



In Honor of
MATTHEW MITCHAM



Australian diver Matthew Mitcham wins gold. ~ Photos courtesy of Getty Images

Matthew Mitcham is Golden at Beijing Olympics

by Jim Buzinski ~ August 25, 2008

(Beijing, China ~ **AfterElton.com**) **When Australian diver Matthew Mitcham** – the only out male athlete at the Beijing Games – executed a near-perfect dive to win Olympic gold on Saturday in front of a crowd that included his partner, he made history. Mitcham will go down as the most significant out male Olympic athlete ever. And, like so many other things in his life, it wasn't easy.

Mitcham's gold medal in the 10-meter platform was one of the most improbable of the Games. He needed a final dive of 112.10 points – the most ever scored in Olympic history – to snatch the gold medal from Chinese diver Zhou Luxin by 4.8 points. The door was opened when Zhou, on his final dive, got a case of nerves and scored 17 points below the average of his previous five dives.

As the scores for Mitcham's last dive were shown inside the Water Cube, the crowd roared and Mitcham looked on in disbelief, thrusting both arms in the air, then burying his face in his hands as he sobbed.

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As he walked backstage to thunderous applause, the first person to embrace him was fellow Australian diver Matthew Helm. Soon, divers and coaches rushed in to hug him. Mitcham still was in disbelief as he was hugged by a female friend who said to him, "Matthew, you just won the Olympics!"



Mitcham reacting to the scores for his final dive ~ Photos courtesy of Getty Images

Later, after the Australian national anthem was played and he had received his gold medal, Mitcham raced into the stands to embrace his mom, Vivienne, and give a bouquet of roses and a kiss to his partner, Lachlan Fletcher.

"I want to thank absolutely everyone who helped; my partner Lachlan and my mom [Vivienne] here to support me and watch me get gold, because it was so important to have those two people here with me," Mitcham said in a post-dive interview. "I didn't think I had a chance to get the gold and to actually get that was mind-blowing. I was crying thinking I had silver and to get gold, I was a blubbering mess."

It was an amazing end to a journey that saw Mitcham quit the sport in 2006, come back in 2007 and declare himself a gay man in 2008. The 20-year-old Australian has battled depression, and partying had replaced training in his daily routine until he got back in the pool and he regained his athletic focus.

In the annals of gays in Olympic sports, Mitcham is unique. Greg Louganis, considered the greatest diver ever, won multiple gold medals, but he was not out while competing; undoubtedly, there have been untold numbers of gay men who have won medals. But as they remained closeted while competing, it is Mitcham who can lay claim to the most astounding Olympic victory by an out male athlete.

Mitcham, who came out in May despite some initial reservations, has stated repeatedly that he wanted to be known as a diver and not "the gay diver."

"Being gay and diving are completely separate parts of my life," he said after his win. "Of course there's going to be crossover because some people have issues. But everyone I dive with has been so supportive. I'm happy with myself and where I am. I'm very happy with who I am and what I've done."

~ Jim Buzinski is co-founder of Outsports.com

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