

CHEN ZHUANYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Former world and Olympic vaulting horse champion Lou Yun enjoys himself with a group of children during his visit to an elementary school in Henan province to promote the Beijing Olympic Games spirit on Aug 29, 2007.

FACTBOX

Born: June 23, 1964
Birthplace: Hangzhou, Zhejiang
Event: Artistic gymnastics
Height: 1.58 m
Performances:
1981
 Japan International Gymnastics Invitational, gold in floor exercise, gold in vault
1982
 9th New Delhi Asian Games, gold in vault
1983
 12th World University Games, gold in vault
1983
 22nd World Championships, gold in teams, gold in parallel bars
1984
 Los Angeles Olympic Games, gold in vault; silver in teams; silver in floor exercise; 4th in horizontal bar
1986
 10th Asian Games, gold in vault
1987
 24th World Championships, gold in floor exercise, gold in vault
1988
 Seoul Olympic Games, gold in vault

Lou vaults into a new career

CHAMPION GYMNAST NOW 'KING OF THE CHEERLEADERS' AFTER RETIRING FROM ACTIVE SPORT IN 1988

By LU YUN
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — Li Ning, who started his own sportswear company, may be the most famous, but he is not the only, gymnast to reconnect with the sport through entrepreneurship after retiring from competition.

His former teammate, two-time Olympic vault champion Lou Yun, has founded a sports management company, which is providing cheerleaders for the Shenzhen Universiade.

"The essence of cheerleading is bringing youth happiness," Lou said.

The former gymnast has a long connection with the World University Games.

The "King of the Vault" was selected for the National Gymnastics team in 1977 and then won a gold in 1983 at the 12th World University Games in Edmonton, Canada. He repeated the win four years later at the 14th Universiade in Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

"The World University Games was an ideal platform for young athletes to gain practical experience and a great opportunity for coaches to test the players," Luo said.

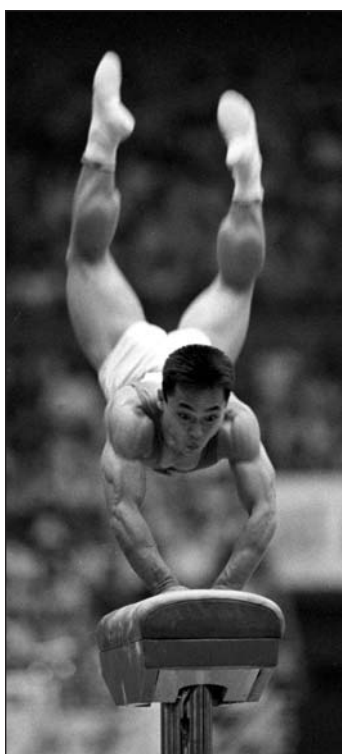
This was demonstrated when Lou helped China land two consecutive Olympic golds in 1984 and 1988 — a feat surpassing the exploits of even the "Prince of Gymnastics," Li Ning.

Luo's vault performance at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics stunned the judges, who gave him an incredibly high score of 19.950 — only 0.05 points short of perfection. The jump, which was later named after Luo, remains challenging to many gymnasts.

Lou said that he is a little "jealous" of today's athletes.

"Now, athletes can show their emotion by running with the flag wrapped around their shoulders or even jumping into the stands to express their happiness," Lou said.

"In the past we could not even show our misery when we failed. We went abroad representing the whole country, not ourselves."



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lou Yun competes on the vaulting horse at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.

At the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the Chinese delegation only took home five golds — just one of which came from the gymnastics team, upon which high hopes had been placed.

The pressure was tremendous, and many team members retired after the Games, including Li Ning, who received death threats for his errors at the Olympics.

Even though Lou won the team's only gold, he also gave up gymnastics after Seoul.

"I decided to quit after I saw Li Ning," Lou said.

"I just didn't want to end up like him."

While Li successfully launched his sports brand, Lou's King of the Vault sneaker brand flopped.

"I will not evaluate my success by how much money I earn," Lou said.

"I just want to create something new, something that only belongs to Lou Yun."

Lou founded his sports management company in 2007 with Beijing Media Group. The company focuses on promoting cheerleading

through competitions and training. "I have some expertise and discovered I was more interested in this," Lou said.

After the first national cheerleading competition in 2008, China's sports ministry officially put cheerleading on the agenda. Lou realized it was a good way to promote fitness nationwide.

"It's only a start," Lou said.

"More innovative skills — named after the creators — are needed to further promote fitness. This is a Chinese gymnastics tradition. I hope young kids can find role models to learn from through this event (Universiade)."

Lou also believed more enterprises will cultivate the passions of the young people.

"Sports should be a source of happiness for all and especially for young people," Lou said.

"Chinese parents should know that sending their kids to sports school does not mean the kids are supposed to be professional athletes. Sports are more about participation and having fun."