



China progressing, but still has a way to go

► Olympic sailing competition a good chance for locals to learn and catch up

By ZHANG XIAOMIN

QINGDAO: After seven days of Olympic competition in Qingdao, the Chinese sailors are still in contention for medal finishes in four categories, but have lagged far behind in other classes.

At the conclusion of yesterday's races, China's Yin Jian led the RS:X Women class, RS:X Men sailor Wang Aichen took sixth place, and Xu Lijia in Laser Radial and the Yngling trio Song Xiaqun, Yu Yanli and Li Xiaoni finished seventh.

"Our sailors have made great progress in the past several years, though they are still not comparable to Western competitors," said Yao Xinpei, deputy captain of the Chinese team. Yao said it is a good opportunity for Chinese sailors in all the events to compete with the world's best and learn from them while in their home waters.

As the host country, China has qualified to send 18 sailors to compete in all of the 11 Olympic sailing events.

Yao noted that China is a late-comer in the event, only start-

ing the sport in the late 1970s. But it is growing stronger with nearly 20 provinces and cities now encouraging the sport. China's sailing team ranks in the top three in Asia.

The team has won five World Championships in sailboard since 1990. Chinese windsurfers won silver medals in the 1992 and 2004 Olympics. What the team desires most now is a gold medal.

Despite the advantages as the host team, the Chinese face challenges, including trying to maintain physical strength, avoiding illness and injury, and adapting to the changing weather in Qingdao.

"The sailors must have the ability to cope with various difficulties like fog, continual

rainy days and windless days," said Yao. "Our sailors must learn from the world's top competitors in dealing with these difficult conditions."

"Compared with their Western rivals, our athletes are in an inferior position in psychological quality, physical strength, skill, tactics and the ability to deal with complicated climates," said Wang Yong, coach of the Chinese Yngling team.

During the years of preparation for the Olympic Games, Chinese sailors grew up thanks to competing with world-class sailors at international regattas.

According to Yao, the national team participated in about 10 international regattas from last March to July. From November

to March, Chinese sailors train in foreign countries.

Laser Radial sailor Xu has improved remarkably by learning from her Western counterparts in international competitions. Now she ranks second in the ISAF rating.

The team also hired well-established coaches from the United States and Sweden.

"For example, the Yngling and the Laser Radial women have made obvious progress with instructions from foreign coaches," Yao said.

"There is a lot we need to learn from the world's top sailors. In the future, we will continue to participate in more international regattas and invite foreign coaches in order to strengthen our technical

level and knowledge of sailing theories, rules and culture," said Yao.

After yesterday's races, Britain's Ben Ainslie is set to retain his Olympic Finn title or at least win silver after extending his lead over American Zach Railey.

Racing began nearly four hours later than scheduled yesterday because of what officials said were light and unstable winds and forecasts of bad weather. Thursday's entire program was postponed.

Ainslie, bidding for a third successive Olympic gold after winning the Laser in Sydney in 2000 and Finn in Athens in 2004, holds a 12-point lead over Railey heading into today's medal race and cannot be

caught by third-placed Swede Daniel Birgmark.

Only eight of the 10-race opening series were completed in both Finn and Yngling because of postponements due to light winds. Rules stipulate six must be completed before a medal race.

The British and Dutch Yngling trios are also certain of winning a medal in Today's showdown events.

The Yngling is set for a thrilling finale with Britain's Sarah Aytton, Sarah Webb and Pippa Wilson holding a one-point lead over Mandy Mulder, Annemieke Bes and Merel Witteveen of the Netherlands.

Agencies contributed to the story



Catching up Luo Youjia/Chen Xiuke of China (left) and Oskar Johansson/Kevin Stittle of Canada compete in the Tornado class during the Beijing Olympic sailing competition in Qingdao yesterday. China finished in ninth place after one race. Ju Chuanjiang



Panayiotis Kontides (right), an official of Cyprus national sailing team, and Pavlos Kontides, a sailor of the team, are also father and son. Du Shu

Father, son team up for Cyprus

By Du Shu

QINGDAO: One is a team official and the other is an Olympic sailor, both from Cyprus.

They are Panayiotis Kontides and Pavlos Kontides, the father and the son.

Their impression of the city agrees with other favorable comments by racing teams, except Panayiotis was not happy with a rainy day.

Yet with his father beside him, Pavlos has a sunny outlook. "I consider him lucky. Whenever he is with me, especially in sailing, I get amazing results," he said.

Pavlos expects to be in the top 10 in his first Olympics, but his father doesn't want to push him. "There is no pressure on him. He is very young," Panayiotis said. "It is already a great achievement that he is participating in the Games at the age of 18. He will do his best."

Pavlos has respectable credentials - he won the Volvo Youth World Championship two times. "This is something that nobody did before in Laser class," the father said.

Many athletes complain about the light wind in Qingdao,

but Pavlos takes it in stride. "The wind influences the sport so much. It is the same for everybody. So we have to deal with it and adapt to it," Pavlos said.

As the president of the Cyprus Yachting Association, Panayiotis wants to make sailing more popular in the island nation.

"It is the first time Cyprus is participating in four different classes. We already have a good result, now we are hoping for some surprising results," he said.

Cyprus has never won an Olympic medal. Its chances were hurt when tennis player and medal hope Marcos Baghdatis, a 2006 Australian Open finalist, missed the Games due to a wrist injury.

On the sea at Qingdao, Pavlos now ranks 10th after 4 races.

Of the 17-member Cyprus Olympic delegation, world champion skeet shooter George Achilleos is now its best hope for a medal.

This special supplement is co-published by the Information Office of Qingdao municipal government and China Daily

Leader Tunncliffe on course for Laser Radial gold

By Zhao Ruixue

QINGDAO: Although a debutant at the Beijing Olympic Games, Anna Tunncliffe of the United States has a strong chance to take gold in the women's one-person Laser Radial class.

After four races, she ranks first in the overall standings.

Though this is her first time at the Olympics, the 26-year-old is already a veteran with 17 years of sailing experience and accomplishments.

She won a gold medal in the 2007 Qingdao Interna-

tional Regatta, a pre-Olympic test event. She is currently ranked No 1 in her class in the world rankings compiled by the International Sailing Federation (ISAF).

In addition to keeping high spirits, hard training contributes to Tunncliffe's good results.

"I have tried to train a lot in similar conditions to Qingdao. I dropped weight at the beginning of the season so that I would be comfortable at this weight in all wind conditions."

At the age of 9, Tunncliffe started to sail Optimists, a din-

ghy in which the young people across the world learn to sail.

Sailing has since been a good way for her to get close to nature and meet challenges.

"Sailing for me is a way to be free. I enjoy being on the water every day and facing the challenges."

Even in her spare time, she seeks reward from challenges. "When I get some time alone, I enjoy working out and running."

She is not only a star in sailing, but one in running races. When she was in high school she won the regional track champi-

onships in the 800m and set a new high-school record.

When time came to decide which one she should choose, Tunncliffe was determined to make a splash in sailing.

"I have had a dream of competing in Olympic sailing since I was 12 years old, so when the time came to decide if I was going to pursue running or sailing, I chose sailing."

"I still run a lot of races because for me it's the same kind of competitive attitude and it's great," Tunncliffe added.

She is also a fan of mu-

sic, especially the classical genre. At school she minored in music. "Music has been a major part of my life. To learn music takes the same dedication it does to be a top-level athlete. Without music, I doubt I would be the person I am today."

After the Olympics, Tunncliffe plans more sailing after a short break.

"I will do some different types of sailing, including match racing and a World Championships and then I'll slowly get back into the Laser in preparation for the ISAF World Cup."



Ready to go Sailors of the 49er class are ready to go at the starting line during the Olympic sailing competition in Qingdao. Ju Chuanjiang