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American Stone wins freestyle aerials gold



Nikki Stone's golden performance

Nikki Stone of the United States nailed two high-difficulty, near error-free jumps Wednesday to win the women's aerials gold medal at the Olympic freestyle skiing venue in Nagano.

The 27-year-old Stone, the 1995 world champion and current World Cup leader, took the lead with a first-round jump featuring two flips and three twists and cleanly landed an equally difficult second jump with three flips, one in the tuck position, and one twist in the second round.

Stone combined high marks of 98.15 and 94.85 for a winning total of 193.00 points at the competition held at Iizuna Kogen in Nagano.

China's Xu Nannan, who topped Monday's elimination round, placed fourth in the first round and moved up by posting the day's highest points of 99.40 on her second attempt to win the silver medal with a total of 186.97 points

It was the third silver medal for China, who won the other two in Tuesday evening's short track speed skating.

Colette Brand of Switzerland took bronze with 171.83 points.

Norway wins men's relay, Daehlie wins record 11th medal

Bjorn Daehlie earned his record 11th career medal of the Olympic Winter Games on Wednesday after Norway's cross country ski team tweaked past Italy in a dramatic duel to the finish in the men's 4x10-kilometer relay.

Thomas Alsgaard gave Norway the victory when he slid his right ski forward and across the finish line just 0.2 second ahead of Italian anchor Silvio Fauner. The two racers skied a one-on-one duel throughout the final 10-km free leg.

The Norwegian quartet of Sture Sivertsen, Erling Jevne, Daehlie and Thomas Alsgaard won the race in 1 hour, 40 minutes, 55.7 seconds underneath a clear blue sky at the Snow Harp tracks in Hakuba.

Finland was third more than one minute back and clinched its third consecutive bronze medal in this event.

With the gold medal, Daehlie surpassed cross country skier Raisa Smetanina of the former Soviet Union as the most decorated winter games athlete of all time — 11 medals including seven gold and four silver.

Daehlie also now holds the record of most gold medals by any winter games athlete, man or woman. He won the men's 10-km classical title and gained the 15-km free pursuit silver last week.

Japan placed seventh. (Kyodo News)

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