



Japan at the
Beijing
Olympics

At the Beijing Olympics from August 8 to 24, Japanese athletes performed creditably in winning a total of 25 medals — nine gold, six silver and ten bronze. Here, we introduce some of the medal winners.

KOSUKE KITAJIMA

GOLD 100m and 200m men's breaststroke

AFTER WINNING GOLD medals in the 100m and 200m men's breaststroke at the 2004 Athens Olympics, **Kosuke Kitajima** defended his titles at the Beijing Olympic Games. He set a new world record of 58.91 seconds in the 100m breaststroke and in the 200m, he came in 0.13 seconds short of his own world record, 1.24 seconds ahead of the swimmer in second place, setting a new Olympic record of 2 minutes 7.64 seconds, and achieving victories in these events in consecutive Olympics.

AFTER WINNING A GOLD MEDAL at the Athens Olympics, **Ayumi Tanimoto** struggled to regain form after a string of setbacks. While the trend in world judo is for matches to be decided on points, Tanimoto focused on the traditional Japanese approach of winning by *ippon*, or one full-point. This paid off in Beijing, where she won all of her bouts with an *ippon*. In the women's judo, gold medal contender Ryoko Tani finished with the bronze in the 48-kilogram division, Masae Ueno won gold in the 70-kilogram division, following on from her gold in the same event in the Athens Olympics. In men's judo, Masato Uchishiba executed a repeat performance of his victory in the 66-kilogram division in Athens, while Satoshi Ishii won gold in the over-100-kilogram division in memorable fashion.

AYUMI TANIMOTO

GOLD women's judo – 63kg div.



TO ACHIEVE that long sought-after gold medal, the Japanese **softball team** won the final 3-1 against the mighty United States team that had won three consecutive gold medals since the Atlanta Olympics. Ace Yukiko Ueno pitched a total of 413 balls in the three games played over the final two days of competition. It has been decided that softball will be removed from the official schedule of Olympic events at the London Games in 2012, so after the matches in Beijing had finished, players from Japan, the United States and Australia gathered together to launch an appeal for the restoration of the sport in the 2016 Olympics.

THE ERSTWHILE UNBEATEN queen of international competition — **Saori Yoshida's** unbeaten run of 119 consecutive bouts over 12 years came to an end at the World Cup held in January this year. A gold medalist at the Athens Olympics, this was a difficult defeat for Yoshida to take. She used that result to spur her on at Beijing, beating one opponent after another with her high-speed tackling to win gold in consecutive Olympics. In women's wrestling, following on from her gold medal at the Athens Olympics, Kaori Icho won gold in the 63-kilogram division and Chiharu Icho showed her determination to win a silver medal in the 48-kilogram division.



SOFTBALL

GOLD *women's softball*

PHOTO : JUN TSUKIDA / AELIO SPORT



SAORI YOSHIDA

GOLD *women's freestyle wrestling – 55kg div.*

YUKI OTA BECAME the first ever Japanese fencer to win an Olympic medal. In the final the 22-year-old was beaten by Benjamin Kleibrink of Germany, but prior to this he recorded some memorable victories, including a win in the quarter finals over the top-ranked, Peter Joppich. Fencing has been an official event since the first modern Olympics were held in 1896, however in Japan it is a minor sport with a limited following. No doubt the Olympic success of Yuki Ota will boost its popularity.

YUKI OTA

SILVER *men's fencing – individual foil*

