

Golden spark for Chinese water polo

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — China has set its sights on the 2012 Olympic title after claiming its first-ever women's water polo gold medal at the Asian Games in Guangzhou.

"I'm very happy to win the inaugural water polo competition at the Asian Games," said China's captain and goalkeeper, Yang Jun, after defeating Kazakhstan 13-5 on Wednesday.

"However, this is only a small test and the London Olympics is our ultimate goal. Every athlete wants to win an Olympic medal. We're not like the Chinese diving team, which is highly favored to win the gold, but we will strive for it," said the 22-year-old.

The victory in Guangzhou came only three months after China won its first medal in this event by finishing third at the World Cup in New Zealand.

Head coach Juan Jane Giralt, who guided Spain's national men's team to the gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, has great confidence in China's women's squad.

"The top players in China are among the top players in the world," said Giralt, 57.

"I'm seeing a medal at next year's World Championships in Shanghai. I'm not sure of the color, but I see a medal. And I have the same feeling for the Olympics in London.

"The United States and Australia are the top two teams, followed by Canada, Russia, the Netherlands and us. We are in the same line. It is quite possible for us to take a medal.

"To win the gold is a big dream for all the athletes in the swimming pool. It is very difficult, but it is also not impossible."

Compared to traditional powerhouses like the three-time Olympic medalists from the US and the 2000 Olympic champions from Australia, China is very young in the sport, but has improved very quickly since the national team was formed in 2004.

The team had its first international competition at the 2005 FIFA World Championships in Montreal, finishing dead last in the field of 16.

China then finished fifth in its Olympic debut at the Beijing Games, with a victory over defending champion Italy in the last game.



YANG SHIZHONG / CHINA DAILY

Sun Yujun of China tries to score as Anna Zubkova (6) and Natalya Shepelina (2) of Kazakhstan defend in the women's water polo gold-medal match at the 16th Asian Games on Wednesday.

"We worked very hard over the past three years. We trained in the morning and in the afternoon. We watched videos. Little by little, we moved to another level and we are going up even higher," said Giralt, who joined the team in 2007.

"The biggest problem is that

the most important players on the team are still very young and don't play well sometimes."

Yang echoed those sentiments. "Compared to the US and Australia, we have much less experience. But we are making steady progress every day together as a young squad," she said.

"For other teams, the transition from older players to young hands might be difficult. I think we are catching up."

Uzbekistan won the Asian Games bronze after defeating India 20-2 to take the second Asian qualification berth for next year's Worlds in Shanghai.

MEDAL TALLY >>

through Wednesday's competition

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	97	39	36	172
ROK	29	22	31	82
Japan	17	41	35	93
DPRK	5	7	10	22
Iran	5	4	8	17
Chinese Taipei	4	5	16	25
Uzbekistan	3	8	8	19
Hong Kong	3	6	4	13
Malaysia	3	3	4	10
Kazakhstan	2	6	11	19
India	1	5	7	13
Macao	1	1	0	2
Philippines	1	0	4	5
Vietnam	0	7	10	17
Singapore	0	4	2	6
Thailand	0	3	9	12
Indonesia	0	2	8	10
Mongolia	0	2	6	8
Myanmar	0	2	1	3
Pakistan	0	1	1	2
Kuwait	0	1	0	1
Jordan	0	1	0	1
Laos	0	0	2	2
Tajikistan	0	0	1	1

24 HOURS >> HOW THE DAY PLAYED OUT

10:25 Horses shipped from Europe arrived at the Guangzhou Equestrian Venue. The flight from Belgium carried 31 mounts, which will be inspected before being approved for the start of the competition. "All have slept well," said stable manager Tony She Jingyu.

10:31 The Ground Jury for Eventing inspected and passed the 39 horses at the Guangzhou Equestrian Venue. Siqin Tariha of China and Monarch Royal T of Thailand were sent to the holding box, but were later accepted after a second inspection. The competition opens with dressage for team and individual competitors on Thursday.

12:44 Reigning world champion Hong Seong-hwan of the Republic of Korea secured his first Asian Games gold medal by winning the men's 25m standard pistol at the Aoti Shooting Range. Hong shot superbly in all three

stages, with 194 out of a possible 200 in the 150-second and 20-second stages. He racked up 575 points to seal the victory.

13:15 China reached the final four in women's cricket with a dramatic one-run victory over Thailand at the Guangzhou Cricket Stadium.

Thailand, chasing a target of 94, looked to be cruising to the total at 71-2, with opener Pundarika Prathanmitr scoring 46 from 52 balls. But a middle-order collapse set up a sensational finale, with spinner Wu Juan conceding four runs from a tight last over as Thailand, needing six runs from the final six balls, fell agonizingly short.

13:56 Azizulhasni Awang won the gold medal in the men's Keirin in the Guangzhou Velodrome. He was joined on the podium by teammate Josiah Ng, who sprinted to the silver medal ahead of Zhang Miao.

The race was marred by a crash that ended the hopes of Zhang Miao's brother, Zhang Lei. Zhang Lei crashed as the riders raced around the first bend of the last lap. The crash also brought down Mohammad Parash of Iran, who did not finish.

15:26 India's penalty corner specialist, Sandeep Singh, was in prime form by scoring four goals to help his side overwhelm Bangladesh 9-0 in the men's preliminary round at the Aoti Hockey Field Pitch.

India sped off the mark in style, with Tushar Khandker deflecting an Arjun Halappa pass from the right flank into the goal in the second minute. Just 11 minutes later, Sandeep Singh scored his first goal, before Shivendra Singh gave India a three-goal lead before the interval.

16:59 Ai Kondo of Japan maintained her near-perfect record in the women's 470 sailing

class with wins in races seven and eight.

With four races to go, Kondo has a virtual lock on the gold medal. China kept the lead in the men's and women's RS:X classes and also held its advantage in the women's Mistral.

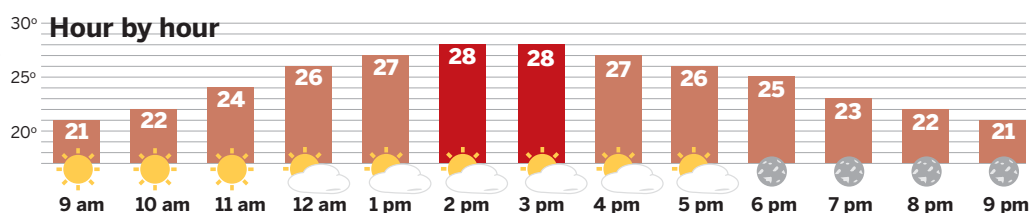
17:55 Beijing 2008 Olympic semifinalist Yang Shuchun has been disqualified from the taekwondo competition in the women's -49kg class.

Yang was leading 9-0 in her quarterfinal match against Vu Thi Hau of Vietnam at the time of disqualification. The official later said she had an illegal addition to each of her two footguards.

21:39 Ikhbayar Ganbaatar sank two free throws with 3.9 seconds remaining to give Mongolia its first tournament victory by beating Uzbekistan 67-65 in a Group E basketball action at the Ying Dong Gymnasium.

Today's forecast
Mostly sunny

Max **28°C**
Min **18°C**
Source: weather.com



Friday
28°C / 17°C

Saturday
28°C / 17°C

Chance of rain today: **10%**