

Britain beats China for first win

Host too good for lackluster visitors in basketball thrashing

By XINHUA in London

This is a match between world's 10th and 43rd ranked. And the 43rd ranked thrashed its opponent. This is a match between a team that hasn't missed the Olympics since 1984 and a team only played once in 1948. And the latter one created history.



Host team Britain beat China 90-58 in their last group match which was their first-ever victory in basketball for the Olympic on Monday.

Britain basketball team made its debut at the 1948 London Games but finished 0-5. Finally they seized their first victory by beating the Asian champion.

China, who reached the quarterfinals at the 2008 Beijing Games, failed to seize a win at London and finished 0-5. It tied their worst record at Olympics, which was also 0-5 at the 1992 Barcelona Games.

The British only had two turnovers in the first half while China took eight. Kieron Achara scored 11 of his 16 points in the first quarter to lead Britain, in which the host team built a 12 points lead at 27-15.

China stumbled in both sides of offense and defense and just could not catch up with Britain. Britain enlarged their lead to 15 points by half-



Great Britain's Drew Sullivan (8) sails to the basket past China's Wang Zhizhi (14) and Yi Jianlian (left) during a preliminary men's basketball game at the London Olympics on Monday. Britain won 90-58.

ERIC GAY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

time while their leading scorer and only NBA player Loul Deng didn't play much time in the second quarter.

Achara led Britain with 16 points and five British players reached double figures while China only had two. Wang Zhizhi had a match-high 11. China had 15 turnovers while Britain only had 5 and made 13 three-pointers.

Extending their lead to 24 points by the end of the

third quarter, the British were ready to celebrate their first ever Olympic victory. They qualified for the London Games as the host nation. It was the first basketball victory of any sort for Britain after the women went winless through the preliminary round and the men went winless in 1948, including a 54-25 loss to China.

"My players were very eager to win before the match and

they did really a good job to win," said Chris Finch, head coach of Britain. "We are so proud to create the history and I think this victory will prompt the development of basketball in Britain."

The loss saw Chinese veterans say goodbye to their last Olympics.

"I tried my best in the last game of my last Olympic Games," said Wang. "This is the last Olympics

for four Chinese veteran players. We didn't do well and lost some confidence. But we have to face the failure. I will miss the time when I played for China at those Olympics."

China's winless finish was a significant stumble for a team that reached the last eight in three of the past four Olympic tournaments.

Both teams had already been eliminated from any chance of reaching the quarterfinals.



We didn't do well and lost some confidence. But we have to face the failure.

WANG ZHIZHI
CHINESE BASKETBALL PLAYER

US braces for Argentine challenge

By ASSOCIATED PRESS in London

Carmelo Anthony doesn't want to mess around against Argentina. Not after the close call against Lithuania.

Anthony, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant and the rest of the star-studded US basketball team have now been tested at the London Olympics — and, admittedly, they weren't quite prepared for it.

The NBA's best players faced another challenge on Monday night when they wrap up pool play against the Argentines. Anthony acknowledged the Americans might have been caught slightly off guard by Lithuania's fight in a five-point victory on Saturday.

"It was a little bit tighter than what we expected," Anthony said before practice on Sunday. "Lithuania was focused, and it kind of caught us on our heels. We won't get caught on our heels again."

US basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski is counting on more from Bryant as the stakes become higher, too. He had only six points, two rebounds, an assist and three fouls in 20 minutes against Lithuania.

It's James, the NBA MVP from the champion Miami Heat, carrying the load and his country's hopes of a dominant run resembling the one by the 1992 Dream Team of Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and Larry Bird.

James showed the world he can be unstoppable in crunch time. And everybody on the US squad hopes his performance will provide some nice momentum going into the next game.

With the US leading by one late, James hit a 3-pointer,

then followed with a dunk off a turnover to put his team ahead 92-86 with 3:41 to play. He also scored two more baskets over the final 2:10 and wound up with nine of the Americans' final 12 points and 20 in all.

This dynamic, high-flying bunch insists the accomplishments of those former NBA greats are far from their minds at the moment.

The first priority is locking up a No 1 seed from their pool heading into the quarterfinal rounds and a move from Olympic Park to the soon-to-be-vacated gymnastics venue.

Argentina, meanwhile, is coming off Saturday's 93-79 win over Nigeria and led by as many as 26. The roster features the likes of well-known NBA names Luis Scola and Manu Ginobili.

James is all for the idea of getting back to basics.

"We have to defend and we have to rebound. It's a very good team and we look forward to the challenge," he said.

"They play as a team and that's what it's all about. They move the ball, you know, and they play together so that is why they continue to be successful."

France handed the Argentines their lone blemish with a stunning 71-64 victory on July 31 in the second game of Olympic preliminary play. Otherwise, Argentina has looked like a contender.

"First of all, we respect them guys, most importantly," Anthony said. "But then again, we go out there trying to win by any means necessary. They're trying to do the same things."

James put it more simply. "We don't come here to lose," he said.



Lionel Price (left), 85, a British basketball player at the 1948 London Olympics, meets Wu Chengzhang, a Chinese basketball player who took part in the same Games, on Sunday in London.

ZHANG CHUNYAN / CHINA DAILY

88-year-old returns to scene of greatest basketball moment

By ZHANG CHUNYAN in London

After 64 years, one of the last remaining members of a tiny Chinese delegation that participated in the 1948 London Games returned to catch Sunday's basketball game between China and Britain and meet up with an old adversary.

Wu Chengzhang, who was part of a 33-member delegation for the Republic of China in 1948, is now 88. Upon his return to London, he gave China Daily a detailed recount of his experience of 1948 Games.

He said he played on the basketball, soccer, track and field, swimming and cycling squads at the London event.

"We were very poor in 1948 and we had to raise our own funds for travel expenses," Wu said.

But it is in basketball that Wu remembers most of his glory days.

"We had 10 players on our team when we came here. Now most of them have passed away, except me and my captain, who is 96 years old," Wu said.

On Monday, while watching Great Britain demolish Team China in a men's basketball game, Wu recalled every one of his matches in 1948.

"We played Chile, Belgium, the Philippines and Iraq... the BBC reporter came to interview us after our game against Iraq because we had scored 100 points in that game," he said.

In that game with Iraq, Wu scored 32 points. "China's 125-25 win over Iraq was one of the biggest

margins in Olympic basketball history," Wu said. "I remember being at my physical peak in London."

More significantly, Wu met Lionel Price, 85, the sole survivor of Britain's basketball team of the 1948 Games.

The two were overjoyed upon their reunion.

"There is a Chinese saying that when you have a friend and come from far away to meet him it can be the most pleasant moment," Wu said.

Wu sheepishly boasted China was invincible during the 1948 Games and beat Britain 54-25.

Price remembered the loss a little too vividly.

"Yes, I remember losing to China. In fact, we lost five out of our six games in that Olympics. But 64 years later, I am really overjoyed to meet

Wu. He's a lovely chap," Price said. "The 1948 Games really were the Austerity Games. I remember the Chinese were even better kitted out than we were. We had one team vest, one pair of shorts, one track suit and one blazer. ... We paid for everything else."

Wu added that the conditions, stadiums and facilities in 1948 were "not as good as the new ones in Britain now."

Returning after 64 years, Wu said he sees a completely different London.

"I went to the London Bridge again and noticed there are many new buildings on both sides of the bridge. London is more beautiful and developed," Wu said.

The British Consulate-General, British Airways and Visit Britain combined to make Wu's trip possible.

Chinese poised to continue table tennis dominance

By STEPHEN WADE in London
Associated Press

China is on the verge of doing just what's expected by 1.3 billion people back home — sweeping all four Olympic gold medals in table tennis, the national pastime.

China's men struggled for the first time in the Olympics, but defeated Germany 3-1 in the team event on Monday to reach the final.

China's women easily beat South Korea 3-0 to make the gold-medal match as the Asian power prepares to add to its tally of two gold and two silvers already won in singles.

This time it wasn't so easy, particularly for the men.

"I was very nervous during the match," China men's coach, Liu Guoliang, said.

It doesn't sound like much, but the admission by Liu — who seldom reveals much to non-Chinese media — tells how close China came to getting upset by Germany, widely regarded as the No 1 threat to China's dominance in the men's game.

"We had our small chances," German coach Jorg Roskopf said. The team event consists of a best-of-five match series.

In the first match, Germany's Dimitrij Ovtcharov, the bronze medalist in London, pushed Ma Long relentlessly before losing. But Timo Boll, Germany's top-ranked player, came back and defeated gold medalist Zhang Jike to level at 1-1 going into doubles.

Ovtcharov said, "it would have been very different" had he won the first match.

"If we could have led 2-0, we would have had a chance."

Boll and Bastian Steger led the doubles briefly — for about 20 minutes Chinese fans were silent — before Zhang and Wang Hao rallied to give China a 2-1 lead. China rolled through the next singles, taking the series 3-1.

"I was nervous, but not especially nervous," said Zhang, who looked down and sent messages on his phone while taking questions. "This is normal for any human. We all get nervous."

China's men will face South Korea in Wednesday's final. South Korea beat Hong Kong 3-0 in the other semifinal.

China's women face Japan in Tuesday's final, a match between a country that has never won an Olympic medal in table tennis, and China, which has won 22 of 26 gold medals since ping-pong was added to the Olympics in 1988. The total is expected to become 24 of 28, with China favored in both team finals.

The Japanese women pose the first real threat to China's women, who are led by gold medalist Li Xiaoxia, silver medalist Ding Ning and Guo Yue, who forms the top doubles pair in the world with Li.

"I feel like the match (with Japan) is going to be a nervous match," Li said. "Every match can be difficult and we prepare for the worst."

The pressure seems to be off the Chinese women, who are more talkative since finishing singles, which eventually pitted Li against Ding for gold.

"In the singles, you have more pressure than the team events," Ding said.

"In singles, that pressure builds up on you. With three on a team, you can trust your teammates so there is less pressure."

Japan's women upset Singapore 3-0 on Sunday, beating a group composed of all China-born players. The same three took the silver medal four years ago in Beijing.

Japan's approach will be the same. A medal is already guaranteed, which will be a first in a sport that has deep roots in Japan.

"We had nothing to lose, so we just went for it," said Sayaka Hirano, who teams with Ai Fukuhara and Kasumi Ishikawa.