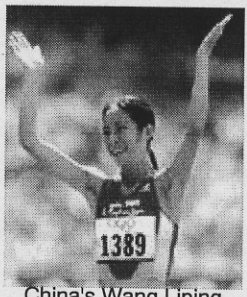
Farce reigns as Wang walks away with gold

28 September 2000

REUTERS

Wang Liping of the People's Republic of China won the inaugural women's 20 km walk gold at the Sydney Olympic Games on Thursday after a race which degenerated into high farce and floods of tears.



China's Wang Liping celebrates winning the women's 20km
Ian Waldie / Reuters

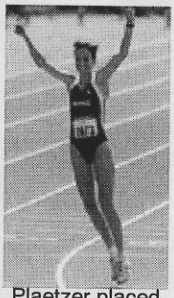
Wang won in a time of one hour 29 minutes five seconds after the three walkers in front of her were disqualified in the closing stages after each had been ahead.

Australian Jane Saville was the last to be thrown out just as she entered the stadium, with the crowd's applause ringing in her ears.



Jane Saville being disqualified
Ian Waldie / Reuters

As she realised she had been given her third and final warning for failing to maintain continuous contact with the ground, the 1998 10 km Commonwealth Games champion burst into tears. She was led away, inconsolable.



Plaetzer placed second in one hour 29:33 minutes
David Gray / Reuters

Silver went to Kjersti Plaetzer of Norway (1:29.33), with Maria Vasco of Spain taking the bronze (1:30.23).

While they celebrated their unexpected success in Stadium Australia, Liu Hongyu of China and Italian Elisabetta Perrone were left bitterly disappointed way back down the course.

Liu, the world and Asian Games champion, was disqualified as she led the race with just over a quarter-of-an-hour to go.

Perrone was also thrown out of the race for lifting but, after stopping and waving her arms angrily in the air, she set off again, causing total confusion as she overtook Saville to go back into the lead. At that stage it seemed as if the 32-year old, a silver medallist in the 1996 Olympics 10 km race, was determined to cross the line first despite her disqualification. But as soon as she had got back in front Perrone voluntarily walked off the road.

Disqualifications are a common feature of walk events, often occurring in the final metres. The men's 20 km walk in Sydney last Friday was as controversial.

Mexican Bernardo Segura completed a lap of honour after crossing first and was being filmed on television talking to his country's president on the phone before he learned he had been disqualified in the final strides.

The gold went to Poland's Robert Korzeniowski who had been thrown out of the 1992 Olympics 50 kms walk as he entered the stadium in second place.