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Shimizu wins Japan's 1st Olympic gold



Hiroyasu Shimizu as fourth grader in elementary school.

Speed skater Hiroyasu Shimizu raced into the record books Tuesday with an emotional victory in the Olympic men's 500 meters, becoming the first Japanese ever to win an Olympic gold medal in the sport.

The leader after first-day races on Monday, the 23-year-old from Hokkaido staged yet another near-flawless display of skating around the M-Wave Olympic indoor oval in crossing the line in an Olympic record of 35.59 seconds.

Shimizu's two-day composite time of 1 minute, 11.35 seconds was a huge 0.49 second faster than Canada's Jeremy Wotherspoon, who clocked 35.80 seconds to jump from seventh place to the silver medal.

Shimizu punched the air with both fists after crossing the line and shed tears after the race. He then carried a pair of Japanese flags while doing a couple victory laps before an enthralled crowd, which included Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako.

Kevin Overland had balance problems around both curves and dropped from second place to third, skating 36.08 seconds for a total time of 1:11.86. The Canadians took the second through fifth places.

Manabu Horii placed 13th in 1:12.78 while Japanese compatriot Toshiyuki Kuroiwa was tied for 16th.

Shimizu's gold extended Japan's streak of gaining at least one medal in this event since the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics. (Kyodo News)

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