

The Inspection of Gendered Language in the Reporting of Olympic Games in *The Star*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the language used by The Star newspaper in the representation of women athletes in the coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The purpose of this study is to decode the projection of women athletes through the analysis of specific linguistic features. To achieve this purpose, a Critical Discourse Analysis approach is carried out on 17 articles published in The Star from 9th August 2008 to 22nd August 2008. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, together with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics approach is used for the purpose of analyzing the data. The linguistic features analyzed are vocabulary, transitivity, passivization, nominalization and also features of intertextuality such as direct quotes and also scare quotes. The findings show that all the linguistic elements analyzed act as cues to reveal the ideological slant of the newspaper. Woman athletes are portrayed in a way that promotes gender discrimination, whereby many negative aspects such as limited physical capability, sexualization of female athletes and also underestimating their achievements occur immensely in the newspaper reports analyzed. Woman athletes are constructed as inferior in almost all occasions. It is disheartening to know that despite efforts taken by government and non-government organizations to address discrimination and inequalities in sports, gender discrimination still exists. More strategies must be taken to address the biased portrayal of women athletes in the media, especially newspaper. So, the press must be more transparent in the reporting of news and stop the stereotypical representation of women in sports. Attention should be paid not only to reduce the sexualized representation, marketing and promotion of women's sport, but also changing the dominant stereotypical gender images to reflect the progress towards gender equality in sports.

Keywords: discourse; ideology; gendered language; transitivity; gender inequality

INTRODUCTION

Gender is one of several important factors which define a person's identity. It gives an intense influence in our lives from the moment we are born, and we enact its social and cultural meanings at every level, from the intrapsychic to the legal and political (Castaneda & Burns-Glover, 2004). Gender is constructed socially and basically revolves around the relationship between men and women in the context of power relations (Machel, 1998). Gender is a concept

created by the means of socialization, using institutions such as the family, religion, school and education, and the state and laws (Machel, 1998).

Gender and gender roles are there to define the way men and women behave in society in relation to each other, the way they look at themselves and also how they want society to look at them (Machel, 1998). These stereotypical gender relations affect the imbalance and inequality of power relations between men and women in society, of which the male is perceived as dominant and the female as subordinate (Machel, 1998). The ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and all the traits regarding the social division between male and female are reinforced in books and also the media (Machel, 2008).

Language and gender is a vast field in which the concept of gendered language (the focus of this study) falls under. Gendered language refers to ‘language that expresses bias in favour of one sex and thus treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner and in most cases, the bias is in favour of men and against women’ (Lei, 2006). Similarly, Cameron (1992) defines gendered language as sexist language or a language that contains a lexicon and a grammatical structure that excludes, insults or trivializes women. It can be said that the existence of gendered language is highly accredited to the existence and practices of gender inequality in society. To add, gendered language acts as the barrier towards achieving gender equality (Mohamad et al, 2011).

The reinforcement of gender inequality in society has been strengthened by the role of mass media. The term mass media refers to the “technological devices through which mass communication - the industrialized production, reproduction, and multiple distribution of messages - takes place” (Turow, 1997). Media portrays the dominant images in societies of the industrialized world and depicts life in society (Creedon, 1998). Almost every person in first-world countries is affected directly or indirectly by the words and images presented by the mass media (Coakley, 2004; Creedon, 1998). The media has the potential to shape, change, and reinforce values and attitudes (Bandura, 1986; Fink, 1998; Kane, Taub, & Hayes, 2000). Thus, the media possesses the power to direct people on what issues to think about (Coakley, 2004).

The press (print and electronic) is a powerful tool of socialization (Swilla, 2000). It plays a very important role in spreading information and thus has the power to influence people’s beliefs, attitudes and perceptions. In Malaysia, the press, being read by people of all ages, plays a very major role in providing information and entertainment to the people. Thus, by examining the language used by the press, we can actually get to learn the way it contributes to the issue of gender inequality. An example would be the way women politicians are portrayed compared to male politicians.

According to Ross (2004), researching the ways in which women have been routinely portrayed by the media has been a preoccupation for many media scholars over the past few decades, such as Bryson (1990), Kian (2006) and Cunningham (2000). It is due to the fact that much discrimination and gender inequality exist when the media reports on news concerned with women. This is especially true in the sports section, where women are frequently marginalized. Many scholars (e.g., Greendorfer, 1983; Hardin, 2005; Sabo & Jansen, 1992; Wanta, 2006;

Vadhera, 2012) have argued that the sports section is either the most or second most widely read portion in metropolitan newspaper in the United States. Many major newspapers include a sports section in their publication, but the coverage of female sports can be said to be virtually non-existent or not given much importance (Lever & Wheeler, 1993).

Statement of the problem

Sport has always been associated with males and masculinity (Kane, 1989). According to Schell and Rodriguez (2000), sport remains a mostly male domain despite an increasing number of women participating in it throughout the world. Elueze and Jones (1998) said that “sport is a powerful institution through which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed” (p. 48).

Many studies have shown that womens’ sports (i.e., sports participated by women such as figure-skating) and female athletes are given less and a different kind of coverage (e.g., Bishop, 2003; Elueze & Jones, 1998; Lee, 1992). In addition, researchers (such as Vincent, 2004; Christopherson et al, 2002 and Bernstein, 2002) have also found that even if coverage is given to female athletes, the reports tend to trivialize them by portraying the female athletes as sex objects and by questioning their ability and performance. This is done by comparing their accomplishments to a male’s. Chalkley-Rhoden (2015) posits that only 7% of female athletes are reported in the sports programming and a significant gap is seen in their under-representation in media.

Numerous studies have revealed that male and female television sports broadcasters use different language and often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes when covering female athletes (e.g., Eastman & Billings, 2000; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Higgs, Weiller, & Martin, 2003). These stereotypes continually portray female athletes in “...ways that link them to oppressive stereotypes of women’s so-called frailty, sexuality, and limited physical capacity” (Kane, 1996:99). However, an extensive online and offline resource search conducted by the researcher shows that no published articles have examined whether these trends (i.e., trivialization of their achievements, giving emphasis to their physical attributes rather than their accomplishments and portraying them as less capable compared to male athletes) occur in *The Star* covering the Beijing Olympics 2008. Robson (2012) mentions that the profiles of female athletes presented major in news agencies seemed to be chosen based on their looks and womanly traits as opposed to their sporting prowess.

Through the discussion, it can be seen that the strength and capability of women athletes are often trivialized. Also, women athletes are usually given less coverage compared to male athletes. Even if coverage is given, it tends to focus more on the personal life and physical attribute of female athletes rather than their accomplishments. So, this study aims to examine whether these forms of gender biasness are present in the sports reports of the Beijing Olympics events published in *The Star* newspaper.

Objectives of study

Much research in the West has supported the notion that gender biasness does occur when the media reports on sporting events (eg. Schmalz & Davison, 2006, Bishop, 2003; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2000). So, the objective of this research

is to discover the presence (if any) of gender biasness communicated through the language in a newspaper published in Malaysia when covering sports events. This research attempts to answer these questions:

1. What are the lexical items, transitivity structures and intertextual elements used to portray women athletes in *The Star's* reports on the Beijing Olympics 2008?
2. What do the lexical items, transitivity structures and intertextual elements reveal about the ideology that is being reinforced in the news reports?

Significance of the study

Gap always exists in the degree of social disparity of the representation of female athletes in media and as such, a close scrutiny is needed on the attention that the media gives to the female athletes and the extent these individuals are being discriminated in the media. This ongoing theme may pose a huge impact on the process of perceiving the female athletes in an unbiased way at different levels such as educationally, ideologically and also culturally. So, it is of utmost importance for more studies to be carried out to revoke the stereotypical projection of them in media. Also, the linguistic analysis of the news reports of the Beijing Olympics which this study undertakes will reveal useful insights on how and why women are represented in a particular way and will at the same time unearth the ideology held by The Star newspaper. Another important contribution of this paper will be the fact that this study can hopefully create awareness among people about the manner in which language can be used by people in positions of power to encode gender inequality and biasness. The framework adapted by the researcher in this study is also an excellent tool for analysing newspaper reports and the researcher hopes to provide a replicable methodology to be employed by future researchers who are interested in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Limitations of the study

This study has its limitations as well. The results of the study are specific to coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics from the selected publication i.e. The Star, and may not be applicable to coverage of other men's and women's sports printed in the same publication. A second limitation is that the gender of the sportswriter is not taken into account in this study. This is due to the lack of information on this particular aspect whereby the identity of the sportswriter is not revealed and only the news agencies to which the sportswriters belong to is mentioned.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gendered language

Gendered language is a language that promotes gender bias and treats one sex as weaker compared to the other (Lei, 2006). Usually, the favour falls on men and is against women. The existence of gendered language is mainly due to the existence of sexism in society. In the past, women were regarded as the weaker sex and were supposed to stay at home, remaining in a powerless state and subordinate to men (Lei, 2006). In contrast, men were and are still seen as the centre both at home and also in the society. It is to be noted that even in English-speaking

countries where everyone is treated equally regardless of their sex, discrimination against women still exist (Lei, 2006).

Gender consciousness about the discrimination against women has led feminist movements to much conscious attempts to influence and change language and linguistic behaviour (Lei, 2006). One aspect to consider is the fact that language is invented in the old days where discrimination against women much prevailed. So, we are forced to think along the line without us realizing that the language we use promote sexism.

Gendered language is a very broad term because it does not only look at how women are treated in a biased manner, but at the same time, provides realization of how language strategies in a mixed sex interaction may serve to silence women or depreciate women as interactants (Atkinson, 1993). English language, as how Spender (1985) defines it, is a language made by men for men, and therefore contributes to gender inequality. She adds that women are successfully kept in low position all the while as the language was developed in a society that practices patriarchy.

Linguists such as Basow (1992), Cameron (1985) and Lakoff (1975) have provided broad examples of the existence of gendered language in English language. One such example is the man-linked terminology, which refers to the usage of man terminology to refer to human beings in general, such as mankind, chairman, best man for the job and also working men (Nair, 2004). Sexual language is also very much present in English language. Sexual language refers to words that tend to refer to the female body and also terms that describe women as sexual preys (Nair, 2004). Examples of terms that advocate sexual language are slut, easy and skirt. Derogatory terms, which refers to the use of animal, plant and food terms to refer to females, are also found in English language, such as chick, tart and bitch. Lakoff (1975) argues that the term 'lady' is overloaded with elements of chivalry, thus implying women as helpless and in need of help from others.

Women and sports

The history between women and sports is a long one filled with discrimination, major accomplishments and also major advancement in the field of gender equality (United Nation, 2007). Among the achievements in sports are those of Helene Madison of the United States of America, the first woman to swim the 100-yard freestyle in one minute at the 1932 Olympics and Maria-Teresa de Filippis of Italy, the first woman to compete in a European Grand Prix auto race in 1958;

These accomplishments were made despite the many obstacles and barriers that women had to face, especially in terms of gender discrimination. Traditionally, women are perceived as weak when it comes to sport, especially sport that requires endurance such as cycling, weightlifting and also marathons (United Nation, 2007). It is believed that these types of tough sports

A clear form of discrimination deals with the weighty focus on the female body in sport. The value of the female athlete is often determined in terms of her body type, attractiveness and sex appeal, rather than in terms of the qualities that define her as an athlete (United Nation, 2007). Donna Lopiano, the former Chief Executive of the Women's Sport Foundation in the

United States, says that the sports media culture is ‘deciding what sells, and they’re not willing to sell legitimate female athletic achievement’.

Many scholars have commented that sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women (e.g., Bennett, Whitaker, & Smith, 1987; Hardin et al., 2005; Hargreaves, 1994). Sport has been consistently associated with men and masculinity in almost every culture and society of the world (Coakley, 2004).

Elueze and Jones (1998) claim that mass media has reinforced the differences between the sexes by presenting a world of sports which belongs to men. Often, sports media only cover sporting events “...that reinforce stereotypical feminine images of female athletes, such as figure skating and tennis” (Elueze & Jones, 1998:47). Even if female athletes are given fair coverage, they often minimize or trivialize women’s athletic accomplishments through their use of language or commentaries (Duncan & Messner, 2000).

Bryson (1990) argues that in general, people accept the view that men are considerably better at sport than women due to physical differences between genders. The mass media has played a role in the development of this kind of thinking as well. Several authors argue that mass media has helped reproduce and uphold antiquated definitions of gender (e. g., Hargreaves, 1994; Hilliard, 1984; Kinkema & Harris, 1998). Rintala and Birrell (1984) contend that newspapers more often than not defend the status quo rather than attempt to effect social change.

Today, sports news has become an important part of daily newspapers and beginning the 1920s nearly every major American newspaper included a sports section (Bryant & Holt, 2006; Lever & Wheeler, 1984; Stevens, 1987). However, coverage of female sports was virtually non-existent at that time and progress has been extremely slow (Lever & Wheeler, 1993).

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Vincent et al. (2004) used a qualitative textual analysis to uncover prevalent discourses used by British sportswriters covering the 2000 Wimbledon Championships. They coded and studied narratives on female athletes related to physical appearances, athleticism, family and personal roles, psychological and emotional characteristics, race, class, and nationality, and found out that female tennis players are still depicted in ambivalent, culturally stereotyped, derogatory, or sexist ways. They found no major link between the amount of coverage and the gender of the sportswriter, but their qualitative study showed that “the content produced by the mostly male journalists typically devalued and trivialized the accomplishments of professional women’s tennis players by using negative cultural stereotypes and sexual innuendos” (p. 86).

In Australia, a 1996 study conducted by Murray on the Australian Sports Commission found that coverage of women’s sport was just two percent of the total sports broadcasting in television, 1.4 percent in radio and 6.8 percent in sport magazines. Newspaper reportage of women’s sport was higher at 10.7 percent. When the South Australian Premier’s Council for Women commissioned a similar research in 2006, it found that newspaper coverage of women’s sport was just 4.1 per cent, despite a number of high-profile women’s sporting events held during the study period (Murray, 2006). An article by Robson (2012) mentioned that notable sports

women are often represented in a poor light in media.

The studies mentioned above show that female athletes are covered and portrayed differently compared to male athletes. Female athletes are more likely to be marginalized by sport media than male athletes since writers and broadcasters are more interested in conveying information about female athletes' bodies, physical attractiveness, or attire (Bernstein, 2002; Christopherson et al., 2002; Prinen, 1997). Also, sportswriters are more likely to use descriptors emphasizing strength when describing male athletes. In addition, sports media are more apt to employ language exemplifying femininity, beauty, and weakness when portraying female athletes (Elueze & Jones, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

Review of related theories:

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field in which the concern is on studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias (van Dijk, 1998). It explores the relationship between structures and strategies of text on the one hand, and social, political and cultural structures and processes on the other. CDA is aware of the fact that texts are not only a result of social and political context, but also have constitutive power to shape cognition and influence relations among various social groups (van Dijk 1998; Fairclough 1995). The central concern of CDA, therefore, is how the structures of discourse reflect, confirm, legitimize, reproduce or challenge power relations in society (Fairclough, 1995).

Fairclough's 3-Dimensional Framework

In this study, the analysis of the sports reports goes through three levels, which are: (a) text, (b) discourse practice, and (c) socio-cultural practice (Fairclough 1995). According to Fairclough (1995), text here refers to a piece of written, spoken, or other visual form of discourse produced in a communicative event while discourse practice refers to the processes of production, distribution and consumption of text. In addition, the texts are produced and interpreted within a socio-cultural context.

Fairclough (1992:10) contends that every discourse instance has three dimensions: it is either a spoken or a written text; it is an interaction between people, involving processes of producing and interpreting the text; it is part of social action. The activities below, i.e. description, interpretation and explanation, (as in Figure 1) of Fairclough's CDA model represent the framework of analysis, in which a piece of text is described, and then the discursive practices upon which it draws are identified, and linked to the underlying power relations which may be reproduced by the interaction (Thompson, 2004). The social interaction happens within the discursive practices, which produce text, and through the analysis of text messages, evidence of social practices can be revealed or noted (Thompson, 2004). Figure 1 displays the 3-dimensional model discussed.

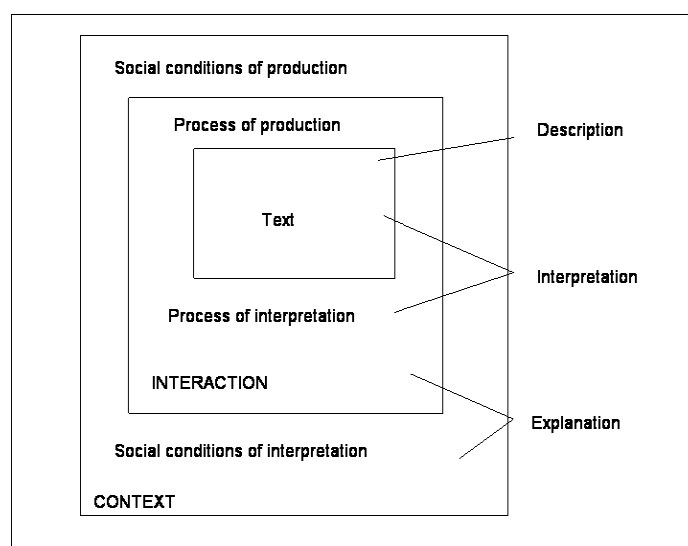


Figure 1: Fairclough's 3-dimensional model - Discourse as text, interaction and context (1989:25)

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) advocates the notion that people use and view language as a means to accomplish their purposes by expressing meaning in context. Halliday has argued that three functions of language, namely 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' exist in any texts. As how Fairclough (1995: 17) puts it: "representations, relations, and identities simultaneously emerge in a text, the ideal function of language in generating representations of the world; the interpersonal function includes the function of language in the constitution of relations, and of identities; the textual function relates to the constitution of texts out of individual sentences".

In analyzing discourse, SFL offers five checklists for CDA analysts which are the grammar of transitivity, the grammar of modality, transformation, classification and coherence, order and unity (Fowler et al., 1979: 179). As for grammar of transitivity, it is fundamental in representing the events and situation to which a text points to. As how Fowler explains it, 'transitivity – part of the ideational function – is a fundamental and powerful semantic concept in Halliday, an essential tool in the analysis of representation, which has already proved extremely illuminating in critical linguistics' (Fowler, 1991). Transitivity refers to events and processes and answers the questions such as who benefits from a particular action and how people are connected to an event (Fowler, 1991). Transitivity covers other themes such as material processes, mental thoughts, verbal utterances, relational processes and also existential processes.

Grammar of modality refers to linguistic constructions that are 'pragmatic' and 'interpersonal' in nature (Fowler, 1979). These express a speaker's and writer's attitude towards themselves, their interlocutors, their subject-matter, their social and economic status with the people they deal with, and also actions performed through the use of language such as accusing, begging, ordering and also promising.

The third feature, which is transformation, includes nominalization and passivization.

The former refers to the act of changing a verb into a noun while the latter inverts the position of subject and object in a particular sentence and gives both of them much emphasis (Fowler, 1979). Nominalization brings about certain effects to a particular sentence, rendering a process as an object, lexicalization and also deletion of participants. Classification deals with overlexicalisation. Relexicalisation refers to the invention of new lexical terms while overlexicalisation refers to the existence of a large number of synonyms for communication (Fowler, 1991).

The last feature, which is coherence, order and unity, defines the organization of a text. It shows the underpinnings of the discourse as a whole (Fowler, 1991). It also includes the analysis of the inter-relationship between events, their respective sequence, importance and interdependence in the structure of a discourse as a whole (Fowler, 1979).

As a summary, it can be said that SFL provides a useful and valuable tool in analyzing the aspects of transitivity to uncover the hidden ideologies in the reporting of sports events during Beijing Olympics 2008.

Corpus of the study

The study focuses on 17 newspaper articles that appeared in *The Star*, from 9th August 2008 to 22nd August 2008. These articles are newspaper reports on the coverage of the Beijing Olympics that took place in Beijing, China from the 8th of August 2008 to 24th August 2008. The analysis of individual text is a common methodology in critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and other types of discourse analysis (Bednarek, 2009). In terms of the sample size required, Guest et al. (2006) had suggested that 12 articles are to be considered the smallest acceptable sample for a purely qualitative analysis. On another note, Stemple (1952) had stated as well that a minimum of 12 samples is needed in order to produce a systematic, coherent and reliable analysis of qualitative data. However, Bauer & Gaskell (2000) opines that what matters the most is the organized selection itself and not the number of data samples in the analysis.

The researcher chose to study the articles from *The Star* mainly because it is the most read English daily in Malaysia with more than a million readers daily (Nielsen Media Research, 2007). All the print contents in the selected articles will be analysed, i.e. headlines and accompanying photo captions. However, photographs and charts accompanying these articles will not be included in the analysis. The articles chosen are labeled from A1 to A17.

The data will be analysed at three levels. At the first level, the researcher will be analysing lexical structures which include nouns, verbs and adjectives. Incorporation of SFL will be done in the first level of analysis through the integration of transitivity analysis. For the second level, the analysis will focus on intertextuality, of which the main concern will be on direct quotes. At the final level, the researcher will attempt to draw instances from the first and second levels to illustrate the analysis of discourse as social practice. This analysis will be based on the concept of ideology and particularly hegemony “in the sense of a mode of domination, which is based upon alliances, the incorporation of subordinate groups and the generation of consent” (Fairclough, 1992:9).

Data analysis procedure

This study adopts a qualitative measure and the theoretical framework for this study is Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional framework. Analysis of discourse will be carried out in three stages i.e. description of text, interpretation of text and also explanation of text. In the first stage, the lexical structures of the texts will be analyzed upon, focusing on vocabulary and transitivity. In the second stage, the focus will be on the aspect of intertextuality. The analysis in the last stage "will be revealed through the analysis of the first two stages mentioned before" (Fairclough, 1989:109). The analysis of discourse in these three stages will reveal whether gender biasness is present in the reporting of the events in the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of the lexical structures

The analysis of vocabulary, i.e. nouns, verbs and adjectives gives the readers the opportunity to interpret text and decode them to identify the meanings embedded in a text. This type of analysis also shows how writers can use lexical terms to cultivate intimacy, express emotion, explain the unfamiliar, and also restructure reader's thinking (van Dijk, 1998). The choice of certain linguistic terms may help to realize certain discourse properties of a particular text (Hazaea et al, 2014).

In the news reports, the representation of athletes varied based on gender. Women athletes are often portrayed as weak and terms that connote weakness and physical helplessness are used to refer to them. Table 1 shows the use of lexical items connoting weakness that are found in the news reports.

Table 1
Lexical Items Connoting Weakness

News Reports	Sentence
A1	GERMAN hockey player Katharina Scholz fears news of her being Playboy cover girl might overshadow her Olympic campaign.
A4	Half-empty stands for women's games at the Beijing Games in a country most obsessed with table tennis reinforce concerns that the sport needs a make-over to shed its fusty image.
A5	Zhang Ning slogged for 66 minutes to beat Pi Hongyan of France 21-8, 19-21, 21-19...
A7	Johnson, bothered by a headache before the competition, nailed her routine that was full of difficult tricks, earning a 16.225.
A9	Moreno left the games on July 31 due to an anxiety attack, which came after a doping test.
A10	And she paid a heavy price for her folly .
A10	"I came here to try to finish in the top 15 and was hoping to get a personal best," said a dejected Yufang, who holds the national record of 1'32:25.
A10	The SEA Games gold medallist, who is unsure whether she will still be around for the 2012 Olympics in London.
A12	Her semi-final defeat was more than a little contentious as she collected one more caution than Dumitru for passivity when it was clear that neither fighter was being any more, or more to the point, less aggressive than the other.

A13	“We're really disappointed for her. After planning a return for the Olympics, it's another setback ,” said Dominguez.
A14	Wenjun was so distraught by his disappearance that she quit shooting.
A14	She became introverted and at one point spent a week waiting outside her former home when she heard a man resembling her father had been seen in the area, reports said.
A14	After finishing a disappointing ninth at the City Games in 2005, she knuckled down and made a promising comeback, winning both a gold and a silver at the 2006 Doha Asian Games.
A14	But a year later she was ready to give up again.
A15	The 15-year-old landed awkwardly on her very first attempt in the women's 10m platform preliminaries.
A15	Her lack of international experience let her down again when she earned a miserable 34.00 in the fifth and final dive.
A16	Two devastating defeats in two days have left former champion Laure Manaudou wondering whether she should swim.

In Table 1, it can be seen that the lexical terms used in most of the news reports convey the idea of weakness and femininity. Lexical terms such as **miserable, devastating, distraught, passivity, anxiety, fusty** and **fears** shows that the emotional capability of women are inferior to men when it comes to sport, which in turn affects their physical competence. In many contexts, women are expected to be ladylike and reserved, and these stereotypical traits exclude women from participating in sport. Even if women and girls do engage in sport, they can be labelled with negative traits, such as being “manly” or “unfeminine”.

Another negative depiction of women athletes is achieved by labelling them as failures using terms that connote nervousness, lack of confidence, lack of “being comfortable,” lack of aggression and also lack of stamina. Much of the news reports focus on reporting the error and slip-ups committed by them rather than highlighting their achievements. Table 2 below justifies this notion.

Table 2
Lexical Items Connoting Failures

News Reports	Sentence
A4	SWEDEN’S reigning Olympic heptathlon champion Carolina Klüft failed in her attempt to reach the triple jump final yesterday.
A5	Wong Mew Choo had only herself to blame for letting slip the chance to get into the medals playoff of the women’s singles badminton competition at the Beijing University of Technology Gymnasium last night.
A5	Wong Mew Choo takes a tumble during her quarter-final match against China’s Lu Lan on Wednesday. Mew Choo lost 7-21, 27-29.
A6	Blonska’s was the fifth drugs case of the Beijing Games
A6	UKRAINE’S heptathlon silver 72medalist Lyudmila Blonska is facing a life ban after the International Olympic Committee confirmed yesterday that her B sample confirmed she had committed a doping offence .
A9	Spanish cyclist Maria Isabel Moreno was reportedly questioned by Spanish police following her expulsion from the Beijing Olympics for doping .
A9	Moreno left the games on July 31 due to an anxiety attack , which came after a doping test.
A10	It never should have happened to an experienced athlete but try telling that to

	Malaysian walker Yuan Yufang, who drank ice water barely two hours before <i>The Start</i> of the women's 20km walk competition yesterday.
A10	And she paid a heavy price for her folly .
A10	Her hopes of making a strong impression in her third Olympic outing were dashed after she retired with stomach cramps at the National Stadium.
A10	Doha Asian Games silver medallist Roslina Samsu came here with a personal best of 4.40m but was only able to clear 4.30m in the women's pole vault preliminaries.
A12	SEVEN-TIME world champion Ryoko Tani failed in her bid for a third Olympic gold medal yesterday as Japan's campaign to restore their pride in judo stalled on the first day of action yesterday
A12	She also lost to North Korea's Kye Sun-hui in the 1996 final before striking gold in Sydney and Athens.
A15	The 15-year-old landed awkwardly on her very first attempt in the women's 10m platform preliminaries.
A16	She earned the lowest score of 36.45 among the field of 29 divers for her opening performance.
A16	Her lack of international experience let her down again when she earned a miserable 34.00 in the fifth and final dive.
A16	Two devastating defeats in two days have left former champion Laure Manaudou wondering whether she should quit the swimming competition midway through.

In Table 2, it can be seen that lexis connoting failures are often used when reporting on the female athletes' performances. The news reports tend to portray the errors made by them rather than commenting on their achievements. Some examples of words used to describe them as failures are like **failed**, **letting slip the chance**, **expulsion**, **anxiety**, **miserable**, **lost** and **folly**.

Apart from that, the portrayal of female athletes is also highly sexualized. The value of the female athlete is often determined in terms of her body, attractiveness and sex appeal, rather than in terms of the qualities that define her as an athlete. This can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Lexical Items Connoting Physical Attributes

News Reports	Sentence
A1	American Olympic swimming champion Amanda Beard posed naked in Playboy last year, and in Beijing stripped for a campaign to end the fur trade, while British athletes have been photographed naked to advertise a sports drink.
A2	I did it because I am confident of my body and myself
A2	World and Olympic champion Cao Lei, and 2006 Commonwealth Games gold medalist Michaela Breeze have spoken up for their fellow women lifters, often dismissed as freaks with V-shaped torsos , bull necks and thunder thighs .
A2	"I try to smile because that's how I wish to feel after I've lifted," said the slender blonde .
A3	TABLE tennis is desperate to attract more viewers and some in the sport believe a simple enough solution exists – get the women to wear skirts and shirts with " curves ".
A3	At the Japanese national championships last year, she played in a daring ensemble of her own design – knee socks , a pleated mini-skirt and a shirt that left one shoulder bare .
A8	GERMAN fencer Britta Heidemann has posed nude for Playboy magazine, boasts an Olympic fencing gold and now has China wrapped around her finger.
A8	Local media was delighted about "the pretty German" and the China News Service

A11	even named her love for China the reason for grabbing the gold. The pony-tailed brunette, beaming broadly , bearing no mark from the fight and glowing with perspiration , was confronted by television crews after the bout.
A13	TATIANA Golovin followed fellow blonde pin-up Maria Sharapova into the Olympics casualty ward yesterday while the Beijing event then braced itself for the potential withdrawal of world number one-elect Jelena Jankovic.

The analysis of the words used to connote physical attributes of women athletes shows that they are highly sexualized. In most of the reports, many terms referring to female body parts are used, such as **V-shaped torsos, bull necks, thunder thighs, pony-tailed brunette** and also **skirts and shirts with curves**. Many reports have also brought to light the portrayal of female athletes as using their body as a platform to get into the limelight. An example from the table above is: ‘American Olympic swimming champion Amanda Beard posed naked in Playboy last year’. This sentence is sort of implying that the female athlete became famous for being the cover girl of Playboy magazine.

Female athletes can also be sexualized through official game rules which sometimes require revealing uniforms even when there is no functional purpose and this has been referred to as exploitation. This can be seen in the news article A3, whereby the vice-president of the table tennis federation is trying to get women table tennis players to wear a sexier and more revealing kind of uniform just for the sake of attracting viewers. Thus, it can be argued that the sexualization of female athletes diminishes their accomplishments and reinforces the image of women as sex objects.

As a conclusion, it can be said that all the lexical items used in the sports reports have constructed women as weak, frail, and incapable of playing and participating in sport. Through the analysis of lexical structures, it has been shown that hegemony was reaffirmed at the 2008 Beijing Olympics; the reports show that dominance of one gender over another exists in the world of sports. Also, it appears that women have not developed adequate understanding of the intrinsic value of sport and the physical strength needed to play sports efficiently. They failed to shine because they are women.

Analysis of the transitivity structures

In this part, the features of transitivity, namely relational, material, mental and verbal processes, passivization and also nominalization present in the sports reports will be analyzed.

Analysis of relational processes

The function of a relational clause in a text is to depict and classify the participants in the text. This analysis will decode the type of participants that attract these relational descriptions and kinds of qualities or categories are assigned to them. The analysis of relational process is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Relational Processes

NR	Token	Relational Processes	Value
A6	Blonska's	was	the fifth drugs case of the Beijing Games
A9	Moreno	was	the first athlete to be thrown out of the games following a positive doping test
A9	The 27-year-old Moreno	was	the first athlete to test positive at the Olympics
A9	The SEA Games gold medallist	is	unsure whether she will still be around for the 2012 Olympics in London
A13	She	was	hopeful of playing here
A13	She	was	laid low with a back injury
A13	She	was	doubtful after picking up a calf strain
A14	Wenjun	was	so distraught by his disappearance that she quit
A14	She	was	ready to give up again
A16	May-Treanor	was	not so sure

The analysis of relational processes in the table above positions female athletes as the token or carrier, and as such they are the focus in each clause. But, the values associated with them are basically negative. In most of the relational processes, the value suggests traits of confusion, failure, emotion, incapability, loss, indecisiveness and lack of experience. The element of paradox is prevalent here in the sense that as tokens, the position of power attributed to these women athletes is linked to negative values and consequently renders their position as powerless. The portrayal of female athletes as the 'powerful' token also conveys the idea that they are the ones responsible for their own mistakes.

These stereotypical assumptions are further reinforced by the use of auxiliary verbs such as 'is' and 'was'. Auxiliary verbs too, give the clause the status of power and indisputability. As such, any news reported is deemed accurate. For example, in news report A9, there is a clause saying that 'The SEA Games gold medallist is unsure whether she will still be around for the 2012 Olympics in London' and the use of 'is' strengthens the truth of the notion represented in the clause.

Through the analysis of relational processes, it can be surmised that women are portrayed in a biased manner and the focus of the news reports is more on their faults and mistakes than on their accomplishments.

Analysis of material processes

Material clauses have the function of describing an action or event and attempts to answer the question of *what happened*. Under this rubric, the analysis will help to reveal on which are the verbs that represent material processes, who are the actors and affected and finally who is represented as most powerful and who is portrayed as less powerful.

Table 5
Material Processes: Female Athletes in Actor Position

NR	Actor	Material Processes	Affected
A1	British athletes	have been photographed naked	to advertise a sports drink
A3	Women players mostly	wear	baggy shorts and shirts unlike their tennis counterparts who dress for comfort as well as style.
A4	The 25-year-old three-time world champion	finished	20 th in triple jump qualifying, with a best of 13.97m
A5	She	bowed out	in straight games
A5	Zhang Ning	slogged	for 66 minutes to beat
A8	She	posed	for the German edition of Playboy.
A9	Moreno	left	the games on July 31 due to an anxiety attack
A9	Moreno	could face	Fines of between euro1,500 (US\$2,215) and euro12,000 (US\$17,722)
A10	She	paid	a heavy price for her folly
A11	She	bowed down	to Hwang Kyung-seon

In Table 5, it is clear that female athletes are placed in the actor position. This act highlights quite a number of things. First, the identity of the actor is revealed, for example, 'women players', 'British athletes' and 'Moreno'. The purpose of making the identity of the actor known is perhaps to reveal that they are not just athletes, but 'women athletes' in particular. The verbs presenting material processes are of the negative type that emphasise the acts of failure such as 'bowed down', and 'slogged'. There are also instances of women athlete being portrayed as sexually alluring, such as 'posing naked' and also 'photographed naked'.

As for the affected party, the participants are other athletes. In the clauses A11 and A12, the female athlete, being in the position of the actor is depicted as being responsible for the failures in the events. They are represented as powerful enough to affect negatively on other athletes, who comes across as passive and powerless. The act of putting other athletes in the affected position also shows that women athletes not only failed in their respective sports that they participated, but at the same time they bother and give trouble to other athletes. This notion goes together perfectly with the old stereotyping of women as being troublesome.

It is also unsurprising to note that women athletes are illustrated as sexual objects to lure men. To illustrate this perception, the sentence below will be analyzed:
American Olympic swimming champion Amanda Beard (Actor) posed naked (Material Process) in Playboy last year. (News Report A1)

It can be noted from the sentence above that the sexually alluring act is committed by the

women athlete. The sentence could have been written as ‘Playboy magazine presents American Olympic swimming champion Amanda Beard on its cover’, but it wasn’t written so. Thus, the Playboy magazine is represented as less responsible for the actor’s position; it is the woman athlete i.e. Amanda Beard who is more active and blameworthy for the act committed.

To sum up the portrayal of female athletes shows that they do not belong to the world of sports; in fact they fail terribly in it. They are portrayed as being ultimately unable to perform well in sports even if they were given a chance.

ANALYSIS OF MENTAL PROCESSES

The analysis of mental process is important in the sense that it signifies inner and continuous processes accessible only to the experiencer. In this part, the researcher will attempt to answer these questions: Which verb represents the mental processes? Are these perception, emotion or thought? Who are the experiencers?

Table 6
Mental Processes

NR	Experiencer	Mental Processes	Phenomenon / Experience	Senser /
A1	Scholz	fears	Playboy cover will outshine her Campaign	
A1	I	think	now I have to play hockey and later talk about things like that	
A4	Carolina Klüft	failed	in her attempt to reach the triple jump final yesterday	
A6	The 30-year-old	failed	the dope test after methyl-testosterone, an anabolic steroid, showed up on it.	
A7	Johnson	bothered	by a headache before the competition	
A7	I	remember seeing	Nastia have hers from the all-around and it is so pretty	
A9	North Korean shooter Kim Jong Su and Vietnamese gymnast Thi Ngan Thuong Do have since	failed	doping tests	
A10	Her hopes	were dashed	after she retired with stomach cramps	
A10	The 32-year-old mother	started to feel	Stomach discomfort	
A12	Ryoko Tani	failed	in her bid for a third Olympic gold medal yesterday	
A12	She	lost	to four-time European champion Alina Dumitru	
A12	She	lost	to North Korea’s Kye Sun-hui	
A13	The Games tennis tournament	saw	Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic pull out yesterday	
A15	Diver Pandeleda Rinong	went through	a painful lesson in her first Olympic	
A15	She	earned	the lowest score of 36.45	
A16	Manaudou	finished	eighth - or last - in the 400 freestyle	
A17	I	hope	to be pregnant soon	

The mental processes found in the news reports of the 2008 Beijing Olympics can be

divided into two perspectives: the description of things from the first person point of view and the third person point of view. It is apparent that the experiencers are female athletes. When the mental processes experienced by the female athletes are described from a first person's point of view (which means the female athletes narrate the experiences themselves), the phenomenon focused their personal lives. For example:

I (Experiencer) hope (Mental Process) to be pregnant soon (Phenomenon). (News Report A17)

To add, when the writers speak on behalf of the female athletes, they tend to stress the idea of negativity as well. For example:

The Games tennis tournament (Experiencer) saw (Mental Process) Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic pull out (Phenomenon) yesterday. (News Report A13)

In the sentence above, the point of view is written from a third person's angle. The writer is acting as the all-knowing kind onarrator who knows everything about the athlete. The writer assumes things on his own, by implying that the tournament saw Ivan Ljubicic's pull out.

ANALYSIS OF VERBAL PROCESSES

The analysis of verbal process is crucial to find out on who gets to hold the floor and get their saying reported (Goatly, 2000). Verbal process is interlinked with mental process, in the sense that verbal process is actually a reflection of the mental process. The questions that will be guiding the analysis are: Which verbs represent a verbal process? Who does the saying and who are the receivers? Consider the examples in Table 7 below:

Table 7

Verbal Processes – Female Athletes as Sayer

NR	Sayer	Verbal Process	Receiver	Verbiage
A1	The 25-year-old striker	said		"I think it a good opportunity but now it's not important for me for now"
A2	Cao Lei and Michaela Breeze	have spoken	for their fellow women lifters	that being healthy is being beautiful
A2	Breeze, a former athletics star	admits		she often gets quizzical looks when she tells people she is a weightlifter
A7	The 16-year-old Johnson	said		"It's crazy"
A9	Moreno	said		on her Web site that she would leave the matter to her lawyers, who would "represent her in the corresponding legal process
A11	She	added		she was "fortunate and privileged" to face the world champion in her opening match
A12	Toni	told	the reporters	"I am proud to have competed in five straight Olympics"
A12	She	said		she had nothing to say about the referee's crucial third caution
A14	She	told		a story of how she hoped her

				success would make another dream come true
A16	Manaudou	told	France-2 television	

Table 7 shows the portrayal of female athletes as the sayer. Even though the sayer is supposed to be someone who gets to hold the power, it can be seen that the utterances made by female athletes are powerless. There is no tone and evidence or authority in the speech of women athletes. The receivers, most of the time are the media people, newspaper reporters and television journalists. In some of the clauses, the receiver is absent, but it is understood that the utterances are intended for the readers.

The main concern of the sayers (female athlete) is their performance and achievements. Female athletes in the news reports prefer to talk about issues relating to career rather than personal. Most of the time, their expressions are the representation of their mental processes. The verbs found in the texts are like ‘said’, ‘admits’, ‘spoken up’ and also ‘told’.

Analysis of intertextuality

Intertextuality refers to the productivity of texts, how the text can alter prior text and reform the present conventions to generate new ones. In Fairclough’s framework, the analysis of intertextuality goes beyond the text level, and analysis is extended to that of discursive practice of text production, distribution and also consumption. In this part, one aspect of intertextuality will be analyzed: direct quotes.

Analysis of the use of direct quotes

Direct quotes refer to actual sentences spoken by people that are inserted into a paragraph or text. Newspapers usually use direct quotes to validate its claims and also as a tactic to convey its reliability.

Table 8

Direct Quotes: Female Athletes

NR	Direct Quotes	Speaker
A1	“For me it was a good opportunity, and maybe when I look back after a few years I will be proud of it. Not everybody can go on the cover of Playboy. I did it because I am confident of my body and myself”	Katharina Scholz
A2	“My belief is that being healthy is being beautiful”	Cao Lei
A2	“I was doing weights to tone my legs to help with my athletics, to become more powerful”	Breeze
A5	“I was not certain where to place the shuttle at that time. My heart was in the game but my arms could not respond. Lu Lan caught up and gained confidence. I tried but could not nail that one point”	Mew Choo
A5	“It’s disappointing but I am satisfied with my outing in Beijing. My objective was to reach the quarter-finals and I did it”	Mew Choo
A10	“I’m very disappointed with myself because I had trained for a long time”	Yuan Yufang

A10	"I came here to try to finish in the top 15 and was hoping to get a personal best"	Yuan Yufang
A11	"I'm pretty hard-headed. It doesn't bother me at all. I'm pretty used to it. I'm a tough girl. Don't worry"	Sheikha Maitha Mohammad Al-Maktoum
A12	There is nothing I can do about the referee's decision and I would accept it as it is"	Ryoko Tani
A13	"If I can't play, if I'm not going to be able to give my best on the court, I will not go. It's not a risk I will take"	Jankovic
A16	"I'm asking myself if it's worth continuing. I don't even have the desire to swim anymore"	Laure Manaudou
A16	"It's tough finishing seventh or eighth"	Laure Manaudou
A16	"It was very hard to rebound after what happened yesterday"	Laure Manaudou

In the news reports, women athletes are not given much voice to talk or express their feelings and emotions except when it deals with failures. The news reports have focused on representing women as synonymous with defeat and failure. To validate their point, they employ direct quotes from women athletes expressing regret over their mistakes and talking about the difficulty that they have faced. The quotes highlighted in the table above show that almost all the quotes referred to statements by women athlete regarding frustration and disappointment. This strategy is employed to validate the notion that the particular woman athlete has truly failed. In analysing the text also, it is found that whenever a woman athlete wins an event, not much direct quotes from her expressing her happiness will be used in the news report.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis, it can be concluded that women athletes are portrayed in a biased and prejudiced way. The newspaper has used the features of lexical structures, transitivity and also intertextuality to address their ideological stand, i.e. women are unable play sports. By large, the readers' minds are shaped to believe that women fail in sports. The choice of lexical items, transitivity and intertextuality have shown that two prevalent themes in *The Star's* coverage of women athletes are evident: portraying athletes as failures and also sexually exploiting them.

The news reports have also downplayed the athleticism and skills of the female athletes. It is apparent in the news reports that it is difficult for female athletes to excel in sports compared to male athletes, who are perceived to be physically superior in a masculine hegemonic society. The use of direct quotes for example, has highlighted women athletes' poor athletic skills. The writer systematically selected direct quotes by the athletes themselves regarding their frustration and disappointment to further advance the notion of women's limited physical ability.

As such, it can be summarized that the gender discrimination has been uncovered through the analysis of linguistic features used in the news reports. Many examples in the analysis part have shown that women athletes have become victims of dominance by other parties such as sportswriters, other male athletes or other sports personnel. This supports the claim by many scholars (eg. Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Sabo & Jansen, 1992) that mass media help sport to serve as a masculine hegemonic order in society, whereby the position of power is occupied by men and masculinity takes precedence over femininity.

In terms of the way women athletes are portrayed in this news reports on the 2008

Beijing Olympics, it is disheartening to know that gender discrimination still exists despite much strategies taken by governments, the United Nations, sport institutions and NGOs to address discrimination and inequalities in sport (United Nation, 2000). More strategies must be taken to address the inadequate and often negative portrayal of women athletes in the media, especially newspapers. Attention should be paid not only to reduce the sexualised representation, marketing and promotion of women's sport, but also changing the dominant stereotypical gender images to reflect the progress toward gender equality in sport. So, the press must be more transparent in the reporting of news and must stop the stereotypical representation of women athletes which reinforce traditional images of women.

CONCLUSION

It is common knowledge among critical discourse analysts that the press only presents an edited version of the news to readers. The piece of information published is carefully selected, deleted in some parts and the final product that reaches us is the piece that has gone through tremendous changes to suit the ideological underpinnings of the particular news agency (Krishnan, 2006). Some crucial information may have been undisclosed in the news reports and as such, we as readers must not be led into believing everything that we read. So, readers such equip themselves with critical thinking skills to deal with these facets of language.

In this study, only selected linguistic structures, i.e. vocabulary, transitivity and intertextuality are analysed. However, there are ample of structures which can be studied upon such as modality, theme, presuppositions, parody and also mood. Future researches could involve doing comparative studies either between different news agencies or gender.

In many societies, women are deemed as weaker compared to their male counterparts. Despite this, many remarkable achievements have been made by women, for example Helene Madison of the United States of America, the first woman to swim the 100-yard freestyle in one minute at the 1932 Olympics; Nawal El Moutawakel of Morocco, the first woman from an Islamic nation to win an Olympic medal for the 400-metre hurdles at the 1984 Olympics; and Tegla Loroupe of Kenya, who in 1994 became the first African woman to win a major marathon. These achievements were made despite the presence and practice of gender discrimination.

Yet, women athletes are made to become the victims of this men-formed hegemonic oppression. Social constraints are a further hindrance to the participation of women in sport, such as the perception of women's limited physical ability. These social constraints are further strengthened by the press in portraying women athletes in a biased and prejudiced way. This is what *The Star* has done, as shown in this study, adding another platform for the discrimination against women to take place.

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APPENDIX A

A1 - Friday, August 15, 2008

Scholz fears Playboy cover will outshine her campaign

GERMAN hockey player Katharina Scholz fears news of her being a Playboy cover girl might overshadow her Olympic campaign.

Scholz and three other German Olympic sportswomen will appear on the cover of the German edition, adding their names to the list of athletes baring all for cash or a cause.

"I think now I have to play hockey and later talk about things like that. I think it a good opportunity but now it's not important for me for now," the 25-year-old striker said after her team's 4-2 win over the United States yesterday.

"The most important thing for me is playing hockey. And because I am playing hockey, I got the opportunity to go on Playboy. Otherwise I wouldn't. I have no plans on a career in modeling."

American Olympic swimming champion Amanda Beard posed naked in Playboy last year, and in Beijing stripped for a campaign to end the fur trade, while British athletes have been photographed naked to advertise a sports drink.

"For me it was a good opportunity, and maybe when I look back after a few years I will be proud of it. Not everybody can go on the cover of Playboy. I did it because I am confident of my body and myself," Scholz said.

Germany's September Playboy, which was published yesterday, have four different covers for the first time – each dedicated to one of the athletes, the others being sailor Petra Niemann, canoeist Nicole Reinhardt and judoka Romy Tarangul. – Reuters

A2: Bar belles sending a defiant message in Beijing

In women's weightlifting, it's possible to have beauty as well as brawn.

That's the defiant message coming from the bar belle of the Beijing Olympics.

World and Olympic champion Cao Lei, and 2006 Commonwealth Games gold medallist Michaela Breeze have spoken up for their fellow women lifters, often dismissed as freaks with V-shaped torsos, bull necks and thunder thighs.

"My belief is that being healthy is being beautiful," said Cao Lei after winning the 75kg gold medal on Friday.

"We are very healthy, so we are beautiful women. There is a (local) saying: 'Health leads the trend in fashion'."

School teacher Breeze, a former athletics star from Devon in south-western England, who switched sports to improve her prospects at Olympic glory, admits she often gets quizzical looks when she tells people she is a weightlifter.

"Why, what do weightlifters look like?" she said she would tell them.

"I was doing weights to tone my legs to help with my athletics, to become more powerful," she said.

It was love at first sight.

Breeze, who finished outside the podium in the 63kg class, said she would like to play a part in breaking down stereotypes about women lifters.

The official public address announcer at the weightlifting venue here tries to do his part, telling the crowd: "What you are about to see is a perfect combination of strength and beauty."

Canadian lifter Jeane Lassen, who finished in eighth place at the 75kg competition, is also doing her best to bring a feminine touch and psychology to the discipline, which first entered the Olympic programme at the Sydney Games in 2000. She wins over the crowd by smiling at them before every lift, and then, pass or fail, kisses the bar after every heave. "I try to smile because that's how I wish to feel after I've lifted," said the slender blonde. "If you have a doubt before you lift, it's pretty hard to do it. It's like positive reinforcement. It puts me in the right mindset." As for showing affection to the metal, "That's something I've done forever," she said. "I try to work with the bar, not against it. When you connect properly it's right and it's amazing. I try to think of the bar as my friend." – AFP

A3 – Wednesday, August 20, 2008

Serves take backseat to curves

TABLE tennis is desperate to attract more viewers and some in the sport believe a simple enough solution exists – get the women to wear skirts and shirts with "curves".

Half-empty stands for women's games at the Beijing Games in a country most obsessed with table tennis reinforce concerns that the sport needs a make-over to shed its fusty image.

Women players mostly wear baggy shorts and shirts unlike their tennis counterparts who dress for comfort as well as style.

International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) vice-president Claude Bergeret said: "We are trying to push the players to use skirts and also nicer shirts, not the shirts that are made for men, but ones with more curves."

One player, Japan's Naomi Yotsumoto, has taken matters into her own hands. At the Japanese national championships last year, she played in a daring ensemble of her own design – knee socks, a pleated mini-skirt and a shirt that left one shoulder bare. – Reuters

A4 - Saturday August 16, 2008

Kluft fails to make triple jump final

SWEDEN'S reigning Olympic heptathlon champion Carolina Kluft failed in her attempt to reach the triple jump final yesterday. The 25-year-old three-time world champion – who opted not to defend her multi-event Olympic title – finished 20th in triple jump qualifying, with a best of 13.97m.

Kluft will seek consolation in the long jump, an event in which she finished 11th in the 2004 Olympics.

Cuba's Yargelis Savigne led the 12 triple jump qualifiers with 14.99m. – AFP

A5 - Thursday August 14, 2008

Mew Choo blows golden chance to win a medal

WONG Mew Choo had only herself to blame for letting slip the chance to get into the medals playoff of the women's singles badminton competition at the Beijing University of Technology Gymnasium last night.

She held a total of nine game points in the second game of her quarter-final match against Lu Lan but was unable to force the Chinese third seed to a rubber game and lost the match 7-21, 27-29.

Mew Choo, who was the first Malaysian woman to qualify for an Olympic quarter-final, had no answer to the Lu Lan's aggression in the first game and conceded defeat in 14 minutes.

But it was a different Mew Choo as she forced herself back in contention in the next game.

She caught up with Lu Lan at 8-8 and held game point at 20-15. But she could not close the game, allowing her rival to win five straight points to force deuce.

The battle continued but it was not to be Mew Choo's night. She bowed out in straight games and there will be an all-China semi-final between Lu Lan and top seed Xie Xingfang, who beat Xu Huaiwen of Germany 21-19, 22-20.

The other semi-final is between defending champion Zhang Ning of China and Indonesian Maria Kristin Yulianti.

Zhang Ning slogged for 66 minutes to beat Pi Hongyan of France 21-8, 19-21, 21-19 while Maria, who ousted Danish contender Tine Rasmussen in the early round, chalked up a 26-28, 21-14, 21-15 win over India's Saina Nehwal.

Mew Choo rued her missed chances in the crucial moments (leading 20-15).

"I was not certain where to place the shuttle at that time. My heart was in the game but my arms could not respond. Lu Lan caught up and gained confidence. I tried but could not nail that one point," said the eighth seeded Mew Choo, who was featuring in her first Olympics.

"It's disappointing but I am satisfied with my outing in Beijing. My objective was to reach the quarter-finals and I did it."

A6 - Saturday August 23, 2008

IOC confirm Blonska doping offence and strip her of silver

UKRAINE'S heptathlon silver medallist Lyudmila Blonska is facing a life ban after the International Olympic Committee confirmed yesterday that her B sample confirmed she had committed a doping offence.

The 30-year-old, who has already served a two-year ban after testing positive for a steroid in 2003, failed the dope test after methyl-testosterone, an anabolic steroid, showed up on it.

The 2007 world heptathlon silver medallist and 2008 world indoor pentathlon champion, who underwent the test on Aug 16, has been stripped of her medal and expelled from the Games.

Her medal will now go to American Hyleas Fountain while Tatiana Chernova of Russia gets the bronze. Another Ukrainian, Nataliia Dobrinska, won the gold.

Blonska's place in Friday evening's long jump final has been taken by Nigerian Blessing Okagbare, who finished 13th in qualifying.

Blonska's was the fifth drugs case of the Beijing Games. – AFP

A7 - Tuesday August 19, 2008

Johnson finally gets her gold

BEIJING (AP) - Shawn Johnson of the United States finally got her Olympic gold medal, blowing away the field Tuesday with her routine on the balance beam – the last event of the women's gymnastics competition.

Johnson, bothered by a headache before the competition, nailed her routine that was full of difficult tricks, earning a 16.225.

"This is what we expected to see," said her coach Liang Chow. "The thing I really am pleased with is she was a little under the weather and she still was able to do a wonderful routine."

The world champion, who already had a silver behind fellow American Nastia Liukin in the all-around, and a silver on floor and in the team event, edged Liukin, who finished with a gold, three silvers and a bronze. Cheng Fei of China took the bronze, giving China six women's medals, two behind the Americans.

"This was the right ending to conclude the Olympic Games," national team coordinator Martha Karolyi said. "We proved the supremacy of U.S. women's gymnastics. Johnson "proved she is absolutely a great balance beam gymnast," she said.

"It's crazy," the 16-year-old Johnson said. "I remember seeing Nastia have hers from the all-around and it is so pretty. Silver is really pretty, too."

The Chinese men swept the two events Tuesday, with Zou Kai winning high bar and Li Xiaopeng winning parallel bars. In all, China took all but one men's event, the vault – in which there was no Chinese finalist.

China's men won the team title, Yang Wei took the all-around, and the Chinese also took the still rings, pommel horse and floor exercise. The United States got its only men's individual medal when Jonathan Horton soared through an energetic high bar routine that drew almost as loud a roar as Zou's performance. Horton also won bronze with the U.S. men in team finals. The Chinese men swept two events Tuesday, with Zou Kai winning high bar and Li Xiaopeng winning parallel bars. In all, China took all but one men's event, the vault – in which there was no Chinese finalist.

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The U.S. women won eight medals to six for China. Liukin's five medals tied the record for an American in one games.

"I'm really happy for her," Liukin said of Johnson, her roommate in Beijing. "Three silvers is kind of hard to take. I couldn't be more proud of her."

While Liukin and Johnson were regulars on the medals podium, Horton's high bar silver was somewhat unexpected. He was up against a strong field that included the 2004 gold medalist, Igor Cassina of Italy, and leading qualifier Epke Zonderland of the Netherlands. Plus 2007 world champ Fabian Hambuechen of Germany.

Horton didn't flinch among such heady company, and coach Mark Williams was so excited after Horton's high-flying routine that he engulfed his gymnast in a huge hug on the podium.

Hambuechen got the bronze. Behind Li on parallel bars were South Korea's Yoo Won-chul and Anton Fokin of Uzbekistan.

Li overpowered the bars, and the competition, adding this gold medal to his Sydney title. The 2000 gold medalist and two-time world champion began with a sensational leap forward from one end of the bars to the other – using only his arms to catapult him.

When he stuck his landing, Li and his coach pumped their arms as if they were trying to touch the ceiling. Then again, the Chinese men already had blown off the roof of the National Indoor Stadium with their dominance. And the U.S. women weren't far behind. – AP

A8 - Friday August 15, 2008

Chinese go gaga over Playmate Britta

GERMAN fencer Britta Heidemann has posed nude for Playboy magazine, boasts an Olympic fencing gold and now has China wrapped around her finger.

Heidemann is somewhat of a celebrity in the Olympic host country, having spent three months there at the age of 15, is enrolled in Chinese studies at Cologne University and will be back in China for work in September.

She won epee gold on Wednesday and became the centre of media attention afterwards when she fielded some questions in Chinese.

Local media was delighted about "the pretty German" and the China News Service even named her love for China the reason for grabbing the gold.

The gold came after a team silver in Athens 2004. The same year she posed for the German edition of Playboy. – dpa

A9 - Friday August 15, 2008 MYT 2:41:01 PM

Moreno questioned by Spanish police

ZARAGOZA, Spain (AP) - Spanish cyclist Maria Isabel Moreno was reportedly questioned by Spanish police following her expulsion from the Beijing Olympics for doping.

Moreno, who was the first athlete to be thrown out of the games following a positive doping test, was questioned by police in the Spanish town of Lleida in the company of her lawyer, according to Spanish reports.

Moreno said on her Web site that she would leave the matter to her lawyers, who would "represent her in the corresponding legal process."

Moreno left the games on July 31 due to an anxiety attack, which came after a doping test.

On Aug. 11, the International Olympic Committee expelled her from the Olympics after that test returned a positive result for EPO, a blood-boosting hormone that enhances endurance.

Under Spanish anti-doping legislation, Moreno could face fines of between euro1,500 (US\$2,215) and euro12,000 (US\$17,722) if found guilty of a doping offense.

The Spanish province of Aragon has since revoked its sponsorship of Moreno, while Spanish investment group Multicaja also withdrew its sponsorship of the Moreno-led club of Sabinanigo cycling team.

The 27-year-old Moreno was the first athlete to test positive at the Olympics.

North Korean shooter Kim Jong Su and Vietnamese gymnast Thi Ngan Thuong Do have since failed doping tests.

A10 - Friday August 22, 2008

Stomach cramps force Yufang out of walk event

IT never should have happened to an experienced athlete but try telling that to Malaysian walker Yuan Yufang, who drank ice water barely two hours before *The Start* of the women's 20km walk competition yesterday.

And she paid a heavy price for her folly. Her hopes of making a strong impression in her third Olympic outing were dashed after she retired with stomach cramps at the National Stadium.

The 32-year-old mother of two started to feel stomach discomfort 3km into the race.

And the pain finally got to her near the halfway stage. The incessant rain since the break of dawn made conditions worse and Yufang dropped out at the 12km stage.

"I'm very disappointed with myself because I had trained for a long time.

"I came here to try to finish in the top 15 and was hoping to get a personal best," said a dejected Yufang, who holds the national record of 1'32:25.

Yufang's best finish at the Games was a 15th placing in her Olympic debut in Sydney in 2000.

The outcome of yesterday's race was a cruel blow to Yufang, who was born in China and granted Malaysian citizenship in 1995.

She had left her family behind in Malaysia to go to Kunming, China, to undergo high altitude training for the last one month.

Despite the setback, Yufang is not ready to quit the sport.

The SEA Games gold medallist, who is unsure whether she will still be around for the 2012 Olympics in London, prefers to focus on the SEA Games in Laos next year and the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou.

Olga Kaniskina of Russia took the gold in a new Olympic record of 1'26:31, improving on the previous best of 1'29:05 set by Wang Liping in Sydney.

It has been a sad outing for Malaysian athletics, with all three representatives failing to record personal bests.

Doha Asian Games silver medallist Roslina Samsu came here with a personal best of 4.40m but was only able to clear 4.30m in the women's pole vault preliminaries.

High jumper Lee Hup Wei would have qualified for the top-12 final if he had equalled his national record of 2.27m set at the same venue in the China Open last month. But he only managed 2.20m.

A11: Princess kicked in the head in debut

A SPORTS-loving princess from the United Arab Emirates made her Olympic debut at the Beijing Games yesterday – and she was kicked in the head by a two-time world taekwondo champion.

"I'm pretty hard-headed. It doesn't bother me at all. I'm pretty used to it. I'm a tough girl. Don't worry," quipped 28-year-old Sheikha Maitha Mohammad Al-Maktoum, a member of the Gulf country's ruling royal family.

She bowed out 5-1 to Hwang Kyung-seon, six years her junior, from South Korea.

"It's a dream and a nightmare at the same time. I couldn't wait until it was going to happen. And now I can't believe it's over," Sheikha Maitha said.

The pony-tailed brunette, beaming broadly, bearing no mark from the fight and glowing with perspiration, was confronted by television crews after the bout.

"I think I performed well for what my background is and my experience," she said. She added she was "fortunate and privileged" to face the world champion in her opening match. – AFP

A12 - Sunday August 10, 2008

Tani fails to win third gold as Japan falter in judo opener

SEVEN-TIME world champion Ryoko Tani failed in her bid for a third Olympic gold medal yesterday as Japan's campaign to restore their pride in judo stalled on the first day of action yesterday. She lost to four-time European champion Alina Dumitru after receiving a third caution from the referee, one more than the Romanian, in a lacklustre women's 48kg semi-final in which the pair failed to score any points. Dumitru, who lost to Tani in the semi-finals at the 2007 world championships, went on to claim her first ever global gold medal as she threw Cuba's Yanet Bermoy for *ippon* (the maximum score) with a perfect *osoto-gari* (outer leg sweep). In the men's 60kg final, South Korea's 2003 world champion Choi Min-ho defeated European champion Ludwig Paischer of Austria with a brilliant *te-guruma* (leg-grab pick-up) for the maximum *ippon*. Tani, 32, fought through the repechage consolation round for losers to win a bronze by downing Russian Liudmila Bogdanova with a spectacular hip throw for an *ippon*. "I am proud to have competed in five straight Olympics," Tani told reporters. "The contest has just ended and I am not sure what I would do. I will consult people around me about that." Tani won the silver at the 1992 Barcelona Games after losing in the final to France's Cecile Nowak when women's judo made its full debut as an Olympic sport. She also lost to North Korea's Kye Sun-hui in the 1996 final before striking gold in Sydney and Athens. Her semi-final defeat was more than a little contentious as she collected one more caution than Dumitru for passivity when it was clear that neither fighter was being any more, or more to the point, less aggressive than the other. She said she had nothing to say about the referee's crucial third caution, when Dumitru escaped punishment, giving her Romanian opponent the advantage. "There is nothing I can do about the referee's decision and I would accept it as it is." Tani's compatriot Hiroaki Hiraoka, who beat record three-time Olympic champion Tadahiro Nomura at the national trials to earn a berth here, bowed out in the men's 60kg first round when he lost to American newcomer Taraje Williams-Murray. Japan won a record eight gold medals in Athens, including five from the women's contests, but their medal haul was down to just three at last year's world championships. – AFP

A13 - Sunday August 10, 2008

More big names pull out from Games

TATIANA Golovin followed fellow blonde pin-up Maria Sharapova into the Olympics casualty ward yesterday while the Beijing event then braced itself for the potential withdrawal of world number one-elect Jelena Jankovic. The Games tennis tournament also saw Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic pull out yesterday to join Davis Cup team-mates Mario Ancic and Ivo Karlovic as no-shows delivering further body blows to a sport whose presence in the Olympics bitterly divides opinion. Lindsay Davenport, the 1996 gold medallist, had, like Sharapova, already withdrawn from the singles but fans and organisers at least had the assurance that the veteran American would play in the doubles. America's former world number one Andy Roddick and fellow top 10 player Richard Gasquet of France had opted not to play in China, preferring to concentrate on their preparations for the season's last Grand Slam, the US Open which starts in two weeks. Injury-plagued Golovin, France's world number 23, underwent a hip operation last winter and hadn't played since May missing both the French Open and Wimbledon. She was hopeful of playing here until she was laid low with a back injury. "We're really disappointed for her. After planning a return for the Olympics, it's another setback," said Dominguez. Jankovic, who will replace Serbian compatriot Ana Ivanovic as world number one tomorrow, admitted she was a doubtful after picking up a calf strain. "If I can't play, if I'm not going to be able to give my best on the court, I will not go. It's not a risk I will take," said the 23-year-old whose calf is heavily strapped. Jankovic is due to play Zimbabwe's Cara Black in the first round today. – AFP

A14 - Thursday August 14, 2008

Wenjun gets help from online community

A REVELATION by Olympic gold medal winner Guo Wenjun that she was abandoned by her father when she was 10 has caught China's imagination and sparked a massive online search to find him. Wenjun, 24, won the women's 10m air pistol shooting gold medal with a new Games record on Sunday and she told a story of how she hoped her success would make another dream come true – to see her dad again. Her parents divorced when she was 14 and she has not seen her father since he walked away in April 1999, the night before Wenjun went to Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, for a national air pistol competition, the *China Daily* said. The only thing he left was a grey coat, and a note to her coach, Huang Yanhua, which read: "I'm going far away. I want you to treat Wenjun as your own daughter and help her do her very best." Wenjun was so distraught by his disappearance that she quit shooting twice. She became introverted and at one point spent a week waiting outside her former home when she heard a man resembling her father had been seen in the area, reports said. But Yanhua convinced her that winning an Olympic gold medal could be the best way to find him, according to the newspaper. "I told her the Olympics is the best chance she has of finding her father," Yanhua was quoted as saying.

"I told her, 'If you give up, you will disappoint your father. But if you win the gold medal, your father is likely to find you'." Wenjun responded by saying: "I'll do well in the Games, and my dad will see me and be proud." After finishing a disappointing ninth at the City Games in 2005, she knuckled down and made a promising comeback, winning both a gold and a silver at the 2006 Doha Asian Games. But a year later she was ready to give up again. It was only Huang's reminder of her ultimate motivation of finding her father that convinced her to keep going, which culminated in Sunday's gold medal. The story has touched the hearts of the nation with an online notice to look for her father receiving 100,000 hits so far and more than 10,000 Internet users actively participating in the search, the *Beijing News* said. Back at her hometown of Xian, there were tears when she stood on the podium. Her grandmother, Chen Guizhen, said she just wanted to see her granddaughter home as soon as possible. "The last time I saw her, she said her greatest dream was to win our country a gold medal," she told Xinhua news agency. "Now that she has fulfilled her dream, I just want to congratulate her." – AFP

A15 - Thursday August 21, 2008

Pandelela undergoes painful debut in pool

DIVER Pandelela Rinong went through a painful lesson in her first Olympic outing at the National Aquatics Centre last night. The 15-year-old landed awkwardly on her very first attempt in the women's 10m platform preliminaries. The impact, akin to jumping off from a three-storey building, was enough to kill her hopes of making it to the top-18 semi-finals. She earned the lowest score of 36.45 among the field of 29 divers for her opening performance. Pandelela put up better efforts in the next three dives but failed to move up to the top 18 bracket. Her lack of international experience let her down again when she earned a miserable 34.00 in the fifth and final dive. She was eventually placed 27th with 249.20. Bryan Nickson will be the last Malaysian from the aquatics team and will go into action tomorrow night in the men's 10m platform preliminaries. And there is hope on the Sarawakian breaking into the semi-finals after coming close with a 19th place finish in his Olympic debut in Athens four years ago.

A16 - Tuesday August 12, 2008

Manaudou considering quitting

BEIJING: Two devastating defeats in two days have left former champion Laure Manaudou wondering whether she should quit the swimming competition midway through.

"I'm asking myself if it's worth continuing. I don't even have the desire to swim anymore," Manaudou told France-2 television Tuesday after placing seventh in the 100-meter backstroke.

"It's tough finishing seventh or eighth."

On Monday, Manaudou finished eighth - or last - in the 400 freestyle, more than eight seconds slower than the winner, Britain's Rebecca Adlington.

"It was very hard to rebound after what happened yesterday," the Frenchwoman added.

Manaudou was slated to race twice more: the 200 back Thursday and the 400 medley relay Friday.

"I think she'll start the 200 back. I'm going to push her by tapping on her champion's mind-set," said Manaudou's personal coach, Lionel Horter.

These games have been a sharp contrast from Manaudou's breakthrough four years ago in Athens, when aged just 17, she brought home France's first swimming gold since Jean Boiteux in 1952, in the 400 free.

She also won a silver in the 800 free and a bronze in 100 back.

In 2005, Manaudou became the 400 free world champion, a title she defended in 2007.

In between, she broke the 18-year-old world record of Janet Evans, and then improved on her own mark again just three months later. - AP

A17 - Wednesday August 13, 2008

Baby plans could spell end for US pair

KERRI Walsh and Misty May-Treanor have lived through thick and thin together for eight years but the most powerful partnership in women's beach volleyball could soon be broken up by babies.

Both US players have married since they won gold at the Athens Games and while each is keen to get on with the next stage of family life, they were divided over how much they would play as mothers.

"I hope to be pregnant soon after the Games, take a year off and then come back," said Walsh, whose husband Casey Jennings is also a professional beach volleyball player.

Walsh, who turns 30 this week, pointed to several players who took their children on tour with them, adding: "it's great, you always have unlimited baby-sitting services."

May-Treanor, 31, was not so sure.

"I wouldn't take them on tour. It's too tough. And it would be nice to see my husband a little as well," she said.

May-Treanor is married to Florida Marlins catcher Matt Treanor, who also spends most of the year travelling for matches.

“You never know what might happen. It's too early to say. If I come back, I come back. If I don't, I don't,” she said.
Walsh and May-Treanor, triple world champions, are favourites to win a second Olympic gold in Beijing. – Reuters