



Liu Xiang returns to his starting line

HURDLER LIGHTS THE CAULDRON AT UNIVERSIADE, WHERE HIS CAREER BEGAN 10 YEARS AGO

By LEI LEI AND TANG ZHE
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SHENZHEN — China's star hurdler, Liu Xiang, will never forget the Beijing Universiade that took place 10 years ago.

It was then and there that the 18-year-old clinched his first world title in the men's 110m hurdles. From there, he went on to make history by breaking Asian and world records and scooping up Olympic and world championship gold medals along the way.

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LIU XIANG
CHINESE TRACK STAR



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China track star Liu Xiang, who lit the cauldron with four students at the opening ceremony of the Shenzhen games, says the Universiade 10 years ago in Beijing was where his dream started.

“Ten years ago, I was very excited to take my first title in an international major event,” Liu said.

“The competition was very fierce at that time. When I dashed to win the race, I was very excited. It was where my dream started.”

Liu's dream came full circle a decade later, when he lit the stadium cauldron with four students at the opening ceremony of the 26th Summer Universiade in Shenzhen on Friday.

“I'm very happy because it is my first time lighting a cauldron, although I was not the only one to do it,” Liu said.

“I always reminded myself not to make any mistakes. I had to remember where to stop, who to wave to the audience and where to light the fire. The whole process had to be smooth.”

Liu rose to fame as China's first major track star when he won the Olympic gold medal in Athens in 2004.

He became the country's superstar athlete when he set a world record of 12.88 sec at a super grand prix meet in Lausanne in 2006.

The record was beaten by a hundredth of a second by Cuban Dayron Robles two months before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The country was shocked when a foot injury forced Liu to withdraw from the first round of the event at the Beijing Games.

Liu experienced ups and downs in competitions after undergoing foot surgery in the US, peaking at the Guangzhou Asian Games last November.

Liu's first race after the Olympics — the Shanghai Golden Grand Prix in September 2009 — suggested he had enough fire in his belly to climb back to the top. The Shanghai native ran a wind-aided 13.15, but was narrowly beaten by then world No 2 Terrence Trammell of the United States.

Public expectations began to rise again. But Liu was underwhelming at the National Games and Asian Championships that followed, despite claiming both titles.

In March 2010, he only managed a seventh-place finish in the 60m hurdles at the World Indoor Championships. He claimed a bronze at the Diamond League meet in Shanghai in May, where he clocked 13.40 and was beaten by teammate Shi Dongpeng.

At the Guangzhou Asiad, he finished in 13.09 to appease his fans and put the past behind him.

Liu started to experiment with a new starting technique early this year — taking seven steps to the first hurdle instead of his usual eight.

Using the new method, the champion hurdler disrupted American David Oliver's 18-race winning streak in the 110m event at the Diamond League meet in

FACT BOX

Date of birth: July 3, 1983 (age 28)

Birth place: Shanghai, China

Height: 1.89m

Weight: 74kg

Event: 110m hurdles

ACHIEVEMENTS

Olympic Games

Gold 2004 Athens

World Championships

Gold 2007 Osaka

Silver 2005 Helsinki

Bronze 2003 Paris

World Indoor Championships

Gold 2008 Valencia 60m hurdles

Silver 2004 Budapest 60m hurdles

Bronze 2003 Birmingham 60m hurdles

Asian Games

Gold 2010 Guangzhou

Gold 2006 Doha

Gold 2002 Busan

Shanghai on Sunday night, clocking a solid 13.07.

The London Olympic Games is Liu's ultimate goal. The biggest challenge this year will be the World Championships in Daegu, South Korea, later this month.

“The London Olympics in 2012 will surely be the last Olympic Games in my sports career,” Liu said.

“I was crowned at the Athens Olympics, but I am still eager to regain the champion's title in London. I want a good result, and I'll try my best.”

Liu said the Daegu World Championships, starting on Aug 27, will be his most important competition this year, and his goal is to “enter the final and then strive for a medal”.