



Hot, tired and going home

By SUN XIAOCHEN
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — After four hours of tennis in the burning sun, you don't feel like a loser. You just feel tired.



TENNIS

Neither South Korean Yoo Mi nor Thai youngster Nudnida Luangnam had the power to summon many words after three marathon sets in the women's singles semifinal at the Universiade yesterday.

Their strength was left melting on the fiery court, the sweaty girls both stressed the energy to finish came straight from the heart.

"It's the longest match I ever played," Luangnam said after winning 7-6 (9), 6-3, 8-6, on the outdoor court at Longgang Sports Center.

"I am so tired now, I just want to lay down and close my eyes immediately," she said. "Actually, I've ran out of strength after the second set. I just tried to reach and return every shot I possibly could."

Although Luangnam earned the berth in the final, Yoo won respect as she played with an injured leg.

"I am happy I was the winner at last. It's not a easy game for anyone and she is a very respectful opponent," Luangnam said after walking through the mixed zone amid thunderous applause.

Before sealing the first set by winning her ninth set point in the tiebreaker in 1 hour, 27 minutes, Yoo stretched her right thigh muscle during a baseline save while leading 5-4.

The 25-year-old fought to hold back tears while undergoing a massage on the sidelines, then hobbled back on to the court.

"It is not so hurt (that I would) quit, but it really messed up my pace and bothered me in every big shot," said Yoo, a veteran of the 2007 Universiade in Bangkok.

The 90-minute third set epitomized the match, as both players could only return shots without much power at the baseline as each game went to deuce.



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NUDNIDA LUANGNAM
THAI TENNIS PLAYER

Yoo committed 81 unforced errors and was broken 10 times.

"I didn't really think about quitting ... both the hot temperature and pain hampered my performance, but I am still satisfied," Yoo said after a 30-minute rest in the players' lounge.

Another Thai player, Wannasuk Nungnadda, stunned defending champion Ksenia Lykina of Russia, 6-1, 2-6, 6-4, to book the first berth in today's final.

Clinching both the gold and silver medals on the women's side, Thailand coach Virat Baerohim attributed the result to the nation's increasing investment in the sport.

"At this meet, our long-term efforts paid off," Baerohim said. "We have (stressed cultivating young talent) for years, and a brand new tennis training center will start operation next month. The medals here will be a big boost.

"Meanwhile, Asian players are becoming more confident against western power-hitting aces ... China's Li Na's success motivated them so much," the coach said.



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

Orlando Johnson of the US goes to basket in the men's quarterfinal match against Lithuania yesterday.

Early exit for US

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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SHENZHEN — A young version of the Dream Team made someone else's dream come true.

The US men's basketball team went home a little earlier than expected, leaving Lithuania's players to celebrate last night after a 76-74 victory Saturday night in the Universiade quarterfinals.

"We came here knowing we could compete with the United

States, but defeating them is like a dream," said emotional Lithuanian guard Augustas Peciukevicius, who scored eight points.

"It's a very big confidence boost for our side. They are maybe the strongest team here, but we beat them. It will help us to be more determined in the semifinals."

The US squad, boasting a core of potential future NBA players, cruised through the early rounds.

However, it struggled with Lithuania's intensity in the paint, allowing 38 points in the key and 43 rebounds.

Lithuania's perimeter defense limited the US to 34 percent from

the field on 23 of 67 shooting, while hitting 47 percent — 28 of 59 — itself.

Lithuania put together a 14-2 run early in the third quarter.

"Our key to victory I think was the rebounds. We know they are good at fast breaks, we control the boards and we can keep our pace," Peciukevicius said.

An early end to their pursuit of a 14th Universiade gold medal left the Americans upset. They refused interview requests after the loss.

The US will play Romania for the fifth place tonight, while Lithuania will take on Canada in the semifinals.



BASKETBALL