



Megan McNamara and Nicole McNamara of Canada, who beat Latvia in their Nanjing Youth Olympic beach volleyball match on Tuesday, are growing in popularity in China. PHOTO BY SUHAIMI ABDULLAH / GETTY IMAGES

Overcoming sibling strife

Canadian twin sisters in spotlight for their mind-bending cooperation and tempers

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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The often romanticized notion that twin siblings have a telepathic connection has been the stuff of books and movies. But what if it really does exist? Would it work out in the sports arena?

Just ask Megan and Nicole McNamara, twin sisters and beach volleyball teammates from Canada who have been thrust into spotlight at the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games with their mind-bending cooperation and cute looks.

"I think we have the advantage because we've played together for four years. We feel comfortable with each other and we trust each other, so we play well together," Megan said after beating the Latvian team of Tina Graudina and Anastasija Kravcenoka, 2-1, in their third pool match on Tuesday.

Still, their chemistry doesn't always work as naturally as

people expect.

Megan, who does most of the talking in front of media, like an older sister, said there are challenges blocking them from maximizing their game.

"Because we are siblings, it is easy to get mad at each other. We are working on it," Megan said, as Nicole nodded in agreement.

"One of our weaknesses is that we do fight sometimes. We blame each other for mistakes. But that happens in all team sports," Nicole said, glancing over at Megan.

Having won all of their three matches in Pool A, the McNamaras, who turned 17 on Aug 1, enjoy overwhelming support from the local crowd when they face non-Chinese opponents. Their selves have even become hot topics on Chinese social media.

Still, they remain modest about their popularity.

"A little," Megan said with a grin when asked whether she knows about their sudden shot to fame in China.

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MEGAN McNAMARA
Canadian beach volleyball player

The two discovered their passion for beach volleyball during a family trip to Mexico in 2010 and despite each being 1.75 meters tall, which is considered slightly undersized for the physically demanding sport, the twin sisters have shown great potential.

Their quickness and flexibility make up for the lack of height at the net as they cover for each other on the court.

Their achievements include the Canadian senior women's title in 2013 and a bronze medal at the U-19 World Championships this month.

"Three years ago they used to fight a lot on the court. You know, like sisters do, mainly on things that don't matter. They know how to get under each other's skin," their coach, Misha Harris, told the youth infor-

mation service after their first match in Nanjing.

"They are very close, it is undeniable that they have a twin connection, they communicate with each other in a different way. They can get away with talking a bit less than others."

As one of the title favorites, the McNamara sisters expect a podium finish in Nanjing.

This is only the start of their promising career: They are enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles, for its volleyball program after graduating from high school in Delta, British Columbia.

"Even before volleyball, our dream was California, so it worked out perfectly. There is really not a better place to play volleyball than California. We have given up indoor for this next year."

The twins made their ultimate goals clear when they wrote "Make it to the Olympics" on their profiles for the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games.

"With our strong performances around the world, hopefully it will help it (beach volleyball) grow (in Canada)," Megan said.

Sri Lankan making ripples

By GAO CHANGXIN
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Sri Lankan oarsman Vishan Gunatilleka's first sport was cricket, the national game, but it turned out he was pretty bad at it.

He was actually dragged to a sculling boat one day, when he was 11, by a friend who insisted he should give rowing a shot.

Today, Gunatilleka is planning to make a career out of the sport.

"It's a beautiful sport; there is no other feeling like it. When you get that feeling of the boat moving quite fast, there is nothing like it," said Gunatilleka, who turned 18 on Aug 7.

He usually rows in the pairs, but his teammate was too old to qualify for the Youth Olympics so he switched to single sculls.

On Wednesday, he finished second in Group D of the junior men's event with a personal best over 1,000 meters. However, that didn't get him onto the podium.

"It was an improvement. I didn't start the whole competition very well but I ended it on a good note," he said.

Gunatilleka said he is more comfortable with rowing in the pairs and the Nanjing Youth Olympics may be his last single sculls competition.

"If I am rowing with my partner it is easier ... training alone is boring and lonely. You have to push yourself because no one else is going to do it," he said.

Gunatilleka was born in Singapore and spent some years in Australia and now goes to school in Sri Lanka, where he studies law.

His foreign experience played a part in him picking up rowing in a country where the sport has just a handful of professional athletes.

But rowing is starting to gain popularity in the former British colony.

There is a rowing team in all the major high schools in the capital of Colombo, according to coach Reshane Fernando. And Sri Lanka has built a number of international-standard rowing courses in a variety of lengths over the past few years, he said.



Sri Lankan Vishan Gunatilleka plans to make a career out of rowing. PHOTO BY GAO CHANGXIN