



FRIENDS UNTIL THEY GET WET

PHOTO BY DAVID GRAY / REUTERS

Michael Phelps (left) and Ryan Lochte chat during a training session on Tuesday for the US swimming team at the main pool of the Aquatics Centre as they prepare for the London 2012 Olympic Games. The Phelps-Lochte rivalry in the pool is one of the most anticipated highlights of the Games. They'll get the chance to test each other quickly — their first meeting will come on Saturday in the 400m individual medley.

The real home of the Games

English town of Much Wenlock begat the modern Olympics

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While London's Olympics are just over a week away, the 700-year-old English town of Much Wenlock is celebrating the 126th edition of its own Olympics.

With young athletes running, spectators shouting and medals waiting to be given, the scene is reminiscent of the real Games.

The resemblance is not an accident. Much Wenlock is the birthplace of the modern Olympics.

The link dates back to William Penny Brookes, a doctor in the town 200 kilometers northwest of London, who believed in the benefits of physical exercise for "every grade of man".

In 1850, Brookes set up the annual Wenlock Olympic Games featuring soccer, running and hopping. His ideas significantly influenced the French aristocrat Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who subsequently led the revival of the modern Olympics in Athens in 1896.

To celebrate Brookes' important role, the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic

and Paralympic Games named the official 2012 Olympics mascot Wenlock.

Simon MacVicker, chairman of the Wenlock Olympic Society, said the Wenlock Olympic Games have undergone significant changes over the years to include 24 sporting events, 500 volunteers, 3,000 athletes and 3,000 spectators.

Biathlon and equestrian were added two years ago, and marathon and gliding were added this year.

"We're very much taking things forward," MacVicker said. "This is very much a living game, not just a historical society looking at the old times."

But some traditions continue. Because Brookes hoped sports would benefit everyone, not just the elites, the Wenlock Olympic Games allow anyone to enter on a first-come, first-served basis.

"In all events, you'll see some beginners, you'll see some people doing better, but everybody is welcome," MacVicker said.

As the Wenlock Olympic Games are a massive event for a town of 2,500, a team of 30 committee members have to start preparations every September.

From September to early



Organizers offer a donkey ride for children as a part of a festival to celebrate Much Wenlock's link to the London Olympics.

June, the team completes its administration work, seeks permission to use public facilities and updates its website. In June and July, the focus shifts to details like buying bottled water, briefing the volunteers and putting in place temporary car parks.

"Some people just come to enjoy a day out. Other people see it as a proper sports event. It's not the same as getting to London, but in a small way, people feel they're a part of that," MacVicker said.

Another link between the two Olympics is that some previous competitors at the Wenlock Olympic Games later went on to participate in the Olympics.

Harold Langley, a Birmingham resident who won the Wenlock pentathlon gold in 1923, represented Britain in the triple jump at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

Alison Williamson, who received a silver medal in Much Wenlock in 1981 at the age of 10, later won bronze in archery at the 2004 Athens Olympics

and will represent Britain in London this year.

"She is a great friend of our society, and we wish her the very best for the Games," MacVicker said.

Fourteen-year-old swimmer Oliver Preece from Thomas Tilford School already has Olympic dreams and trains seven times a week. "I am working really hard," he said. "Hopefully, I am on my way."

This year is Preece's first time competing in the Wenlock Olympic Games, with the

encouragement of his school.

"There is a bridge between this and the Olympics," he said. "It is good for juniors and other people who cannot participate in the Olympics to come here."

Competing in junior school biathlon is Maddie Wong, a 14-year-old second-generation immigrant from Hong Kong. "I enjoy the atmosphere," she said. "Last year, there was a small amount of people, but this year, there are more participants, maybe because of the Olympics."

The Wenlock Olympics is held on three consecutive Saturdays in July. To celebrate its link with the London Olympics, the town put on a variety of music, arts and entertainment on the second Saturday.

Another highlight was a performance of the play *Much Ado About Wenlock*, a retelling of Brookes' story in front of his old house, performed by five students from the William Brookes School.

Much Wenlock, a remote town with winding streets, traditional white-and-black timber beamed houses and limestone cottages, was scarcely known until 1990, when a visiting academic studying Olympic history went through a box of letters between Brookes and De Coubertin and publicized its links with the Olympics.

briefly

ATHLETICS Idowu called to explain injury

British triple jumper Phillips Idowu has been asked to account for an injury that has clouded his Games build-up.

The 33-year-old, a silver medalist in Beijing in 2008, failed to travel to a pre-Games camp in Portugal on Monday.

That has led to the British Olympic Association to ask him to explain why he missed the trip and to clarify his injury.

CYCLING Evans ready to ride in London

Former Tour de France winner Cadel Evans has arrived in Britain and declared himself ready to get back on his bike for Australia at the London Olympics despite his disappointing defense of the yellow jersey.

Evans finished seventh in Paris on Sunday as Bradley Wiggins gave the Olympic host a pre-Games boost by becoming the first British rider to win the endurance classic.

"The Tour has been tiring for us and my Tour wasn't up to my expectations, or anyone's expectations, but for us eight days is a lot of recovery," Evans said upon arrival in Britain.

Injured cyclist to skip Olympics

Polish road cyclist and medal hopeful Maja Wloszczowska will skip the Olympics because of a foot injury.

Her doctor, Krzysztof Ficek, said on Monday that tests in Poland showed the 2010 world champion and Beijing silver medalist had two broken bones and torn tendons in her right foot. He says the injuries make it impossible for Wloszczowska to take part in the Olympics. The 28-year-old cyclist injured her right foot on Friday during training in Italy.

BADMINTON Lee's fitness a state secret

The fitness of Olympic badminton silver medalist Lee Chong Wei is a state "secret" that cannot be revealed before the Games, according to Malaysia's chef de mission.

The top seed Lee, Malaysia's brightest hope of a maiden Olympic gold medal, has been battling to get back to peak form for the July 28-Aug 5 tournament at Wembley Arena since injuring an ankle during a Thomas Cup match in May.

"He is here. I cannot tell you about his form, but he is here," Malaysia chef de mission Tun Ahmad Sarji said.

WALKING Chinese walkers on right path

Chinese race walkers are on track to shine at the London Games, according to their Italian coach, Sandro Damilano.

Damilano, 62, a coach immersed in race walking for nearly 40 years, was confident that the four Chinese athletes he has been training over the past three years are physically, mentally and technically prepared for the Olympics.

"I did change a lot about them, both technically and mentally, and also their way of living life. I believe we did a good job and I think we can hope to see them do really well in London," he said.

AP—REUTERS—AFP—XINHUA

Democracy comes first for volleyball boss

By REUTERS
in Lausanne, Switzerland

Volleyball's governing body had only two presidents for the first 51 years of its existence, so it was something of a surprise when the current incumbent said he would give up his post after only one term.

Wei Jizhong said he will stick by his decision, saying it will allow him to make sure that this year's elections are the most transparent the FIVB has had.

"I had the opportunity to become president, and my goals were to change the image of the FIVB in the sporting world and to make changes in the internal governance according to the following four basic principles: transparency, democracy, delegation of power and supervision," he said.

"Since I am not looking to be re-elected, I can organize and

supervise the most democratic elections in the history of the FIVB," said Wei, a sprightly 75-year-old who was formerly head of the Asian Volleyball Confederation.

"I think it's the right thing to do, to show that now we are a truly democratic organization."

Wei's decision is unusual among sporting directors, many of whom spend decades in their posts.

Sepp Blatter will have been head of soccer's governing body FIFA for 17 years when his current mandate ends in 2015, and his predecessor Joao Havelange was at the helm for 24 years.

Wei's predecessors were both around for a long time. Frenchman Paul Libaud headed the FIVB from its founding in 1947 until 1984, when he was replaced by Mexico's Ruben Acosta, who occupied the seat for another 24 years.



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WEI JIZHONG
FIVB PRESIDENT

When Acosta called it a day in 2008, he put forward Wei's name as his successor during the FIVB Congress and the Chinese was immediately approved. No other candidates were given a chance.

"Maybe being an ex-sportsman gives me a different perspective," said Wei, who played

the sport at a high level with the Nanjing University team.

"I wanted to limit the term of future FIVB presidents, but the executive committee would not agree to that."

Doug Beal of the United States, Ary Graca of Brazil and Australia's Chris Schacht will be standing to replace Wei at the FIVB Congress in California in September.

Wei's four years at the helm have also included a re-branding of the FIVB and the introduction of a development fund to help the growth of the sport at the grassroots level.

Wei said he wanted the continental federations to take a greater role in organizing international competitions and saw beach volleyball as having a bigger potential for growth, especially in developing countries.

"To play indoor volleyball, you need 12 players and a gymnasium. For beach volleyball,

you just need a sand pit, a net and a ball and you can play," he said.

Wei said that the FIVB was still searching for the right kind of technology to help referees make decisions.

The Hawkeye system used in tennis was too expensive and the FIVB was instead studying three other possibilities, although it would be crucial that any system employed in volleyball could decipher when a player had touched the net.

Wei said that FIVB was not overjoyed at choice of the Earls Court Exhibition hall as the venue for the volleyball events at the London Olympics.

"We would have preferred a sports hall," he said, "but the facilities are good enough and, although some members of the executive committee were not very happy, we are not going to make a scene."

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