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DELIGHT FOR GORDON, AGONY FOR BONTI

Wandsworth Lightning's Commonwealth Games Gold medallist Winston Gordon made an excellent start to his Olympic qualification campaign at the weekend, by taking a bronze medal in the –90 Kg category at the first of the European ranking events in Moscow. But for his team-mate Eric Bonti, the newly crowned British Champion at –73 Kg, there was only agony as a hamstring injury sustained in the first international training camp of the year ruled him out of the Moscow event.

The Moscow Championships is one of only three 'Super A tournaments' which carry higher ranking points than the other European events apart from the European Championships themselves, the final event, which are to be held in Belgrade in May. "Qualifying for Athens is a massive task in itself" says Lightning's coach Simon Hicks, "as there are only 8 places available for European fighters in each category, and the former Soviet bloc countries all produce exceptional Judo teams."

Gordon (27), from Tooting, started the Moscow tournament in brilliant style dispatching three World class opponents from Germany, Azerbaijan and the Ukraine for Ippon, the maximum score. This took him through to the semi-final against the 2001 World champion, Frederic Demontaucon from France. This was an incredibly hard fought tactical match in which both fighters forced penalties from the other, but was eventually won, by the narrowest of margins, by the Frenchman. This took Gordon into the bronze medal match, surprisingly against his principal domestic rival Peter Cousins, the former Junior European Champion, from Essex. The two fighters know each other well, so the match was close, with Gordon forcing the more errors from his younger rival and winning by two penalties to one. The victory gave Gordon the bronze medal, but more importantly 40 vital qualification points

Bonti (30), from Battersea, hopes to join Gordon in the next of the Super A tournaments, in Paris on the 7th and 8th of February, or in Budapest the week after, providing his injury continues to respond to treatment. Meanwhile Lightning's other international fighters Darren Hawney and Junior Morrison both took medals in the first British ranking tournament of the year, the North-West Open at St. Helen's. Both fighters were fighting at a higher weight category than that at which they normally compete. Hawney (25) from Norwood, moved up from the –90 Kgs and took a bronze in the –100 kg category, whilst Morrison (31), from Streatham, normally a –66 Kg fighter, experimented with the –73 Kg category and defeated all his opponents except the Scottish international Ian Feenan. In his bronze medal fight he narrowly defeated Lightning team-mate, Jerome Purrier (21), from Streatham.

Wandsworth Lightning train at Battersea Youth Centre on Monday Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Call 020 8871 8529 for details.

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