

# Afghanistan hoops dream shattered

## S ASIAN CHAMP BEATEN BUT UNBOWED

GUANGZHOU — Afghanistan's basketball team arrived in China desperate to win an Asian Games medal and return home to share the delight.

Neither of those dreams will be realized.

After Afghanistan lost 83-76 to India in a qualifying game, there will be no happy returns for a team for whom the United States is now home.



### BASKETBALL

"Wearing the colors of my country and representing my people are beautiful," said Ali Noorzad.

"But more than anything, I would love for us to be able to return home to Afghanistan."

Noorzad, 24, has never been to Afghanistan, having been born in the US to refugee parents.

The team is predominantly America-based, but the Afghanistan Olympic Committee insists it is not safe for the squad, which is the South Asian Games gold medalist, to go home.

The handful of Afghanistan-based players who took part in the that South Asian Games success in February enjoyed celebrity status when they returned home.

"They were paraded around like superstars," said Noorzad. "Our homeland has never had a gold

medal to celebrate and we just wanted to share it."

Afghanistan defeated India by a point to win the South Asian title, but came up short on Monday.

"We played on behalf of our country to win back respect from the world," said Afghanistan coach Wamiq Rafiq.

"The Asian Games also give our players the chance to know more about the world. Basketball or football, male or female, they can participate at the world level," he said.

Afghanistan guard Mohammad Mojaddidi said players were distraught by the defeat, which came in the only game they played in Guangzhou.

"There were tears in the dressing-room. We have come so far and trained so hard to have this opportunity to play for our country. It sucks that we don't get the chance to play again tomorrow."

Despite the setback, the Afghanistan delegation still has an Asian Games gold medal hope in its men's cricket team, which is a contender in the tournament.

In individual events, taekwondo could also provide rewards with Afghanistan having captured two bronze at the Doha Asiad in 2006.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

Being in the spectacular opening ceremony was the Asian Games highlight for Afghanistan's basketball team.

# Masters-bound Matsuyama ready to crash ROK party

GUANGZHOU — Japan's Masters-bound Hideki Matsuyama threatens the Republic of Korea's (ROK) bid to retain all four golf titles at the Asian Games.

ROK high school students Han Jung-eun, Kim Hyun-soo and Kim Ji-hee are

ready to dominate the women's field after sweeping the team gold and individual medals at the World Amateur Team Championships last month.



### GOLF

The Asiad tournament opens on Wednesday at the Dragon Lake Golf Course in Guangzhou.

Matsuyama won the Asian Amateur Championship on Oct 10 and a week later finished third at the Japan Open won by the ROK's Kim Kyung-tae, who turned professional after claiming the 2006 Asiad men's title.

The Asian championship has earned the 18-year-old university freshman a ticket to the 2011 Masters.

"I want to adjust my putting and golf for the victory," Matsuyama said.

His teammates include 16-year-old Kenta Konishi, who won the Junior British Open in July at Lundin Links, Scotland.

The Guangzhou tournament features an Asian Games record 113 golfers from 19 countries and regions, including war-torn Afghanistan.

At the 2006 games in Doha, the ROK achieved an unprecedented golden sweep in regaining the men's team title after a 20-year break.

But heading to Guangzhou,

Korean Golf Association Secretary General Oh Cheul-gyu said, "we are not as strong as before."

"We're aiming for two gold medals, one each in the team games," he said.

At the World Amateur Championships in Argentina, Kim Meen-whee led the ROK to a tie for 13th place in the men's tournament, which was won by France. Japan was tied for 17th.

The women's world amateur title was won by the ROK's Han Jung-eun with a record 13-under-par 275.

The Asian Games have paved the way for many amateurs to join lucrative pro tours, including Indian Shiv Kapur, who triumphed at Busan 2002 where Japan's Ai Miyazato won the women's title.

The ROK has won eight gold medals, against seven for Japan, five for Chinese Taipei, three for India and one for the Philippines since golf made its Asian Games debut in 1982 in New Delhi.

The women's tournament debuted in 1990.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE