

Americans who emerged at Rio figure to chase gold again in Tokyo

BY DAVID WHARTON
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It happened to Michael Phelps and Allyson Felix. Also to Simone Biles.

The stars of the U.S. team at these Summer Olympics had barely stepped off the medals podium when they were asked about coming back for the 2020 Tokyo Games.

As Biles said: "Tokyo is a long way away." While the five-time medalist is still a teenager, other athletes who contributed to the Americans' 121 medals in Rio de Janeiro were veterans whose careers may or may not last much longer.

In four years' time, the U.S. could be anchored by some new faces who had breakout performances here.



Hernandez



Ledecky

Sixteen-year-old Laurie Hernandez, the youngest member of the women's gymnastics squad, won gold with her teammates and added an individual silver in the beam.

Hernandez sounded as if she wanted more of the Olympics.

"These are all new and great experiences for me," she said. "It's all very cool and I'm just kind of embracing this new part of my life."

Swimming phenom Katie Ledecky has already talked about coming back, and she could bring along another medal winner who will be her teammate at Stanford this fall.

Simone Manuel made headlines as the first African American swimmer to earn individual gold. The 20-year-old, who finished the Games with two golds and two silvers, is competing for something more than personal achievement.

"I am super glad with the fact I can be an inspiration to others and hopefully diversify the sport," she said after winning the 100-meter freestyle. "But at the same time, I would like there to be a day when there are more of us and it's not, 'Simone, the black swimmer.'"

Rio marked the sixth consecutive time the U.S. led in the overall medal count and only the seventh time in Olympic history that a nation topped each of the categories — gold, silver and bronze.

The total of 121 was the country's highest ever, not counting the boycotted 1984 Los Angeles Games and the 1904 St. Louis Games, when only 15 teams competed.

Alan Ashley, chief of sport performance for the U.S. Olympic Committee, sounded optimistic about the future.

"There have been so many first-time per-

Medals tally

Top 20 by total medals won

COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOTAL
United States	46	37	38	121
Great Britain	27	23	17	67
China	26	18	26	70
Russia	19	18	19	56
Germany	17	10	15	42
Japan	12	8	21	41
France	10	18	14	42
South Korea	9	3	9	21
Italy	8	12	8	28
Australia	8	11	10	29
Netherlands	8	7	4	19
Hungary	8	3	4	15
Brazil	7	6	6	19
Spain	7	4	6	17
Kenya	6	6	1	13
Jamaica	6	3	2	11
Croatia	5	3	2	10
Cuba	5	2	4	11
New Zealand	4	9	5	18
Canada	4	3	15	22

Note: Some countries tied in 20th position may be excluded from the table.
Source: Infrostrada
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formances by so many athletes in different sports," he said.

That includes swimmer Ryan Murphy, who walked away with three gold medals, two in the backstroke events and one relay. Sprinter Tori Bowie made her Olympic debut with a silver in the 100 meters, bronze in the 200 and gold in the 400 relay.

If sprinter Trayvon Bromell can overcome the injury that nagged him the last few weeks, he might also be a contender in Tokyo. And gold-medalist shooter Ginny Thrasher is only 19 in a sport where careers can stretch for decades.

Among the veterans on the team, diver David Boudia, who won silver and bronze, has talked about continuing. So has wrestler Helen Maroulis, who scored a stunning upset of three-time Olympic champion Saori Yoshida.



Maroulis

"I like to think of it as my profession," Maroulis said of wrestling. "And if you love what you do, why stop?"

And then there is Phelps, who has insisted that these were his last Games.

"This is it," he said after winning six medals in Rio to boost his career total to 28, 23 of them gold. "This is the last time you'll ever see me racing in the water again."

Of course, he said the same thing after the 2012 London Olympics. A lot can change in four years.

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