

Usain Bolt wins three Olympic gold medals garnished with world and Olympic records

Already a legend, sprinter Usain Bolt reaffirmed his standing as the greatest sprinter of all time in 2012. The towering Jamaican clinched three gold medals at the London Olympics, matching his Beijing tally and rewrote a cache of records. He defended his 100m gold in 9.63secs, an Olympic record, and completed a golden Grand Slam by becoming the first man to defend the 100 and 200m titles in successive Olympic Games. He took the 200m in 19.32s, matching Michael Johnson's mark of 19.32s set in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Bolt capped it off by anchoring Jamaica's 4x100m relay team to gold in world record timing. Along with Nesta Carter, Michael Frater and Yohan Blake, Bolt cantered to gold in ca's previous WR (37.04s) set in 2011.

Anand wins unprecedented fifth World Chess Title

Viswanathan Anand is the only Indian to be crowned a world champion in any sport five times. The first Indian Grandmaster won the world titles in 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010 and in 2012, overcame Boris Gelfand's challenge to enter the history books. In spite of being on the wrong side of 40, Anand continues to dominate in a sport that is throwing up younger and younger GMs every year. Still hungry for more, the world No. 6 is looking forward to defending his crown next year.

Stylish Spain wins back-to-back European Championship

Brazil may have won the new millennium's first World Cup (in Japan-South Korea, 2002), but Spain have dislodged them from the top spot and become the team to watch in world soccer. They won the World Cup in 2010. And this year, Spain became the first nation to win back-to-back European Championships - on either side of their World Cup triumph. Accused of not scoring more goals, their classy 4-0 demolition of Italy in the Euro 2012 final in Kiev was the biggest victory margin in any World Cup or European championship final.

F1 driver Sebastian Vettel of Germany.



Sebastian Vettel is F1's youngest triple world champion

German Formula One driver Sebastian Vettel became the youngest triple world champion in the history of the sport when he clinched the title this year in Sao Paulo. Pushed till the end by a doughty and equally-superb Fernando Alonso of Ferrari, the 25-year-old also became only the third driver in history to win three successive titles, equalling the feats of Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio and childhood-idol Michael Schumacher.

Lebron James wins Olympic gold with team USA and the NBA title with Miami Heat

He is heir apparent to Michael Jordan's legacy. 'King' James is the hottest property in American professional basketball. Two years ago he had antagonised home fans when he left Cleveland Cavaliers and joined Miami Heat. But in 2012 he vindicated his stand by guiding his new team to the NBA title for the first time and picked up the NBA Finals MVP trophy in the process. He also helped USA win their second goal at the Olympic Games in London to join Jordan and Scottie Pippen as the only players to have won NBA championship as well as an Olympic gold in the same year.



Michael Phelps became the most decorated Olympian with 22 medals

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Lanky US swimmer Michael Phelps continued to rule the pool and left an indelible mark on the London Olympics with an unprecedented three-peat of medals. And then walked off into the sunset. The American added four gold and two silver medals to his collection, making him the most 'decorated' athlete in the history of Olympic Games.

Calling it quits after London, he ended his Olympic career with an unprecedented 22 medals spread over three editions - Athens (2004), Beijing (2008) and 2012. Eighteen of these medals are made of yellow metal and two each were silver and bronze. The American's feats are so unique that the international swimming federation (FINA) presented Phelps with a Lifetime Achievement Award during the London Games itself.

Andy Murray wins an Olympic gold and the US Open title

Andy Murray kicked off 2012 with a new coach in former multiple Grand Slam winner Ivan Lendl in the hope of breaking his Major jinx. The new partnership worked wonders for Murray, as he tamed Serbian Novak Djokovic to win the US Open. The 25-year-old thus became the first Briton to lift a Grand Slam trophy since Fred Perry's US Open triumph in 1936. Earlier in the season he was in line for a rare Brit Wimbledon title, but was vanquished by an inspired Roger Federer.

He soon got his revenge at the same venue, when he downed Federer for the Olympic men's singles gold at the All England Club. It was an emotional moment for all of Britain.

Brit Wiggins wins the Tour De France and Olympic gold

It was a sterling performance Bradley Wiggins who become the first man to win the Tour de France and Olympic gold in the same year. In July, Wiggins became the first British rider to win the Tour de France. Wiggins took the lead in first mountainous stage and maintained it for the rest of the race. He then topped off his golden summer by storming to gold in the London Olympics time trial.

Tour de France 2012 winner, yellow jersey, British cyclist Bradley Wiggins. Wiggins was presented with the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award on December 16. AFP



Rafael Nadal wins a record seventh French Open crown

Rafael Nadal's season ended abruptly after a shock second-round loss to unheralded Czech Lukas Rosol at the Wimbledon Championships in June. But even before a recurring knee injury laid him low, the former world No. 1 had made his presence felt by winning the French Open men's singles title for a record seventh time. The 'king of claycourts' surpassed Bjorn Borg's record of six French Open crowns. It was the Mallorcan's 11th Grand Slam title.

Europe snatches Ryder Cup victory from the US

Come-from-behind wins have an appeal of their own, but when it is scripted amidst one of the oldest and strongest rivalries in the world, it's usually an indescribable experience. On the final morning, Europe trailed USA 6-10. Everyone thought it was all over, till Europe won the first five singles. It was neck-and-neck from there till Europe prevailed 14.5-13.5 to script a most remarkable victory. Tiger Woods, the last man out for the home team, could have had the teams finishing 14-14 but he missed a three-foot putt on the final green!

Argentina's forward Lionel Messi



Lionel Messi surpasses Gerd Mueller's record 85 goals in a calendar year

Football may be a team game, but this 'wizard' from Argentina seems to have turned it into an individual sport. The year started off disappointingly when Barcelona failed to defend the Champions League title, but Messi quickly embarked on a goalscoring spree that left German legend Gerd Mueller's 40-year-old record for goals scored in a calendar year (85) in tatters.

Messi's 2012 tally currently stands at 90 with one match (at the time of printing) remaining in the year.

Sachin Tendulkar completes a century of centuries

When Sachin Tendulkar turned Bangladesh left-arm spinner Shakib-al Hasan to square leg and set off for his hundredth run in an Asia Cup match at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur, it brought up the maestro's 'century' of international centuries (49th in ODIs to go with 51 in Tests). It may have come in a losing cause, it may have taken Sachin as many as 33 innings and 368 days to add to his 99th international century, but it was worth the wait to experience that magical moment. Among the several batting records Sachin possesses, this will be the jewel in the crown - one which may never be matched.



Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar reacts after scoring his hundredth ODI century.