

Canada hails 'Alexandre the Great'

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VANCOUVER — Canadians across the nation hailed Alexandre Bilodeau as a hero on Monday after his victory in the men's moguls freestyle skiing ended a long-running home-turf gold medal drought.

Coast to coast, the front pages of newspapers billed him as "Alexandre the Great" in bold print alongside full-page photos of his "historic" win.

Bilodeau scored 26.75 points to snatch the gold on Sunday evening ahead of defending champion Dale Begg-Smith of Australia on 26.58. Bryon Wilson of the United States took bronze with 26.08 points.

The win was not just Canada's first gold of the Games, but also consigned to history their dubious honour of being the only country to host the Olympics twice -- Calgary 1988 Winter Games and Montreal 1976 Summer Games -- and not capture a gold.

"Gold comes home," shouted the daily Globe and Mail. "It was 23.17 seconds of glory that was shared by an entire nation," it said in its pages, describing Bilodeau as "Canada's newest hero."

"He smashed a jinx that spanned Canada's two previous Olympic Games and began 12 years before he was even born," the newspaper added.

"It seems appropriate that a curse which started with the Montreal Olympics should be busted by a son of the same city," after more than 500 of his compatriots failed in two previous Olympic Games.

"Canada ends embarrassing drought," commented Montreal's Le Devoir.

The Vancouver Sun screamed: "Home gold! The wait is over," on its front page

"Canada's home-team curse -- if there ever was one -- is part of sport's history now," it said.

The sentiment was echoed in a Vancouver Province's headline: "Gold medal win ignites the country."

Canadian Olympic Committee chief executive Chris Rudge said he was glad the curse had been broken.

"We knew it was going to happen, it was just a matter of who and when," he said.

"I'm not so sure it's as much of a relief as it unlocks the mystery of who was going to get it."

Coming off the slopes of Cypress Mountain, Bilodeau hugged his brother, who has cerebral palsy, immediately after his win, as exultant fans broke into singing of Canada's national anthem.

He revealed he then took a phone call from Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"I didn't believe it when Pete (a Canadian judge) handed me the phone," said Bilodeau.

"Pete said the prime minister is on the phone. Do you want to talk to him?"

"I could only half hear him because the crowd was still cheering so loudly."

"The prime minister was watching TV. He said he was really proud that the curse was broken. He said it was only the beginning of the adventure for Canada, and that the train would really begin rolling now."

"I told him I was really proud to be Canadian."

Bilodeau added: "There are a lot more golds to come. I also want to be clear: the first gold medal is not worth more than the last."

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