



Beijing Blog

2008 Summer Olympics

Journal Sentinel reporters Gary D. Amato in China and Charles Gardner in Milwaukee provide regular updates on the Games.

Linda's Beijing Journal: Final Day

By Charles F. Gardner

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Editor's note: Linda McDonald is writing a daily journal for JSOnline, tracking the progress of West Allis gymnast Chellsie Memmel and commenting on the Olympic scene in Beijing. Linda is a nationally rated gymnastics judge, clinician and choreographer and close friend of the Memmel family. Originally from Green Bay, Linda now lives in Aurora, Ill.

Chicago - We said farewell to China on Thursday. We certainly did pick the right day to leave. We awoke to a rainstorm in Beijing, and the rain was to last all day.

A van picked us up, and we had our last death-defying drive in China. There really are no rules to the road. Green does not necessarily mean go, and red does not necessarily mean stop.

Pedestrians do not have the right of way. When crossing the street, the green walk signal usually means it is safe to cross. Not in China. Even when walking with the signal we had to be careful, as cars would come from every direction, regardless of the signal.

The basic rule of the road is the biggest vehicle wins. It was not unusual for a car to pull into oncoming traffic. Cars are forced to stop, and everyone merges in the most unusual way.

Our flight home to Chicago had a stop in San Francisco. The men's gymnastics team and women's all-around champion Nastia Liukin and her family were on our flight, along with many U.S. athletes of other sports. Most of the women's gymnastics team was on a later flight going non-stop to O'Hare.

All-around silver medalist and beam gold medalist Shawn Johnson stayed behind in China. She had some sponsor commitments and also will be participating in the Closing Ceremonies on Sunday.

Chellsie has announced that she has unfinished business and will continue her gymnastics career for at least another year. Chellsie will be performing in the post-Olympics tour (through mid-November) and then will resume training. My guess is she will shoot for the 2009 World Championships, scheduled to be held in London.

One thing I have learned is the Olympic mascots have not received much attention here in the States. The mascots were such a highlight in China. There are five mascots, one for each color of the Olympic rings, and they mainly signify China's most popular animals.

The five are: Jining the panda, Bebei the fish, Nini the swallow, Yingying the Tibetan antelope and Huanhuan the Olympic flame. The mascots were in the airport and at every venue. They were absolutely adorable. If you are not familiar with them, I recommend you Google them.

When I arrived home, I watched some of the Olympics on TV. It was so different to see the American broadcast and to understand what was being said. It was surreal to actually think I was just there.

The Olympics have been a huge success, and the Chinese should be proud of their efforts. Being at the Olympics was amazing and a trip I will never forget. I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity and hope you have enjoyed sharing in my Olympic experience.