



Yin Jian, a silver medalist in Athens four years ago, won China's first gold medal in sailing yesterday in Qingdao, competing in the women's RS:X windsurfing event.

Ju Chuanjiang

Yin grabs China's first sailing gold

► Breakthrough shows improvement but host still has 'a long way to go'

By ZHANG XIAOMIN AND ZHANG YING

QINGDAO: Windsurfer Yin Jian won China's first Olympic sailing gold medal yesterday, hailing it as the ultimate reward for years of battling constant injuries and spending long periods training away from home.

"When the flag was being raised I was thinking about the hardship I have gone through for this gold medal," the 29-year-old Yin said.

"These past four years have been a hard time for me... because of the injuries that have affected my training. It's a very demanding sport that requires you to be in perfect physical condition," said Yin, a silver medalist in Athens four years ago.

China's sailing team captain Yao Xinpei, who was thrown into water by his excited team members, was quite delighted with the breakthrough.

"China's first Olympic gold medal here shows we are competitive in two Olympic sailing events now," said Yao.

"Yet it is quite clear that we are still far behind Western countries," Yao said. "China's sailing is just in its starting phase both in popularity and professionalism. We still have a long way to go."

Xu Lijia secured a bronze medal of Laser Radial on Tuesday, fellow windsurfer Wang Aichen took 7th place in RS:X men's class, and the Yngling team ranked eighth on the overall list.

China's sailors in seven other classes didn't make it to the medal round.

Among all the nine sailing events now completed, Britain won in Finn, Yngling and Laser, while Australia, the United States and Denmark divided the other gold medals.

"Western sailors, especially the Europeans, have historically dominated Olympic sailing. In the last three Olympics, all Asian countries together have won only five medals," said Yao.



Yin Jian celebrates after winning China's first gold medal in sailing yesterday.

Ju Chuanjiang

"Among the 400 athletes participating in the Olympic regatta, 317 are from Europe and America. Sailors from Britain, France and US qualified to compete in all eleven events," he said.

Competitive sailing started a century later in China than in Western countries. China established teams in all classes only after Beijing won the bid to host the Games.

"We only have one or two classes in which we are competitive, with not many sailors and coaches of world caliber

to win medals. We are eager to cultivate younger sailors," said Yao.

He thinks that sailing's popularity in the past century in Europe and the US established a comprehensive system to cultivate young sailors and further develop the sport.

More than a third of International Sailing Federation (ISAF) members are from Europe.

"Popularity plays a key role in the development of sailing as a sport. It has caught on in China's coastal areas in recent years, growing in over 20 cit-

ies. But there are no more than 1,500 professional sailors in China," Yao said.

Foreign coaches

China's sailing program has hired foreign coaches in the last few years, with more coming in the future. Competing in more international events and battling with world-ranked athletes is proving the best way for Chinese sailors to improve, Yao said.

Yao noted that China's sailors have participated in more international regattas including

World Championships in the past two years than all other years combined.

The effort proved effective for China's Yngling team, which placed eighth in the Olympic regatta less than four years after it was established.

Yao said this Olympics is a golden opportunity for Chinese sailors to acquire experience, to communicate with foreign rivals and to improve their overall competitive level.

Goran Petersson, ISAF president, was impressed by China's development. "I am very excited to see China's progress in sailing during the past few years. I hope to see more Chinese sailors show up in international events," he said.

"Absolutely, China has a large space to develop sailing," Ewan Mcewan, a National Olympic Committee rules adviser, told China Daily.

"We can see Xu Lijia is so young. She is under much pressure in this regatta. But it will be an advantage if she qualifies for the next Olympics. She will know how to deal with such pressure. If she wants a future in sailing, the future is open to her," Mcewan said.

Rogge: Work 'outstanding' in Qingdao

By ZHANG YING AND ZHAO RUIXUE

QINGDAO: Jacques Rogge, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), on Tuesday congratulated the city of Qingdao for its years of effort and organization in hosting the Olympic Sailing Regatta.

"What you have achieved is outstanding," Rogge said.

The IOC president watched two medal races at the Qingdao Olympic Sailing Center and then attended awards ceremonies.

Rogge said everyone in Qingdao smiles and works hard, and is ready to help others, making athletes comfortable and happy.

After the ceremony, Rogge visited the Olympic Village and Qingdao's Folk Customs Culture Display.

Rogge said it is one of the best Olympic Villages he has seen and matches the quality of the venue and other facilities.

He also wished athletes good results in the remaining races.

A former Olympic sailor, Rogge said he felt very much at home in the sailing center.



What you have achieved is outstanding.

JACQUES ROGGE
IOC President

He led the IOC delegation to Qingdao on October 16, 2005 for the first official inspection in the city.

Born on May 2, 1942, in Ghent, Belgium, Rogge competed in yachting races at the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968, Munich in 1972 and Montreal in 1976. He also played on the Belgian national rugby team, making him something of a legend in his home nation.

After his sports career, Rogge studied at the University of Ghent and became a professional orthopedic surgeon after receiving his doctorate in medicine.

Rogge's passion for sports brought him back to an athletics-related position. He became an IOC member in 1991 and joined its executive board in 1998. He was elected as the eighth president of the IOC on July 16, 2001, succeeding Juan Antonio Samaranch.

Under his watch, the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games, the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics and the 2006 Turin Winter Games were held. Now the massive Beijing 2008 Games is approaching completion.

He noted that there have been many achievements by the IOC, but further efforts are needed to prevent doping and excessive commercialization.

Philippe Rogge, son of the IOC chairman, served as the head of Belgian team during Beijing Games. Not surprisingly, Philippe said he greatly admires his father.

"He is an amiable father, working free for the IOC though his life and the work are tough," he said.

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RESULTS



Olympic Star and Tornado class results and standings after 10 races in Qingdao yesterday. Medal races of the two classes take place today.

STAR

- Standings
1. Fredrik Loof/Anders Ekstrom (Sweden) 33 points
 2. Iain Percy/Andrew Simpson (Britain) 35
 3. Robert Scheidt/Bruno Prada (Brazil) 47
 4. Xavier Rohart/Pascal Rambeau (France) 51
 5. Flavio Marazzi/Enrico De Maria (Switzerland) 55
 6. Mateusz Kusznierewicz/Dominik Zych (Poland) 57
 7. Afonso Domingos/Bernardo Plantier Santos (Portugal) 60
 8. Marc Pickel/Ingo Borkowski (Germany) 62

Race 10 results

1. Flavio Marazzi/Enrico De Maria (Switzerland) 1
2. Xavier Rohart/Pascal Rambeau

- (France) 2
3. Robert Scheidt/Bruno Prada (Brazil) 3
4. John Dane III/Austin Sperry (U.S.) 4
5. Diego Negri/Luigi Viale (Italy) 5
6. Iain Percy/Andrew Simpson (Britain) 6
7. Fredrik Loof/Anders Ekstrom (Sweden) 7
8. Iain Murray/Andrew Palfrey (Australia) 8

TORNADO

- Standings
1. Fernando Echavarri/Anton Paz (Spain) 36
 2. Darren Bundock/Glenn Ashby (Australia) 39
 3. Santiago Lange/Carlos Espinola (Argentina) 44
 4. Johannes Polgar/Florian Spalholz (Germany) 52
 5. Oskar Johansson/Kevin Stittle (Canada) 57
 6. Mitch Booth/Pim Nieuwenhuis (Netherlands) 58
 7. Francesco Marcolini/Edoardo Bianchi (Italy) 58
 8. Iordanis Paschalidis/Konstantinos Trigonis (Greece) 60

Race 10 results

1. Santiago Lange/Carlos Espinola (Argentina) 1
2. Oskar Johansson/Kevin Stittle (Canada) 2
3. Johannes Polgar/Florian Spalholz (Germany) 3
4. Darren Bundock/Glenn Ashby (Australia) 4
5. Roman Hagara/Hans Peter Steinacher (Austria) 5
6. Francesco Marcolini/Edoardo Bianchi (Italy) 6
7. Xavier Revil/Christophe Espagnon (France) 7
8. Fernando Echavarri/Anton Paz (Spain) 8



Tom Ashley of New Zealand sailing in RS:X Men competes for gold at the Beijing Olympics in Qingdao yesterday.

Reuters

Ashley wins men's windsurfing title

By ZHANG XIAOMIN

QINGDAO: New Zealand windsurfer Tom Ashley took home gold in the RS:X men's class at the Olympic sailing competition in Qingdao yesterday.

"The racing is extremely tight and everyone is sailing at a very high level," Ashley said. "Events like this generally are won and lost on attrition as guys make mistakes and take themselves out of the running, so consistency is definitely the key."

France's Julien Bontemps got silver and Israel's Shahar Zubari took bronze.

The Kiwi showed his ability to perform well regardless of conditions on August 17 when Qingdao had strong winds and choppy seas. With a 5th and a 3rd in the races that day, he sailed to the top of the leader board.

The son of a sailmaker, Ashley grew up around boats. But his journey to the Games did not start until 1999, when international windsurfers were training in New Zealand for the Sydney

Olympics. Ashley received an Olympic-class windsurfer as a 15th birthday present from his parents.

Many sailors were selling their boats before they left, so his parents bought him one. "That's what got me into it," Ashley explained.

Five years later he made his Olympics debut in Athens, finishing 10th in the Mistral windsurfer class. His rapid progress then continued. By January of this year, he was RS:X world champion, earning the title off the Takapuna Coast in his hometown Auckland.

Winner of Qingdao's 2007 Olympic test event, Ashley showed his ability to handle rough conditions. He also realized the need to master light air.

For the past two years he has prepared for the Olympics in Valencia, Spain, where the conditions are similar to those in Qingdao.

"It's been a big effort to get strong and competitive in these conditions, but you still need to be able to sail in all conditions," said Ashley.