

Xiaoxia wins controversial women's final

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Li Xiaoxia won the Olympic Gold in the women's singles

Li Xiaoxia won the Olympic women's singles final amidst a cloud of controversy around the ExCeL Centre as her opponent, world number 1, Ding Ning, was reduced to tears.

The drama all came about from umpiring decisions made by Italian Paola Bongelli, which resulted in Ding Ning being faulted three times on her serve and receiving a red card.

The match began with a series of excellent rallies, as could only be expected from two of the finest female table tennis players from China, as the rapid speed and movement from both made for an awesome spectacle on Wednesday afternoon.

While Ding Ning was faulted in the first game for her serve, that's not completely out of the ordinary, so little notice was taken as Li Xiaoxia held on for an 11-8 opening game. Her exhibition of forehand fade shots down the line were a brilliant example of world class table tennis at its best.

The second game was incredibly dramatic and full of the tension that every Olympic final should possess. Ding Ning, faulted for a second time, fell 10-5 behind but fought back to 10-10 as Li Xiaoxia missed a backhand cross-table shot long.

However, the world number 1 was unable to take either of her two game points as Li Xiaoxia finally held her nerve on her sixth game point to take the game 14-12 and open up a 2-0 lead.

The third game saw Ding Ning fight back to win it 11-8, demonstrating some of her fighting spirit that led her to the top ranking in the world, however, that would all change when the fourth game came to a head.

At 6-2 to Li Xiaoxia, Ding Ning was faulted for a third time on her serve. When she asked Bongelli for a reason, she received a second yellow card and therefore a red card, which reduced the Chinese number 1 to tears.

The rest of the match was almost irrelevant as Li Xiaoxia won the last two games 11-6, 11-4 for a 4-1 win but Ding Ning didn't hang around as she stormed away from the arena in shock of her dream collapsing in a horrible nightmare.

While Li Xiaoxia was a worthy winner and that can never be taken away from her, the final will be overshadowed by the incredible scenes engulfing the audience in disbelief.

Li Xiaoxia beamed: "I'm very excited. This has been my dream since being a little girl; I dreamed of being an Olympic champion. We (her and DING) are the same level but today I performed better than I expected. My family are in China. I want to thank my parents. They have sacrificed a lot to make my dreams come true."



World Champion Ding Ning was distraught at her defeat.

Ding Ning understandably had other things on her mind: "I didn't do very well today. I had two obstacles, not only from my opponent but from the judge. Not only did she give me a yellow card but she also gave me a red. There's nothing I can do. She judged my serving. I was only doing my best. It's quite a pity because I lost, not only because of my tactics but also outside the arena."

Li Xiaoxia (CHN) bt Ding Ning (CHN) 4-1 (11-8, 14-12, 8-11, 11-6, 11-4)

Gold: Li Xiaoxia (CHN)

Silver: Ding Ning (CHN)

Bronze: Feng Tianwei (SIN)

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