

SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED BY MORE THAN JUST THE MEDAL COUNT

# THE HOST WITH THE MOST



ADRIAN DENNIS / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Members of the Chinese delegation march during the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games on Aug 8, 2008.

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CHINA DAILY

**GUANGZHOU** — China comes into the Guangzhou Asian Games as a proud host and undisputed frontrunner, with sights firmly set on topping the medal harvest.

With a massive delegation of 1,454 — including 977 athletes, a new record in its Asian Games history — China expects to lead the medal tally once again.

However, what the host nation really cares is how to use the Guangzhou showcase as a springboard for launching its sports power to even greater heights.

“Gold medals are not the only standard,” said Cai Zhenhua, deputy chef-de-mission. “The Asian Games is a big parade of the overall power of Chinese sports and reflects the nation’s position in the world. It is always very significant.”

China hosted its first Asian Games in 1990 in Beijing, finishing with 183 gold medals.

That marked a milestone in China’s sports history because the nation subsequently became

a major contender on the world’s sporting stage.

In the last Asiad in Doha, China won 165 gold medals and showed its readiness to challenge the US for overall supremacy at the Beijing Olympics two years later.

In Guangzhou, China hopes to refine its golden harvest, striving for improvements in such team events as basketball, soccer and volleyball.

“Frankly speaking, our teams in the three ‘big ball’ events face an uphill battle here at the Guangzhou games,” said Xiao Tian, deputy chef-de-mission.

“But as long as they try their best and go all out in the competitions, we can accept whatever their results are.”

Against that high expectation, the host’s men’s under-21 soccer team was humbled 3-0 by Japan in Group A on Monday in failing to give China a winning start at the games.

Earlier this year, China’s once-glorious women’s volleyball team was denied a top-8 finish at the World Championships in Japan

## BY THE NUMBERS >> CHINESE SQUAD

**977**  
athletes

**13**  
years old - youngest

**49**  
years old - oldest

**35**  
Olympic champions

**655**  
athletes who will debut  
in international events

— the worst result in 36 years.

China’s men’s basketball team salvaged some credibility with a top-16 finish at the World Championships in Turkey in August, but the women’s side, which made the semifinals at the Beijing Olympics, finished a disappointing 13th at this summer’s Worlds in the Czech Republic.

“We cannot be called a strong sports nation without competitive powers in the three ‘big balls’ events,” Liu Peng, China’s sports minister said.

The Chinese sports authorities also hope to use the Guangzhou Asiad as a testing ground for the 2012 London Olympics. To that end, 655 athletes without major international experience will represent China in Guangzhou, hoping they can shape up for London.

“The Guangzhou Asian Games is a mid-term examination. It is the crucial part of the preparation for 2012 London Olympics,” Cai said.

“Through the Guangzhou event, we can test the training after the Beijing Olympics and then work

out how to tune up for the London Games. This is a big opportunity.”

There are 35 Olympic champions among China’s 977 athletes in Guangzhou, including men’s hurdler Liu Xiang, table tennis star Wang Liqin, badminton’s Lin Dan and women’s trampolinist He Wenna.

With an average age of 24, the young team will take part in 447 events in 41 sports.

The oldest athlete on the team is Mi Zhongli, 49, who will compete in men’s 10-pin bowling, while the youngest is Xia Shiyong, 13, a female dragon boat drummer.

Zhang Shan, a 42-year-old shooter, is one special athlete who bears watching.

Zhang achieved legendary status by defeating her male adversaries to win gold in skeet at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, and she is the only athlete on the Chinese team who also competed in the 1990 Beijing Asiad, where she won two gold medals.

China’s non-competitive contingent in Guangzhou includes 24 foreign coaches.