

Above and beyond sports: Duan

CHINESE ATHLETES ARE ALSO AMBASSADORS AT GUANGZHOU'S SHOWCASE EVENT

By CHEN XIANGFENG
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BEIJING — Duan Shijie, head of the Chinese delegation at the Guangzhou Asian Games, hopes the nation's athletes will act as ambassadors for their country.

"The Asian Games is not just a sports gala to win as many gold medals as possible for us any more," said Duan, also the vice-minister of the State General Administration of Sport.

"It's a platform to exchange friendship as well as show the world that great changes are taking place in Chinese sports.

"Apart from chasing the slogan of 'Higher, Stronger and Faster', young Chinese athletes should also show our nation's culture, its progress, its democracy and freedom. We should also show an open mind and respect to players from other countries and regions."

China has topped the gold medal tally at the past six Asian Games and it will, without doubt, dominate at Guangzhou Games.

But Duan said China should not simply look at podium finishes as the sole barometer of achievement.

"At the Asian Games, we should pay extra attention to some world-level sports like taekwondo, wrestling, table tennis and badminton," he said.

"The rivalry between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in these events is at the world's top level and it is very important for us to gain experience and prepare for the 2012 London Olympic Games."

The chief official said the event would also provide a good opportunity for officials and coaches to see how sports are developing internationally.

"Some of our traditional training systems are out of date. We should learn from other countries and regions and improve our systems," he said.

"It's not about having more athletes involved in intensive training any more. Sport is more about the proper use of knowledge and technology."

China established itself as a power in sport at the Beijing Olympic Games by topping the table with 51 gold medals. Thirty-five Olympic gold medalists are in the 1,454-member delegation for the 16th Asian Games.

About two-thirds of the 977



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Duan Shijie believes the Asian Games will provide China with a platform to showcase both its sporting prowess and rapid development.

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DUAN SHIJIE

athletes neither take part in the 2008 Olympics nor the Asian Games held four years ago in Doha, Qatar.

Duan insists China still has a way to go to become a consistent sports powerhouse, like the United States.

He said China is good at some "traditional production industries" like table tennis and badminton, but lags far behind in "high-tech areas" like swim-

ming, athletics and team sports — especially soccer, basketball and volleyball.

"Table tennis and badminton are relatively simple and easy sports. Swimming, athletics and ball games, like soccer and basketball, are more difficult to handle because they need more complicated and systematic training systems. They need more people to get involved in different ways.

"It needs time, just like the process of developing a nation's economy. We are on the way to becoming a sports powerhouse, but we need breakthroughs in those sports to balance our development."

Duan uses the German soccer team as an example, claiming there are 27 staff behind the squad.

"Apart from the coaching team, it has other support in terms of research, medicine and physical training. That's why I do not believe China's soccer will improve by just hiring one or two foreign coaches."

AIMING FOR A CLEAN GAMES

Chinese delegation chief Duan Shijie reiterated the host nation's determination to play a pivotal role in the anti-doping fight and make sure of a clean Asian Games.

"We should take the responsibility to make sure the Asian Games are a clean and fair event," Duan said. "First, we have zero tolerance for our athletes.

"We have made bigger and bigger efforts in the fight against doping over the past few years and we impose the world's harshest punishments on our athletes who test positive."

Beijing Olympic women's judo champion Tong Wen was banned for two years for testing positive for clenbuterol, and national women's 100m sprint champion, Wang Jing, was banned for

life after testing positive for epitestosterone.

"Apart from the athletes, we also punish their coaches and the sport's governing body in their province," Duan said.

During the Games, the China Anti-Doping Agency plans to test a record 1,500 urine samples and more than 200 blood samples.

All testing will be done at the agency's world-class laboratory in Beijing, which conducted drug screenings for the 2008 Olympics.

The tests will be carried out in accordance with Olympic standards.

Extra efforts have also been made to make sure no Chinese athletes will cheat.

"It's meaningless for us to win a gold medal if it is done by cheating," Duan said.

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