

Timor-Leste tandem here for the lessons

By CUI JIA
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Although FXL Alianca and Dos Santos Mariana from Timor-Leste only managed to score seven points in their beach volleyball match against a Chinese pair on Wednesday night, they're proud to be the sport's first two female players in their country.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL "We know we have no chance of winning; we are here to learn," the 27-year-old Alianca said of the tandem that trained four months for their international debut at the Asian Games.

She said having the opportunity to participate in the international tournament is reward enough for Timor-Leste's only female beach volleyballers.

"We don't care about the result, we treasure every game," she said.

To fulfill her dream of competing internationally, Alianca, a former amateur volleyball player, decided to give the beach version a go just four months ago.

"Although our performance is very poor, I am glad we made the first step," she said.

"It is our second game of the tournament but I am still not used to wearing a bikini. In Timor-Leste, women are not allowed to expose their bodies in public, so we always wear trousers and a long-sleeved shirt during the training."

She added that it was also the first time their coach has seen them wearing bikinis.

The Chinese duo of Huang Ying and Yue Yuan said their Timor-Leste opponents deserve respect, despite being beaten within 15 minutes.

"I respect them from the bottom of my heart because they tried their best," said Yue.

Not surprisingly, Timor-Leste's only male beach volleyball pair also lost to China's defending gold medalists in the morning.



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Huang Ying (right) and Yue Yuan in action on Wednesday.



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Ali Ahmad Fazel of Afghanistan plays his shot in the first round at the 16th Asian Games on Wednesday. Fazel fired an incredible 58 over par 130 on the opening day, a score he considered 'a good performance'.

Afghan golfer not planning on burying head in the sand

DESPITE SHOOTING 58 OVER PAR, ENTHUSIASTIC NOVICE ANXIOUS TO KEEP PLAYING

By ZHANG YUCHEN
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — While the rest of the world's golfers get to swing their clubs on lush green lawns, Afghans have to do so in the sand.

So when the country finally made its international debut at the golf tournament of the Guangzhou Asian Games, its players were happy just to have an opportunity to compete on a top-quality 1,600-hectare course in China.

Afghanistan's war-torn capital of Kabul only has one golf course, a nine-hole affair close to the home of Fazel's teammate, 20-year-old Hashmatullah Sarwaree.

The course is covered by black sand instead of turf, and has fairways made of a mixture of sand

and oil. There are no water traps, no trees and only one tee.

"I found the course I was playing today was far more difficult than the one I played on in Kabul," said Ali Ahmad Fazel, 19, after the first day of competition at the Dragon Lake Golf Course on Wednesday.

"The ball runs faster so I have to be more accurate."

"But I really enjoyed the course," added Fazel, the son of an amateur golfer.

Sarwaree said there were no let-ups throughout the day's play. "It was difficult and each hole was very hard," he said.

Their scores reflected their difficulties.

Fazel ended the day 58 over par to rank at the bottom of the table. Sarwaree was two spots ahead of him at 36 over, with Mongolia's Bayarkhuu Yanjiv in between.

Miguel Luis Tabuena of the

Philippines topped the leaderboard after shooting a four-under 68.

Golf was introduced to Afghanistan 40 years ago, but it was not until 2004 that the public was allowed to play. Now there are around 50 golfers in the country, according to coach Mohammad Jama Hekmati.

He expects the sport to blossom there now that it has a foundation, but knows that development and financing will take time.

Afghanistan only set up its golf federation two-and-a-half years ago, and Hekmati represents half of the country's full-time pro golf coaches.

"It's not a game that belongs just to the wealthy," said the 30-year-old, who began playing eight years ago. He returned to home last year after spending time in Iran.

Now he hopes the exposure the

team is getting in Guangzhou will help water its roots back in the deserts of Afghanistan.

"The 16th Asian Games is a great chance for us to let more people in my country know about the game and grow to like it," he said.

"We have a team of 12 members in the federation who look forward to sending our golfers overseas to learn professional techniques. Now we are more focused on improving their training and the conditions in which they compete."

Fazel said the hardships he has endured have not dampened his desire to kick-start his career and become a pro.

"I am learning English and preparing for the university entrance examination next year," he said.

"I have five brothers, and two of them are playing golf like me. I can't tell if I'm turning professional in five or 10 years, but I will work to build my way there."