

# Heading in the right direction

## JAPANESE TACTICS RESULT IN FIRST GOLD MEDAL AS DPRK RUNS OUT OF STEAM

By QIU QUANLIN  
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — The coach of the Japanese women's soccer team said brains beat brawn as his side won the gold medal against defending champion, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), at Tianhe Stadium on Monday.

Japan's Iwashimizu Azusa's header in the 74th minute ended the DPRK's hopes of winning a third consecutive gold medal at the Asian Games.

"China and the DPRK players are physically stronger. That's why we had to play with very careful tactics on the field," coach Sasaki Norio said after the 1-0 triumph.

"Besides China, the DPRK and Korea, we will also face physically stronger teams from Europe and the United States in the future," he said.

"Having that in mind, we need to intensify our preparations for the Olympic qualifiers and the World Cup."

Aya Miyama, Japan's captain, also said a strong mental approach helped her side to victory.

"Four years ago, we lost to the DPRK in the Asian Games final. Now we are here, we are four years older, and we have better mentality. Luck is also involved," Miyama said.

Meanwhile, the DPRK's head coach, Kim Kwang-min, put his team's loss down to a lack of fitness.

"The final match (of a tournament) is usually the most difficult. The main reason we lost this match was that we lacked energy," Kim said.

"Most of our players are young and they didn't have enough experience to deal with such an important game and they were not in the best physical form," Kim said.

"They have never gone through a match like this. However, I think losing this match is a good experience for the players."

According to the coach, the DPRK's leader, Kim Jong-il, was disappointed after being informed of the result.

"The leader of the DPRK loves all women's sports. He takes good care of my players and looks at my players as if they are his daughters. I'm sorry that he couldn't see their



Sawa Homare of Japan (right) and Jon Myong-jwa of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea fight for the ball in the final of the women's soccer competition on Monday.

great efforts rewarded," Kim said. Before the Guangzhou Asian Games, Japan had finished with a medal at every women's soccer tournament at the Asiad, but never gold.

In reply to a question about the

difference between China, Japan, the DPRK and Korea, the semifinalists at these games, Sasaki said little separated the sides.

"Each of the four teams had the potential to win the gold at this tournament ... they clearly are

Asia's best," he said.

Sasaki also said there was plenty of room for his team to improve leading into qualifying matches for the London Olympic Games in 2012 and next year's Women's World Cup in Germany.

## Women's coach vows to stay on

By TANG ZHE  
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Though rumors persist that the Chinese Football Association (CFA) will replace all three

national coaches, Li Xiaopeng, head coach of China's women's soccer team, has expressed his determination to stay on.

"I won't leave the team rashly, because this is a promising squad," Li said after China lost 2-0 to Korea in the bronze medal match. "If there is no hope, I will leave voluntarily."

The 35-year-old coach, who was appointed in early August, missed his target of at least achieving a medal in the Asian Games, but insisted that the three-month tenure was too short for him to give the team a dramatic makeover.

"My team and I are both very young; we played well in the recent matches, but also paid the price," said Li.

"In the past three months, our team made changes in attacking from the back to midfield. To enhance the attacking rhythm from the center going forward, we need at least half a year."

China fell behind in the first minute of the game, which drove the match in the opposite direction of Li's plan.

"I focused a lot on attacking, so I only thought about our opponent's counterattack and didn't expect them to control the game so well," Li said.

"Because of the wrong tactic, we gave up a goal at the very beginning and I'm responsible for that silly mistake."

Li admitted his team was not strong enough and didn't play the best, but he said there's also big room for improvement.

"When you're climbing a hill, it's very common that sometimes you have to stop, sometimes you have to slip, before finally climbing up to the top," said Li.

"We have gifted players and I have to prove they are capable."

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