



Chinese swimmer stuns with Lochte-beating split

By Yenni Kwok, for CNN

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Swimmer Ye Shiwen, 16, raises her hand after winning the 400m race.

When Chinese teenager Ye Shiwen dives into the pool on Monday, all eyes will be firmly on the clock to see if she can repeat her world-beating -- Ryan Lochte-beating -- time in the last 50 meters.

The 16-year-old is due to swim the heat of the 200 meter individual medley after taking gold in the 400 meter event on Saturday.

It wasn't just the win that captured the world's attention, although she did clinch gold after beating American champion Elizabeth Beisel and smashing the world record in 4 minutes 28.43 seconds.

The clock also showed that in the last 50 meters Ye swam faster than U.S. swimmer Lochte who won gold in the men's 400-meter individual medley the same night.

Ye, who wasn't among the race's favorites, clocked in 28.93 seconds in her final 50 meters of the competition's last 100 meter, freestyle leg, while Lochte went 29.10 seconds in his final 50. Sports pundits also pointed out the Chinese athlete broke the record previously set by Stephanie Rice in the 2008 Beijing Olympics; the Australian swimmer did it with the aid of a polyurethane suit, which is now banned.

In Monday's 200 meter individual medley heats Shiwen finished 1.61 seconds clear of Kirsty Coventry in second, and 3.33 seconds ahead of 2008 Beijing Olympic champion Rice.

Lochte, 27, who holds various world swimming records, said on Sunday: "It was pretty impressive. And it was a female. She's fast. If she was there with me, I don't know, she might have beat me."

Not surprisingly, Chinese compatriots, from athletes to ordinary citizens, heaped praise on the swimming sensation.

The hurdler champion Liu Xiang said, "Ye Shiwen, she shocked me!" while one netizen said: "Ye is only 16! Sixteen is the age at which I am doing my homework at home while she wins the gold medal."

Even the swimmer herself was surprised. "I dreamed of winning the gold medal, but I never ever expected to break the record. So I am overwhelmed," Ye said in quotes carried Monday in the state-run China Daily.

Ye's swift time apparently caught commentators in the UK by surprise. BBC Olympic presenter Clare Balding provoked criticism by making remarks some interpreted as a suggestion that Ye had been cheating.

Turning to her co-presenter former British Olympian Mark Foster, Balding asked: "How many questions will be there, Mark, about someone who can suddenly swim much faster than she has ever swum before?"

Users on China's version of Twitter jumped to Ye's defense. "Don't suspect other people's success while you never saw how hard they fought for it," wrote one netizen on Sina Weibo, while another wrote: "Why doubt her success? She has won the match and that's it, disgusting BBC."

According to a profile in the China Daily last year, Ye was just seven years old when she told her mother she wanted to become a swimmer. She joined the Zhejiang provincial swimming team in 2007 and the national team the year after.

Since the age of 14, Ye has scored a number of victories in national and international competitions. She took the top spots in the 200 meter individual medleys in the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou and the 2011 World Aquatic Championships in Shanghai.

Ye has attributed her success to her training regime. "If the coach asks me to practice 10,000 meters, I would never be a lazy player to swim 9,900 meters instead," Beijing Morning News quoted her as saying.