

OLYMPIC SPOTLIGHT: Michael Phelps goes out on top!

Written by olande Y. Lezine, Sports Editor
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Michael Phelps has been a part of 22 medal ceremonies over the past three Olympics, but it wasn't enough as he returned back to the pool one last time to compete in the 2012 Olympics in London, England.

This time, Phelps received a trophy rather than a medal, and award that sought to sum up a career like no other. The plaque/trophy said "To Michael Phelps" the greatest Olympic athlete of all time."

In his final race, Phelps headed into retirement the only way imaginable, earning an 18th gold medal. He reclaimed the lead with his trademark butterfly stroke, the one seen in his Olympic debut as a 15-year old in Sydney, Australia over a dozen years ago. He capped off a mind-boggling career with a win in the 400-meter medley relay.

"I've been able to do everything that I wanted," Phelps said. "I was able to really put the final cherry on top Saturday night, put all the whipped cream I wanted and sprinkles. I was able to top off the sundae," Phelps said.

"It's been a great career. It's been a great journey. I can't be any more happy than I am." When it was done, he hugged his teammates- Matt Grevers, Brendan Hansen and Nathan Adrian- before heading off the deck for the final time. He waved to the crowd and smiled, clearly at peace with his decision to call it a career.

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Michael Phelps retires with twice as many golds as any other Olympian, and his total of 22 medals is easily the best mark, too. At age 27, Phelps could surely compete in another Olympics, but there’s really no point.

“I told myself I never wanted to swim when I’m 30,” Phelps said. “No offense to those people who are 30, but that was something I always said to myself, and that would be in three years. I just don’t want to swim for those three years.”

Phelps hugged his longtime coach, Bob Bowman and he whispered three words that said it all, “I love you.” Their partnership was formed 16 years ago, when Bowman agreed to coach a very hyperactive kids with an extraordinary gift.

“Bob and I have somehow managed to do every single thing,” Phelps stated. “If you can say that about your career, there’s no need to move forward. Time for other things.”

Phelps bounced back from a disappointing first race in London, a fourth-place finish in the 400 individual medley, Phelps wound up with more medals than any other swimmer at the Games; four golds and two silvers.

The U.S. men had never lost the medley relay at the Olympics, and they weren’t about to on the final night for such a momentous athlete.

The governing body of swimming, FINA, broke with Olympic protocol to present Phelps with an award recognizing his body of work. A video montage played while Phelps took one more victory lap around the pool.

All the swimmers from the other relay teams lined up to shake his hand behind the blocks once he was done.

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“It’s kind of cool,” Phelps said. “That’s just something you don’t see every day.”