

USA ROUTS AUSTRALIA IN SHUTOUT

Aug. 15, 2004, 10:39 a.m. (ET)

Athens, GREECE – One of the most storied rivalries in Olympic softball history, it was all Red, White and Blue on Sunday evening in Athens, Greece where Team USA dominated the Australians in a 10-0 five-inning shutout victory. Tossing a one-hitter from the circle, softball legend Lisa Fernandez (Long Beach, CA) and the solid defense behind her led the team to victory.

“This game (vs. Australia) is always on my calendar,” Lisa Fernandez commented in a post game press conference. I have a tremendous history with Australia as well as my fellow teammates (Leah, Laura and Lori) who have been here since 1996. But that is what you play the game for, rivalry. That is what makes us continue to play this game.” The U.S. offense came out strong once again putting two runs on board in the first inning. Natasha Watley (Irvine, CA) led off with a walk and used her speed to swipe second base. A walk to Bustos followed by a double-steal put two runners in scoring position for U.S. pitcher Lisa Fernandez (Long Beach, CA). Fernandez, who was on the losing end of the round-robin games against Australia in 1996 and 2000, helped her cause with a double to right center to give the U.S. an early 2-0 lead.

In the previous two Olympic Games, Fernandez dropped a 2-1 10 inning decision in 1996 and a 2-1 13 inning game in 2000. In the two games she had a combined 38 strikeouts and allowed only three hits in 23 innings of work.

Starting Australian pitcher Brooke Wilkins struggled early finding the strike zone before the Aussies called up right-handed pitcher Melanie Roche. Roche was strong early on through the U.S. line-up retiring the first nine U.S. hitters she faced but the tides changed in the bottom of the fourth when the U.S. exploded for eight runs on seven hits.

U.S. right fielder Kelly Kretschman (Indian Harbour Beach, FL) led the efforts in the fourth when she contributed a line drive double through the right side before Jessica Mendoza (Camarillo, CA) was victim to a hit by pitch. A blooper to left field from two-time Olympian Laura Berg (Santa Fe Springs, CA) then loaded the bases bringing the top of the order to the plate with one out. Taking the 3-0 lead, it was Watley again who fueled the U.S. team with her speed and an infield RBI single to shortstop.

With one out, the U.S. continued to increase its lead as Leah O’Brien-Amico (Chino Hills, CA) drove in two runs with her first hit of the 2004 Games. The bats kept on as Crystl Bustos (Canyon Country, CA) and Fernandez each added RBI singles while slugger Stacey Nuveman (La Verne, CA) bolted a three-run home run to dead center for a 10-0 advantage.

The victory marks the 12th shutout in 21 Olympic competitions for Team USA since its first appearance in Atlanta in 1996. In addition, it was the 72nd consecutive win for the USA Softball Women’s National Team dating back to the summer of 2003.

The U.S. will take the field of competition on Monday against 2000 Olympic silver medalist and 2002 World silver medalist Japan at 12 noon. A one run decision in its last seven meetings, the U.S. defeated Japan 2-1 in eight innings of the gold medal game of the 2000 Olympics.

BLAST FROM THE PAST: The last time the USA Softball Olympic team scored double digit runs in Olympic competition came in its first appearance ever in Olympic competition.

OH MERCY: Coming into the 2004 Olympic Games, the U.S. had posted only two mercy-rule victories in its past two Olympic appearances. The first two came in the first two games of the 1996 Olympic Games in Columbus, GA (USA 10 Puerto Rico 0 and USA 9 and Netherlands 0).

###