



A pointed lesson for Xu

YOUNG CHINESE FENCER BATTLES NERVES IN EDUCATIONAL LOSS TO AMERICAN

By ZHANG CHUNMEI
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — A sad and disappointed Xu Anqi, 19, left the strip after losing 15-14 to Courtney Hurley of the United States in the round-of-32 of the women's epee individual event at the exhibition center in Shenzhen on Saturday.

Xu, a rising Chinese fencing star, started poorly and was unable to grab the lead against her foe. She cried after losing her match against Japan in the final bout of the women's epee group competition at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games. She ran from reporters after that event.

This time, she regained her composure, smiled and was willing to be interviewed.

"The Asian Games was something of a nightmare for me. I was extremely nervous; it was like standing at boiling point. I was so eager to win for my team. It was so important, and I finally collapsed," Xu said.

She overcame that disappointment and looked to restart her career at the Universiade.

"I had never met Courtney before. I knew nothing about her skill and tempo. My skill was better than her's, but when she suddenly changed her tempo, I could not find a way to break her defense," said Xu.

Xu emerged on the international stage with a stunning victory at the 2007 World Cup. The 15-year-old fencer managed to overpower the 2000 and 2004 Russian Olympic squad's gold medalist, Oxana Ermakova.

"That was my first time at a senior competition. Five national team members went to play other events, and that gave me my chance. I did not even know my rival's name, but I was so excited about the victory," said Xu.

However, fencing was not her original sport of choice. Her father played basketball and her mother was a track athlete.

"I was very tall from childhood. People said that it was a pity if I did not become a model or an athlete, so I entered the school's basketball team as a point guard," said Xu.

While in grade 5 at primary school, a fencing coach from



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Xu Anqi from China (left) competes against Courtney Hurley of the US in the round-of-32 in the women's epee individual event at the Shenzhen Universiade on Saturday. Xu lost 15-14.

a local sports school in Nanjing came to pick fencers from the basketball team. Xu was chosen, and began a life of practicing fencing and studying.

That local sports school spawned Luan Jujie, the first Chinese athlete to win a gold medal in fencing - at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. "I hope I can be as outstanding as my predecessors," said Xu.

The youngster made rapid progress at the sport's school. She easily beat her peers and challenged the seniors. She attended the Jiangsu Provincial Games and claimed the

gold medal in 2006, when she was only 14.

She made the national team in 2009, and reached the quarterfinals of the World Championships.

It seemed like a smooth road to success for the young fencer, before she lost in the team competition at the Asian Games.

It is hard to find any anger or menace on the young lady's face. She always smiles sweetly. But when she wears the mask and holds the epee, she shows great maturity and calm.

"My biggest advantage is attack.

I think an excellent fencer should know how to attack rivals. When I stand on the strip, I always tell myself that the winner must be me," said Xu.

After yesterday's encounter, she rested for half an hour and then went to watch other fencers perform.

"I think I am more mature now than I was at the Asian Games. I can adjust my mood to all conditions. I have trained harder than many others since childhood. I am ready to accept all the challenges and difficulties before I hopefully earn a ticket to London next year."

South Korea's rising star ready to face archrival China

BY ZHANG CHUNMEI
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SHENZHEN — South Korea's rising young fencer Gu Bon-gil failed to secure his country's first fencing gold medal at the Shenzhen Universiade on Saturday.

Gu, the gold medalist at the 2010 Asian Championships and the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, beat China's He Wei 15-9 in the semifinal, but was trounced by Ukraine's Andriy Yagodka 11-15 in the gold medal match of the men's sabre individual at the Exhibition Center.

Gu currently occupies third place in the men's sabre world rankings released by the International Fencing Federation, but Yagodka, who is ranked 45th in the world, took the Universiade men's sabre individual title.

The South Korean men's sabre team is always China's strongest rival in Asia. The competition between them is becoming fiercer as the London Olympics draw nearer.

"Gu has the power to control the distance between himself and his opponent," He said after losing to Gu. "He lures me into entering his range and suddenly attacks me. I did not control my footwork very well. This is the beauty of fencing."

The 21-year-old Gu came into the spotlight in his youth. People saw him as the successor to Oh Eun-seok, a South Korean sabre fencer who won a bronze medal in the 2007 World Fencing Championships.

Gu began to learn fencing in junior middle school in 2003. He won gold in the sabre individual

events at the 2006 and 2008 Junior World Fencing Championships, and then was selected to the South Korea national team.

He won the title at the 2010 Asian Championships, and defeated Zhong Man, a Chinese fencer who won gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, in the final bout at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games.

"Gu is young and fast. I have not competed against him very often," said Zhong. "I did not expect him to be so exciting and daring on the strip. You can hardly stick to your tactics."

Gu has shouldered the responsibility of leading the national team's defense of its standing at the Universiade, a challenge that may help him to mature.

South Korea faces China in two days' time.



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"China has sent a strong squad to the Universiade. We are ready to win the squad sabre gold medal on August 16," He said.

Gu Bon-gil, of South Korea, shown after his loss in the individual sabre final, will lead his team against China in two days' time.