



China's Li Xiaoxia (left) hugs teammate Ding Ning after China beat Japan to win the women's team table tennis gold at the London Olympics on Tuesday.

SERGEI GRITS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A gold sweep inevitable for China

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in London

China is one gold medal away from sweeping all four in table tennis.

China's women delivered gold No 3 on Tuesday in the team competition with a 3-0 victory over Japan, which claimed silver, its first medal of any color in table tennis at the Olympics since the sport entered in 1988.

China won two golds and two silver medals in singles and now has gold in women's team.

It is an overwhelming favorite to complete the gold sweep by winning the men's team final on Wednesday against the Republic of Korea.

The victory was greeted by a quilt of China's red and yellow flags in the 6,000 sellout, accompanied by chants of "Jia You, Jia You" — "Let's Go" in Chinese — as the women came through.

Table tennis, called pingpong back home, is China's national pastime, and the country has now won 23 of 27 gold medals since '88, and is almost certain to make it 24 of

28 when table tennis ends on Wednesday.

Singapore — all three of its players were born in China — took bronze defeating the ROK 3-0.

China dominates in table tennis, and its women are even more overwhelming than the men. Only three women's teams in the Olympics played without China-born players, or players with roots in China — the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan and Egypt.

The winning team of Li Xiaoxia, Ding Ning and Guo Yue

represent the new generation, all 24 or younger and the latest in a long line of famous female players.

Li, who won gold in singles and team, is on course to match the record of several national icons.

Zhang Yining took four gold medals in the last two Olympics. Wang Nan won her fourth gold in three Olympics — 2000, 2004 and 2008. And Deng Yaping started the string with four in 1992 and 1996, and went on to be one of the faces of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

If anyone can challenge China's women at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, it may be Japan.

Left-handed Kasumi Ishikawa is only 19, and Ai Fukuhara is 23 and already in her third Olympics. The veteran is Sakaya Hirano, who's 27 and in her second Olympics. Fukuhara started playing table tennis at 3, and is one of Japan's best-known female athletes along with soccer star Homare Sawa.

Japan's women defeated China in the final of the 2010 world junior championship, a team led by Ishikawa.

Japanese too hot for China in the quarters

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in London

Japan outlasted China 3-2 on Tuesday to reach the semi-finals of women's volleyball at the London Games, upsetting a team it had never even taken a set from at any Olympics.

Many of the Chinese players burst into tears as the Japanese celebrated at Earls Court.

The fifth-ranked Japanese won 28-26, 23-25, 25-23, 23-25, 18-16 and will next play the winner of the quarterfinal match between Russia and Brazil.

Saori Kimura and Yukiko Ebata each scored 33 points for Japan, whose finesse countered China's power. Hui Ruoqi had 26 points for China, which had beaten Japan in straight sets in all five Olympic matches between the nations since the sport debuted at the 1964 Tokyo Games.

"I'm delighted to win this match, although it was very difficult from the beginning to the end," Japanese captain Erika Araki said. "It was a very close match."

Japan scored four straight points to go up 5-3 in the deciding set and held off China until Wang Yimei made two straight kills to put her team ahead 9-8. Japan regained the lead and won on Hitomi Nakamichi's ace after Zeng Chunlei's dig sailed out to set up match point.

"We were relieved at the end of the match that we won," Japan coach Masayoshi Manabe said.

Wang, a 1.90 meter tall wing spiker known for her powerful jumper serve, had 22 points for China, which was ranked third.

Coming off surgery on her right ankle, Wang had problems with the injury in the preliminary



CHRIS O'MEARA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Japan's Erika Araki (5) spikes the ball over China's Yang Junjing (9) during their women's volleyball quarterfinal on Tuesday. Japan won 3-2.

round, and against Japan it was heavily wrapped.

The energetic Japanese team kept pace with China in the first set, taking a 27-26 advantage on Ebata's spike before Kimura's kill for set point couldn't be stopped by Hui.

China found a rhythm midway through the second set, pulling ahead 18-15 on Xu Yunli's ace, then winning it on her kill. Japan won the third set with another Kimura spike.

The fourth set was tight until Wang's kill set up Ma Yunwen's block to force the deciding set.

"Their defense was very good," Chinese middle blocker Yang Junjing said. "We couldn't follow their tempo with their blocking."

The Japanese have won gold twice in volleyball, but their most recent was in 1976. China has won the gold three times, most recently at the 2004 Athens Games. The Chinese won bronze on home soil at the Beijing Games.



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