



STUNNING SWIM

Brazil's hopes of producing a homegrown winner at the Rio Olympics are looking good on Friday after Matheus Santana won the 100m freestyle at the Youth Olympic Games. The 18-year-old cruised to victory in 48.25 sec — a world record for a junior swimmer and faster than Michael Phelps, Olympic champion Nathan Adrian and world champion James Magnussen managed at the Pan Pacific Championships on the same day. PHOTO BY REUTERS

Paddling up different stream

By GAO CHANGXIN
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Very few boys in Brazil choose another sport over soccer, but table tennis player Hugo Calderano is an exception to the rule.

He was not guided toward table tennis by any of his family members or teachers. He gave soccer a try but was just more naturally suited to table tennis after he started playing with his father for fun at his home in Rio de Janeiro.

Originally, he also played volleyball and participated in track and field but soon focused on table tennis.

"I am just better at ping pong than other sports and I enjoy playing it, so I just went for it," said Calderano, who won bronze in singles at the Nanjing Youth Olympics.

He plays basketball, volleyball and, of course, soccer on the side, but just for fun.

Calderano loves sports in general and admires athletes in different disciplines. He identifies most with tennis great Roger Federer for his attitude on court and in life in general.

This is Calderano's first time in China and he has been awestruck by the experience.

"It's a different vibe here. You get more attention. I had never seen so many people in the stadium," he said.

The 18-year-old sensation is one of the most promising junior players in the sport outside China.

In June, he signed with German table tennis club Ochsenhausen. After the Nanjing Youth Olympics he will be heading straight to Germany for the new season.

Calderano may be able to play at home in the near future thanks to the Rio Olympics in 2016.

The Brazilian government has promised to place more investment in sports like table tennis. Top-level foreign professionals have been hired and infrastructures put in place to build sports over the past few years. Brazilian athletes are getting more opportunities to play in events overseas. And there are now short- and long-term plans for table tennis in Brazil, according to Calderano.

He has already made his way onto the Brazilian senior team. His main task next year is performing well at the Pan American Games and qualifying for Rio 2016, where he hopes to win a medal.

A new buzz about archery

Archery has been made more exciting at the Nanjing Youth Olympics thanks to the addition of music and cheering from the bleachers.

Normally, sound is kept to a minimum at archery venues so as to not distract the archers, who need to focus on landing their arrows on the target 70 meters away.

Spectators are asked to keep quiet and only clap between shots while commentators announce nothing but scores through the loudspeakers.

At the Nanjing Youth Olympics' Fangshan venue, background music, ranging from electric to jazz, is played during to add excitement to a sport that untrained eyes might find boring. Spectators are free to shout when they see fit, just as long as it is not during the timer when the archer is about to aim and shoot.

The change is one of many the Nanjing Youth Olympics has made to add more fun to the event.

"It's an improvement to the event. I am already kind of bored with the way it is now, I can only imagine what it would be like if the music and cheering had been taken out," said Yan Weiguo, who watched the event on Saturday morning.

"The sport still needs a lot of promotion in China and making it more fun to watch would be step one."

— GAO CHANGXIN

Li coping on her own

By GAO CHANGXIN
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When Chinese archer Li Jiaman first heard her coach wouldn't be able to accompany her to the Nanjing Youth Olympics, the 17-year-old was "shocked".

However, she managed to handle her emotions and emerge a more mature athlete.

On Saturday, she was a picture of calm as she marched onto the range, set up her sights and aimed her bow during a shootout with her Kazakhstan rival.

Li was the only athlete that competed without a coach standing by her side but that didn't stop her from advancing to the final eight in women's individual recurve with an impressive 7-3 victory.

For her, the Nanjing Youth Olympics is providing not only a test of skill but also the ability to take care of herself.

"It has just been a few days but I feel like I have already grown up. I was worried when I first knew about the news but I did a lot of preparation in advance. So far I have taken care myself very well," she said.



Li Jiaman
PHOTO BY GAO CHANGXIN

Li's coach, He Ying, failed to register for the event as the Chinese team's headcount maxed out. Li is alone not only on the course, but also in the Athletes' Village. That means she has to do everything by herself, ranging from dealing with event officials and following competition schedules to doing laundry and arranging meals.

To make things more challenging, Li is the only Chi-

nese archer with no teammates to discuss ideas. She also lives with China's shooting team, which has tried to help her but works of a different schedule.

Fortunately, she has made some friends in the village she can hang out with. One is Filipino archer Gabriel Luis Moreno, her partner in the mixed international team competition, an event unique to the Youth Olympics where players from different countries form teams and compete.

The competition is designed so young athletes from different countries can communicate and build friendships.

Li speaks limited English but she has not let that get in the way of making friends.

"When my English fails, we communicate through body language. The last resort is to ask volunteers to help. So far our collaboration has been effective and fun," she said of her time with Moreno.

"I have learned a lot from the experience and it will benefit me in both archery and life in general."