



Newcomers welcomed with open arms

STRONG PHILIPPINES TEAM KEEN TO MAKE ITS MARK AT ITS FIRST UNIVERSIADE ON CHINESE SOIL

By CHEN XIAO
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — The 26th Shenzhen Universiade may not be the first Universiade staged in China, but this is the first time many countries that recently joined the biennial event have competed here.

Take the Philippines, for instance. The country's 94-member delegation will compete in nine sports during the 11-day event, which is its first on Chinese soil. The disciplines are swimming, men's basketball, table tennis, badminton, chess, taekwondo, archery, beach volleyball and athletics.

Federation of School Sports Association of the Philippines (FESSAP) president David Ong said his association is "proud to send our athletes" to the event.

"The Shenzhen Universiade ... (is) the Olympics for top universities and colleges all over the world," he said at the send-off party in Manila on Aug 1.

The delegation's highest expectations are on its basketball team, Ong said.

I met the Philippine's basketball team outside the bank in the Village on the afternoon of Aug 11. Having arrived in Shenzhen early that morning, the players looked a bit tired from jetlag but couldn't hide their excitement and curiosity about the Village and the city.

"Everything is great so far, and we're really surprised how nice it is here," team captain Krist Edward Pao said.

"And we're thankful to have the opportunity to play in our first international event."

Basketball is one of the most popular sports in the Philippines. The team that has come to Shenzhen is an "all-star" team of players from the University of Cebu, head coach Roehl Gomez said.

Gomez once played professionally in the Philippine Basketball Association.

"The University of Cebu has the most talented basketball players in our country, who just won the national championship," Gomez said.

I couldn't help but notice Junemar Fajardo, the team's 2.1-meter-tall center.

"He's one of the best players in the Philippines right now (and) might be in the next Asian Games," Pao said.

Fajardo said his first international competition was special because he carried his homeland's national flag during the opening ceremony.

"It's exciting," he said.

"I couldn't feel more honored."

Fajardo seemed confident about the upcoming competition, which starts with an Aug 13 game against Lithuania.

"We heard that everyone is good, and we're in a tough group, but we will do the best to make our country proud," the center said.

Fajardo, who called the Universiade "a learning experience", joked that his team will keep a tight schedule, even if it was knocked out of the competition early.

"I heard that Shenzhen is a nice place, so lots of fun things have to be done and explored while we're here."



Top: (from left to right) Philippines basketballers Krist Edward Pao, Junemar Fajardo and head coach Roehl Gomez pose during an interview with China Daily.
Above: Philippines players receive service in a bank in the Universiade Village.

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Q & A >>

Chan Kwongkit, 23,
from Hong Kong Polytechnic
University, a volleyball player



What is your expectation of the competition?

It was a little bit surprising that a lot of people, some of whom are from Hong Kong, came to the gymnasium to support us. I could hear their voices clearly. The environment is really great. It was a pity that we lost the game 0-3 to Korea, but I felt the warmth of the audience.

We must be the shortest men's volleyball team. It was tough for us. It was the first game, and I was nervous at the beginning. I think we will play better in the next match.

How do you feel about life in the Universiade Village?

It is a great experience to live in the Universiade Village. The volunteers and staff are considerate. It is not my first time in Shenzhen, but it gave me a fresh impression of the city. The buildings have been well decorated and we live comfortably here.

What is one thing you like about the Village?

I like the stores. They are special and funny. I have bought some gifts for my family members from the stores.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I go to the park very often. They are beautiful and quiet. You can see many foreigners sitting in the park and chatting with each other. I like to join them and make friends with them.

In the village, we live close to other volleyball teams. I saw the Korean team playing on the ground beside our dorm buildings yesterday. Next time, I will say "hi" and communicate with them. I am always excited to make new friends.