

China key to cricket's growth

ACC BOSS SAYS GAME NEEDS WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS NATION TO SOW SEEDS OF FUTURE GROWTH

By CUI JIA
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Cricket cannot be regarded as a global sport if China doesn't embrace the game, said the chief of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

"China's debut at the (Asiad) means a lot to us. Without its involvement, cricket simply cannot be classified as an international sport," Syed Ashraf Huq, chief executive officer of the ACC, told China Daily on Thursday.

Huq said the Chinese women's cricket team advancing to the quarterfinals in its first international appearance was hugely important to his organization.

"China's cricket is on the right track now and our hard work has paid off," he said.

Huq can now sit back and enjoy the event's first cricket tournament after his mission to save the sport from the axe at the next Asian Games in Incheon, the Republic of Korea, has also been accomplished.

The Asian Olympic Committee decided to cut non-Olympic sports from 14 to seven after the Guangzhou Asian Games.

Huq was disappointed that cricket was omitted from the list of events proposed for the Incheon Games due to the host's concerns about costs.

"What they don't understand is that cricket could add value to the Asian Games commercially. As the No 1 sport in many countries like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh,



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China's Wang Meng (right) looks up after skying a shot during the team's semifinal against Bangladesh on Thursday. Bangladesh won by a massive nine wickets to advance to the final against Pakistan.

and non-Asian countries including England and Australia, the organizers could have made a fortune simply by selling broadcasting rights," Huq said. "The sport could add 20 to 25 percent financial value to the Games."

He also said cricket at the Asian Games needs to become internationally recognized and that joining the Olympics would be the icing on the cake.

Huq continued that the women

players were blossoming at the games.

"Some of the players are from remote villages and have little funding, but you can see their passion for cricket when they play," he said. Cricket is a relatively acceptable sport for women in Muslim countries because the players are covered and there is no body contact, he said.

Huq was also glad to see that Chinese fans were developing a

growing appreciation of the sport thanks to the Asian Games and the volunteers working at the stadium.

"They (Chinese) knew absolutely nothing about the sport before the games, but look at them now, they know the rules, they can even comment on the matches," he said.

Although the Chinese women's team lost to Bangladesh, the No 2 seed, in Thursday's semifinal,



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CHIEF OF THE ASIAN CRICKET COUNCIL

it seems efforts to fill the venue have worked. The occupancy rate for the China-Bangladesh match at Guangdong Cricket Stadium reached 80 percent compared to just above 20 percent at China's previous game.

China still has a chance to win bronze on Friday, when it takes on Japan.

Pakistan and Bangladesh will fight it out for the first Asian Games cricket gold medal.

Improving China starstruck by MLB's Choo

By YU YILEI
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — In the wake of Thursday's 7-2 loss to the Republic of Korea, members of China's baseball squad admitted they were somewhat in awe of Choo Shin-soo, the ROK's star player from Major League Baseball's Cleveland Indians.

China kept it close early, trailing 2-1 after two innings, but Choo's solo homer in the bottom of the third opened the floodgates as the ROK cruised to a berth in the gold medal final of the Asia Games tournament.

"We had a special plan to contain Choo before the game," said China left fielder Wang Chao, who formerly played for the Seattle Mariners. "But his homerun broke open the game."

China's team leader Shen Wei said Choo made a great swing to hit the ball out of the park.

"I think it was a very difficult hit because the pitch was very low," said Shen. "Not many hitters would swing at a pitch like that. He simply proved his star power."

Shen said he was happy with China's performance, considering the depth of the ROK team.

The majority of the Korean players were members of the gold medal-winning team at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and the silver-winning squad at the 2009 World Baseball Classic.

"I think we put up a decent fight today. This ROK team is stronger than the one that won at the Olympic Games two years ago," added Shen.

China will take on Japan in the bronze medal game on Saturday, while defending champion Chinese Taipei will square off with the ROK for gold.

"We have made some progress.

We have better defense and better players and we are getting stronger. We probably can get the bronze," said Thomas James Lawless, China's American manager.

Lawless said he hopes China can catch up with its Asian neighbors in the long term and give the sport a higher profile in the nation — especially at the grassroots level.

The former MLB player, remembered for his dramatic game-winning home run for the St. Louis Cardinals in Game 4 of the 1987 World Series, took over the helm of the Chinese team just a month ago.

"We gained some knowledge from the US, but we need younger kids to play baseball. We have to tell them what baseball is and how baseball could be. The Chinese should start playing baseball from a younger age," said Lawless.

"I hope we can become as good as the three Asian powerhouses (Japan, ROK and Chinese Taipei) in the future."

His players are similarly upbeat. "China is always considered No 4 in Asian baseball behind Japan, the ROK and Chinese Taipei. I think we can elevate ourselves this time in Guangzhou," Wang said.