



Li-inspired Liu looks abroad

By SUN XIAOCHEN
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — Inspired by French Open champion Li Na, young Chinese player Liu Chang is keen to improve her skills abroad as the nation is becoming more open to the Western tennis culture.



TENNIS

“Yeah, she (Li Na) has definitely provided a boost for tennis in our country. After she made it (to claim Asia’s first Grand Slam title at the French Open), we all have a clear target... and are more determined to play the game,” said Liu after losing to Thai player Wannasuk Nungnadda, 7-5, 6-4, in the quarterfinals of the women’s singles at the Longgong Tennis Center yesterday.

“After the meet, I plan to go to Spain for an intensive training camp at a local club before the new semester begins,” said Liu, who is a junior at Shanghai University, majoring in business management.

World No 576 Liu, who stunned third-seeded French young gun Nathalie Piquion, 6-3, 6-2, in the previous round, couldn’t maintain the momentum in her fourth consecutive hot noon match against Nungnadda, committing 36 unforced errors while being broken six times.

“I just felt tired in the second set, especially on a hot court. She kept hitting the ball hard and flat to my backhand, which exhausted me a lot. Anyway, she was a better player than me today,” said Liu.

Nungnadda, who is ranked 436 in the world, said she scouted Liu before the match and took the showdown by hitting to her opponent’s weakness.

“I think her shot while running has to be improved. That is her shortfall right now,” said the 21-year-old Thai, who studies at the Suan Dusit Ratchabhat University.

Allowing the top four women players, including Li and Australian Open semifinalist Zheng Jie, to leave the state-supported system and manage their own careers at the end of 2008, the Chinese Tennis Association (CTA) has witnessed a huge boom in the sport at both the elite and grassroots levels.

More and more foreign coaches, including world No 1 Caroline Wozniacki’s mentor, Tomas Hogstedt, and former Belgian star Justine Henin’s coach, Carlos Rodriguez, have started investing time in China through youth tennis training programs.

Meanwhile, more international events, including ITF Challengers, have been introduced to the country.

Liu, who started to play tennis at 6 through the encouragement of her parents, says, “I hope to play more games at home and have more chances to practice overseas. It’s all about learning the advanced foreign techniques if young (Chinese) players want to improve rapidly,” said the 21-year-old.

Meanwhile, on the men’s side, Xu Junchao, China’s only player in the singles third round, quit his match against Spaniard David Estruch due to injury. All eight Chinese players have now been knocked out of the tournament.



GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

China’s Liu Chang will head to Spain soon for intensive training.

Home squad maintains team spirit despite losses

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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SHENZHEN — Despite missing out on the top 16 after the group stage, the Chinese Universiade basketball team was still upbeat about its performance, saying “solidarity was the biggest harvest”.



BASKETBALL

“We played more collaboratively this time. Whether we were up or down, we still fought together

as a team,” said forward Ren Junfei after China lost to its last group opponent Germany, 75-51, at the main gymnasium of the Universiade Center last night.

After winning one game, over the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in its opening match, China finished fifth in Group A and missed out on a berth in the ninth to 16th classification.

After two rest days, the Chinese squad has to take on the winner of the New Zealand-Hungary game to vie for 17th at the Games.

Shrugging off the failure, Ren Jun-

fei and his twin brother, Ren Junwei, who competed at the 2009 Universiade in Belgrade, stressed this side has a better atmosphere in the locker-room than the 2009 team.

“Last time? Yeah, we can’t forget it. It’s a bitter memory,” said 21-year-old Junwei. “We have better chemistry this time and all the players get along well with each other on and off the court.”

Playing a close first half against the Germans, China fell apart in the third quarter, netting only 13 points and conceding five turnovers.

The taller Germans had 46

rebounds and 48 points in the paint while allowing China only 26 points under the rim. Their tough defense limited China to a poor 35 percent from the field and no assists during the whole game, with only four players reaching double-figure points.

“I don’t know either (why we played badly in the second half). I was wondering too,” Junfei said.

“They (the European teams) always have a leader to come in an emergency. But we don’t,” said center Li Yuanyu, who averaged 16.4 points a game to lead the side’s scoring.

“We just messed our pace up when we fell a long way behind. I think we still have some problems in training and with our mental toughness,”

The Chinese squad’s lackluster performance did not disappoint coach Liu Weihao.

“We didn’t have any specific goals for our ranking this time,” the 40-year-old Liu said.

“It’s my first experience leading a team at an international event. I just hope the youngsters can enjoy the competition and learn from their rivals.”