

Historic Silver Medal for US Women's Foil

Contributed by Craig Harkins
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The United States Women's Foil team of Emily Cross, Erinn Smart, and Hanna Thompson won the silver medal in the team competition today. They lost to top ranked Russia 28-11. This is the United States' first ever medal in the women's foil discipline. The United States team entered the Olympic Games as the 7th seed and were expected to lose their first match against 2007 world champion Poland.

The US fencers were happy with the accomplishment of the silver medal. "You always dream about these moments when things work out well," said Erinn Smart. "We were the underdogs in all of our matches."

The bout started out cautiously for both teams as the 3rd bout ended at a 4-4 stalemate. Smart talked about the team strategy vs. Russia: "We wanted to take our time and be patient and have a strong point. We wanted to fence our best like we had done in previous matches."

The Russian team showed why they have the number one world ranking: they held the United States scoreless for 4 straight periods. From the 4th bout, they slowly built a 15 point lead over the Americans going into the last match.

The Russians are a difficult team for the US to match up against. When asked about fencing Russia, Hanna Thompson stated: "The Russians are such a strong team and they're obviously exceptionally tall, so trying to get touches off of them, to attack especially can be pretty difficult. Once they got the lead it was pretty hard to catch up."

The medal marks the 5th for the United States team in the 2008 Olympic Games and the 25th fencing medal for the United States since 1900. The United States is currently 2nd in fencing medals, ahead of perennial powerhouses France, Germany, and Russia. Italy holds the lead with 6 medals won during these Olympics.

Keeth Smart, Erinn's brother - and best friend - was watching from the stands. "For them to come and win the Silver medal is huge. I'm extremely proud of them and the effort they've shown today."

The Russian trio of Victoria Nikichina, Svetlana Boyko, and Evgenia Lamonova defeated Italy in a controversial decision. At the end of regulation Russia and Italy were tied at 21 each. The next touch seemed to be simultaneous but the referee called it for Russia upon video review.

Italy won a slowly paced Bronze medal bout. Italy started with a 3-0 lead and extended it to 11-4 at the end of the 4th period. In the sixth bout Hungary started to close the gap and ended the match with a red card against Granbassi for using her mask to parry. Though the entire match was slow, the final bout picked up as Vezzali closed it out going 11-6 and Italy won 32-23.

The Italian coach, Andrea Margo, received a black card which ejected him from the venue before the bronze medal bout. According to a statement from the FIE, this was due to "affecting the order" in the warm up area.

The Hungarian team was defeated in the semifinals by the United States 35-33 despite an inspired last bout by Hungarian team anchor Aida Mohamed.