

BEIJING OLYMPICS

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Sheer will, huge thrill

Jessie Diggins overcame food poisoning, excruciating conditions to ski into history

By RACHEL BLOUNT • rachel.blount@startribune.com

BEIJING - Jessie Diggins didn't cry when she lay in bed with food poisoning. She admitted she had a moment of self-pity, but with her final race at the Beijing Olympics only hours away, that wasn't going to do any good.

She bit her lip Sunday, too, when her legs began cramping during the brutal 30-kilometer freestyle. And when a sharp wind buffeted her face, already

numb from the 5-degree cold. And when she struggled to remember what lap she was on, as she willed her way through an 85-minute marathon.

When Diggins approached the finish, though, she felt the tears coming. The Afton native could hear dozens of people cheering her on, helping to lift her to an Olympic silver medal in one of the gutsiest races of her career.

On the final day of the Beijing Olympics, Diggins seized her last shot to make more history in the moun-

tains of Zhangjiakou. She finished second to runaway winner Therese Johaug of Norway, earning her second medal of the Beijing Games. Diggins' silver matched the best Olympic finish ever by a U.S. cross-country skier in an individual event, and it made her the first American in the sport to win more than one medal at a single Olympics.

Diggins, 30, will leave Beijing with medals in the shortest and longest races on the program: a

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A little leap, and why not? Afton's Jessie Diggins celebrated on the podium at the Closing Ceremony after winning a silver medal in the 30km freestyle mass start.

Photo by JAE C. HONG • Associated Press

The roller coaster that was Beijing

Games were a contrast of success and safety, anxiety and controversy.

By RACHEL BLOUNT
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BEIJING - At Sunday's Closing Ceremony for the Beijing Olympics, the keynote speeches were stuffed with words like unity and togeth-

ness and solidarity. While that wasn't surprising at an event that promotes shared ideals, it didn't reflect what made these Winter Games unique.

The Beijing Games were ushered out the same way they began: from a safe distance and behind a mask. Like the Opening Ceremony 16 days earlier, the Closing Ceremony ended with a barrage of fireworks at the Bird's Nest

stadium. The mood was just as celebratory, but this time, it felt more like a sigh of relief.

The highly restrictive "closed loop" functioned as intended, with 1.8 million COVID tests producing only 437 positive results. It also left these Olympics feeling strangely isolated, separated from the rest of this massive city by concrete barricades

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Four more years? Hey, vote me in

LA VELLE E. NEAL III



BEIJING - One more tonsil swab. Two more trips through metal detectors. A few more forms

to fill out and I'll be back in the United States. And my Olympic experience will be

complete.

Or will it?

Perhaps this is just the beginning.

Covering this enormous event required plenty of homework. I tried to follow some of the qualifying events and learn about the medal favorites. And that was just for our Team USA athletes. The Winter Olympics, if you hadn't noticed,

is a made-for-Minnesota event. I knocked myself out just trying to keep up with local stars. When the NHL backed out of the Olympics about six weeks before the Opening Ceremony, there was a whole new team to learn about.

The Olympics began with 30 Minnesotans on Team USA and another 21 with

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