



British goalkeeper Rosemary Morris tries to block a goal attempt by the Canadian players.

GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

British eager to copy China's rise

UK WATER POLO TEAM SEEKS TO EMULATE THE HOST'S POST-OLYMPICS SILVER MEDAL SPLASH

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — The British women's water polo team is keen to follow China's rising path and make impressive progress before next year's Olympics on their home soil.

The Beijing Olympics not only gave the host team its first chance to appear in the world sport's most prestigious event but also paved the way for its subsequent success.

At the recent FINA World Championships in Shanghai, the Chinese team delighted the home crowd by winning the silver medal. Six years ago in Montreal, they were dead last in a field of 16.

China's rapid rise did not escape the British players' notice and has given them extra motivation as they prepare for their

Olympic debut next year.

"We are really very excited about it. It is a great opportunity, like China in 2008, for women's water polo to really grow," Angela Winstanley-Smith, captain of the British team, said after an 8-8 draw against Canada in its Universiade opener at Bao'an Natatorium on Friday.

"What they (China) have done has been phenomenal. But we hope we will be on the same journey as China four years later," she said.

"They won a silver medal in Shanghai two weeks ago, which was brilliant. I'm very happy for the team. So, if we follow the same plan and be silver medalists in four years, I will be very happy."

The 2012 London Olympics will also mark the first appearance by British water polo teams — male

or female — since the 1956 Melbourne Games.

The British men's team was a powerhouse at the beginning of the modern Olympic era. It won the gold medal when the sport had its Olympic debut in 1900 and won again in 1908, 1912 and 1920.

But it hasn't won gold since 1920, and the women's team has never qualified for the Olympics since women's water polo was introduced in 2000.

However, that lackluster history has allowed them to play without the burden of expectations.

"Pressure? There must be pressure because we will play at home. But not really much pressure because nobody expects us to do anything," Winstanley-Smith said.

However, she appears quite confident about the team's potential.

"We are a very young team. I'm

the oldest," the 26-year-old said. "But we have been playing together for a few years. We've kind of grown up together."

"We are young, but we are really very solid as a team. We have very good team spirit. Everyone is happy to play together."

"We can build on something after the Olympics, for Rio de Janeiro (2016 Olympics) and for the World Championships after that. Hopefully, this team will stay together for five or six years after London."

With mostly an Olympic squad in Shenzhen, the British team is taking the Universiade as a crucial chance to hone its game for next year in London.

"It is a good preparation. It is the main preparation for London, with the Village and everything," Winstanley-Smith. "We just pre-

pare step by step and hopefully we can give some good performances next year."

"Like today, Canada is a big water polo nation and we were up for the opportunity to win, so slowly and slowly we are catching them now. So we will see what happens in the next few days and next year."

Besides the level of play, Winstanley-Smith believes there will be more fans and a brighter spotlight for the sport in Britain after the Olympics.

"Water polo is not so popular in Britain, so it is great to see such a big crowd today," she said.

"But, you know, with the home games, everyone wants to watch every sport, and tickets for water polo at the Olympics are already sold out in the UK. So I think its popularity will grow after 2012."