



PRESS RELEASE

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BARNES AND CONLAN CLAIM GOLD FOR TEAM NI

Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan delivered Northern Ireland's first two gold medals of the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow with outstanding performances in front of 10,000 spectators at the Hydro on boxing finals day.

There was disappointment for Michaela Walsh who lost narrowly to Olympic champion Nicola Adams and for Joe Fitzpatrick who also settle for silver.

Barnes, the Team Northern Ireland captain, became the first boxer in forty years to retain a Commonwealth title from any country in any division.

He took on and beat India's Devendro Laishram by a unanimous decision in the light-flyweight division.

"That makes it extra special to me, and even more so because I'm the team captain. It's a top-quality feeling and the gold is for the whole team," he said afterwards.

"It was a very tough fight, he was very strong and wirey. I don't know what happened, my game plan just went out the window so I just got stuck in. But I still won anyway! We fought each other in the Olympic semi-finals in London and it was a very close fight. It was a war in there, and for the first time in the whole competition, my head really hurts."

Barnes is now making plans for Rio in two years time.

"You saw how scrappy that fight was so there is still a lot to learn and the plan is to qualify for the Olympics next year and then get ready for Rio."

After his medal ceremony Barnes stood at ringside to watch his close friend Michael Conlan take on Qais Ashfaq from England at bantamweight.

Conlan had passed a morning medical on a cut over his right eye sustained in the semi-final and when he lost the first round, according to the judges, he was on the back foot.

However he produced two magnificent rounds of boxing and ended up as the unanimous winner becoming the first boxer from Northern Ireland to win at bantamweight since Barry McGuigan 36 years ago in Edmonton.



Conlan's first embrace was for his father John who has coached the Northern Ireland team to such success.

"My father's been my trainer all my life and it's great to see him on one of the biggest stages here at the Commonwealth Games getting so much recognition for something he loves doing."

Conlan added, "I knew I had to deliver on this big, big stage. I knew Ashfaq would be right up for it and what a talented boxer he is, but I had the drive and the heart to beat him. I only had two weeks' training for this competition because I was injured. I came out here and I did the job. He took the first round and made me drive on and it was a really tough contest but I think the drive in me just won me it. I'd say it was probably my toughest fight.

And of course there was the usual banter with his room mate.

Conlan laughed, "When Paddy came out and said he had more gold medals than me I thought, 'Oh no, I have to win now'. I put a bit of pressure on myself."

Michaela Walsh was in tears after her fight with Nicola Adams in which the 21 year-old gave absolutely everything and many observers thought she had done enough to shade the decision. The verdict was given to the English woman.

"It was a close fight but I wanted it a bit more. I know in my heart I won the fight and I wanted it more but I would like to say congratulations to Nicola. She's a great ambassador for women's boxing and I wish her the best of luck, said Walsh.

"I felt I had it when the bell went and when they said 'split decision' I expected it to be me. It was a close fight against an Olympic champion."

Joe Fitzpatrick gave a very honest assessment after his unanimous defeat by Scotland's Charlie Flynn at lightweight.

"My tactics were all wrong. I didn't listen to what I was being told by my corner. I'll get him again and I know for a fact that I'll beat him. For a fact! He won the fight no problem but that wasn't even me in that ring there. I'm well better than that and I don't know what was wrong with me."

The 19 year-old added, "I don't know what went wrong, I just felt very sluggish and drained, I'd had a long wait before my fight. Silver is better than nothing but I'm always wanting gold. I wasn't at my best out there, but you'll get the best out of me on TV one day, there's big improvements needed."

Alanna Audley-Murphy, Steven Donnelly, Connor Coyle, Sean Duffy and Sean McGlinchy all were presented with their bronze medals giving the Northern Ireland boxing team a superb haul of 2 gold, 2 silver and 5 bronze.



ATHLETICS

The women's pole vault final took place in heavy rain that caused treacherous conditions. Unfortunately Zoe Brown failed three times at her opening height of 3m80cm, as did half of the ten finalists.

Only four registered any height at all with the two vaulters who cleared 3.80 – Sally Scott (England) and Alyeha Newman (Canada) claiming bronze. Sally Peake from Wales took silver at 4.25 and favourite Alana Boyd from Australia the gold with a clearance of 4.50.

"The warm up was very difficult and I took a few spills which affected my confidence. In 16 years vaulting I have never experienced weather conditions like it," said Brown. "As my confidence was low I decided to go in for a low height of 3.80 metres to ensure that I at least cleared one height. This plan did not work out as the weather conditions were at their worst and it ensured that 60 percent of the field was eliminated." She added, "I cleared the bar on two of my vaults but knocked it down as my stance was wrong. The conditions were dangerous at times. I did what I thought was right and I am very disappointed. Sport is very cruel at times and it is a very hard pill to swallow. The experience was bitter sweet as the support from the crowd was incredible."

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