure skating history Monday, becoming the first woman to land a quadruple jump in Olympic competition — and not content with one, she nailed two.

Her efforts helped the Russians win gold in the first figure skating medals awarded at the Beijing Games, as they beat the United States into second place in the team event.

The 15-year-old landed the quadruple jumps — when a skater rotates four times in the air — as she once again demolished the field in the women's free section.

Despite finishing 30 points ahead of second-placed Kaori Sakamoto of Japan — they won bronze overall — Valieva looked distraught at the end of her performance, having fallen attempting a third quad jump.

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But she was beaming again as she stepped onto her first Olympic podium with her teammates.

Valieva said it was a "fantastic feeling" to have landed the first women's Olympic quad.

"While I had this burden of responsibility, I came out a winner. I coped," she said.

She recounted how she had been fascinated by the Olympics as a child.

"When I was three years old I would tell my mother, I want to be an Olympic champion, which I have become, thank god," said Valieva. "I believe my next dream will come true too."

She is part of a team trained by coach Eteri Tutberidze expected to dominate the podium in the women's individual event in Beijing. Valieva is favourite for gold.

All three Russian skaters have comfortably landed quad jumps in competition before, but it had never been done at an Olympics.

On how she deals with the pressure of expectation at such a young age, she said: "Sometimes it even pushes me forward, it helps me."

'Scary moment'

The team event involves countries submitting skaters in eight events, which all contribute to the final standing.

"This medal means everything to us," said Russia's captain Nikita Katsalapov. "We worked so hard to get it."

Anastasia Mishina and Aleksandr Galliamov came top in the pairs free skate, even with what the latter described as a "scary moment" when both skaters fell over in their final lift.

The United States' Evan Bates and Madison Chock won the ice dance category with the synth-heavy "Contact, Touch, Within", narrowly beating Katsalapov and his partner Victoria Sinitsina.

The silver medal is the highest the United States have ever placed in the event, which is a fairly new one to the Olympics.

"It's been an intense couple of days," said Bates. "This is like the highlight of our career and to share it with all these humans is just the best."

Absent from the U.S. podium was Vincent Zhou, who tested positive for Covid-19 and risks missing a shot at a medal in Tuesday's men's individual event, unless a re-test clears him.

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