

Getting a kick out of his favorite sport

PRESIDENT OF THE WTF SEES A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR TAEKWONDO ON THE WORLD STAGE

By LEI LEI
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SHENZHEN — You can teach an old fellow new tricks.

Choue Chung-won, president of the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), has been involved with the sport for 40 years, and still finds himself excited about changes being brought to events at the Universiade.

“This is the first time we will introduce PSS (protector and scoring system) and a video replay system at the Universiade,” Choue said on Monday.

“It will be the most transparent and fair competition among university students.”

With 21 gold medals available, taekwondo is the fourth largest sport at the Shenzhen Universiade, which features 24 sports.

More than 550 athletes from 74 countries and regions will participate in taekwondo — which begins on Thursday — making it the sport's largest event in Universiade history.

The president is satisfied with the organization of the games so far, especially the opening ceremony.

“Shenzhen is very much an international city. It has been one of the first open-door cities to the Western world since the late 1980s. It's really amazing you have such development,” he said.

“I have attended many Universiades — this is one of the best, and the opening ceremony was wonderful. It's a very well organized Universiade.”

“During the opening ceremony, they introduced Chinese culture, the oriental culture, which is very important to show the Western world ... that was the most impressive part.”

As an Olympic sport, taekwondo, which originated in the Republic of Korea, has grown in worldwide popularity.

The WTF has about 200 member nations.



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

WTF president Choue Chung-won is excited about changes being brought to taekwondo at the Universiade.

“Taekwondo is one of the largest family sports in the world, (with) 17 million people practicing,” said Choue, who was elected WTF president in June 2004.

He said there's a lot more to taekwondo than competition.

“Parents want to send their children to taekwondo gymnasiums, because taekwondo teaches not only self-defense, martial arts, but also philosophy, the respect for older people, loyalty to the country, self-confidence and supporting colleagues. That's why outside Korea ... many countries accept it as a compulsory subject in their elementary schools,” he said.

“It's very nice. Because at the taekwondo gym, the masters

teach young kids whenever you leave your house, you have to first bow to your parents. That's a very nice thing to do for young kids. That's why taekwondo is getting more popular in different countries.”

To further develop the sport, the WTF has made several changes.

It shrunk the competition square to make matches more dynamic. It also introduced PSS, the electronic system inside body protectors, and a video replay system to ensure fairness.

The changes will make their Olympic debuts next year in London.

“The London Olympic Games will be the first Olympics ... to

introduce the video relay system,” Choue said.

“Four cameras at the four corners and one from the ceiling will watch the competitions. Coaches can appeal and we can make immediate corrections after viewing the video replay. Taekwondo is becoming more fair and transparent in judgment and refereeing.”

Promoting the sport among young people is an important step toward popularizing taekwondo, Choue said.

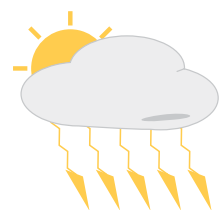
“Kyung Hee University was the first to have a department of taekwondo ... Now, there are almost 70 universities that have that department,” said Choue, who

learned the sport during army service in South Korea in the 1960s, and established the taekwondo department at Kyung Hee University.

“In many other countries, like the US, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Indonesia and Iran, taekwondo is not only simply martial arts, but also part of the academic field.”

“In 2009, we organized the World Youth Taekwondo Camp in Korea. We invited many young kids to learn taekwondo and to make friends with other athletes. Even this year, we had about 32 countries and regions, and about 300 young athletes came to learn taekwondo during the one-week program.”

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