



Chinese sailing weaning new stars

► Passionate, fast-learning youngsters are working hard to become pros

By Guo Xin AND HUANG YANHONG

QINGDAO: While top sailors from all over the world compete to reach their Olympic dreams on Fushan Bay in Qingdao, local youngsters are working hard to become one of them in the future.

The boys and girls, mostly elementary and middle school students, spent almost all their school vacation at a summer camp to learn theories and practice sailing skills.

Zhang Lu, an 11-year-old girl, won third place in her age group at last year's Qingdao Aquatic Sports Youth Sailing Competition, an amazing performance since at the time she had only trained for two months.

"As she ranked in the top three after only two months, I must say Zhang Lu has a really good talent for sailing," her coach Liu Yuanyuan told China Daily.

In the beginning Zhang learned sailing just for fun, but quickly found it rewarding. Others saw a change in her.

I have a strong interest in sailing and I do hope someday I can become a professional and participate in the Olympics.

ZHANG LU
11-year-old sailor

"She has become more outgoing and quick-minded," said Liu.

Zhang is determined to develop into a star sailor one day.

"I have a strong interest in sailing and I do hope someday

I can become a professional and participate in the Olympics," said Zhang.

Twelve-year-old Huang Shihao, who is on the same team as Zhang, said "it's so great — just like flying".

"I watch international sailing competitions on TV. My favorite event is Yngling. I dream of being one of the top sailing athletes," said Huang.

There are many other youngsters who have developed a passion for sailing in Qingdao. They study sailing at school and practice at sea over summer vacation. Many have turned in excellent performances, with some chosen by the Shandong Sailing Team, soon to begin their careers as

sailing athletes.

In July each year, 10 outstanding young sailors go to Kiel, a coastal city in northern Germany, famous for its long seafaring history, to learn from German sailors.

Over the past three years the Qingdao Municipal Government has worked hard to promote sailing among youngsters. Forty-two schools now offer courses in sailing, while 80 yacht clubs have sprung up for elementary and middle school students. There are more than 2,000 young sailing enthusiasts in Qingdao, Liu said.

"The seas of Qingdao will be the birthplace of famous Chinese sailors," Liu said.



More than 1,000 pupils sail OP boats in training in Qingdao. By Ju Chenghao



Breaking the waves
Sailors of the women's 470 round the mark. Today they have a rest day.

Ju Chuanjiang

Couple competes for different nations

By Zhao Ruixue

QINGDAO: They are a couple, but they represent different countries at the Olympic sailing competition in Qingdao.

Irina Konstantinova Bontemps, the only athlete representing Bulgaria in women's windsurfing, is clear — and relatively modest — about her aims.

"I am giving my best to move into the medal race. I would like to finish in the top 10."

Her husband Julien Bontemps of France is more ambitious.

"I am reasonably prepared after more than a year's training in France. I am also mentally strong and I always keep the stress low and motivation high. I can manage the board well, so I have my chances," Julien said.

"My aim is to win a medal," he added.

Even with her own competitive stress, Irina is considerate of her husband. "I don't want to put pressure on my husband

because he has already had enough pressure due to people's high expectation of him. I just wish him the best."

Julien won the Mistral World Championship in 2004 in Turkey and took the bronze medal at the Qingdao International Regatta last year.

He is currently ranked fourth after four races in Qingdao. Irina ranks 12th.

The couple will compete in their fifth and sixth races today.

The two met at the European Championship in 2002 and four years later windsurfing helped them tie the knot.

"It is a big part of our life. We both love our sport and it is no wonder that we have met during a competition. We are both crazy about windsurfing," said Irina.

Though she is the only competitor from Bulgaria in Qingdao, Irina doesn't feel lonely and homesick but happy and lucky.

"I'm lucky to be with Julien at these Games to share all the experiences."

Different cultural backgrounds usually result in fun for the couple.

"We laugh a lot because of the differences in cultures."

Their happiness is apparent when Irina talks about her husband. "If we have conflict, we try to find solution and often we finish laughing, because Julien has a great sense of humor," she said.

But as Olympic competitors, they have to contribute much of their time to training and competition rather than being together.

"Because the team is a group, it is important to stay with my colleagues. We have to focus on competition," Julien said.

He is quite sure that he will continue the fight in the next Olympics, but Irina is wavering.

"We have to see how it goes. I have to find a job. I quit my job a year ago, and now everything is changing. It will be difficult for me to be competitive again in my job. It is also like a competition."



The men's 470 fleet compete in tight races. Today they have a rest day. Ju Chuanjiang

Fair days for meteorological system

By Huang Yanhong

QINGDAO: Athletes and coaches say they are impressed with the weather services provided by the Qingdao Meteorological Bureau over the five days since the Olympic sailing competition began.

Precise weather information can be obtained at any time.

Data is updated every 10 minutes and released over radio, television, mobile phones and other media in both Chinese and English.

According to Wang Xiaoyun, director-general of Qingdao Meteorological Bureau, the comprehensive forecasting system for the Olympic sailing event has reached the world's top level.

Wang said the system is three-dimensional using satellites, weather radar and the latest sea monitoring and land observational equipment.

The Qingdao Meteorological Bureau now has 143 automated meteorological stations providing data every minute.

Its new-generation radar can scan a radius of 230 km every six minutes, greatly increasing its capability in short-range forecasting, especially in the event of disastrous weather such as typhoons, heavy rains and hail.

The system was tested as it provided hydro-meteorological data for the 2006 and 2007 Qingdao international sailing regattas.

The system is now providing

real time and forecast information on wind speed, visibility, tides and wave heights.

More than 70 experts work directly at the Olympic weather service, including those from the National Meteorological Center and bureaus from Shanghai, Beijing, Shandong and Anhui.

The Qingdao Meteorological Bureau is also linked through advanced telecommunication systems with the Olympics meteorological offices in Beijing and Shanghai and other cities.

According to Lin Hang, head of the Qingdao Hydro-Meteorological Service Center for the Olympic sailing competition, high precision has been achieved in calculating wind speed and forecasting complex weather.

Defending champion Ainslie extends Finn lead

QINGDAO: Defending Finn champion Ben Ainslie, chasing a third successive Olympic gold, extended his narrow advantage over nearest pursuer Zach Railey to six points on a truncated day at the Olympic regatta on Wednesday.

Light winds on a hazy afternoon in Qingdao meant just one

of the two scheduled Finn races were completed.

The Yngling, Laser and Laser Radial classes also only managed just one race, although a full programme was completed in the 49er and 470 fleets.

Ainslie, like the rest of the fleet, was left frustrated as race officials waited in vain for the breeze to pick up in late afternoon.

"We left the dock at 11am so it's been a good six hours on the water," a weary Ainslie said on returning to dry land.

He leads American Railey by six points with three races to

complete of the 10 in the series before Saturday's medal race. Two are scheduled for Thursday with organizers set to rule if Wednesday's postponed eighth race will be staged.

The Briton, gold medal winner in the Laser in 2000 before taking the Finn title in Athens four years ago, finished second with Railey seventh behind Croatia's Ivan Kljakovic Gaspic on Wednesday.

"It could have been a lot worse. In those conditions anything could have happened, but I'm relieved to have come away with a good result," Ainslie said.

"A six-point lead is really nothing in these conditions... so still a long way to go."

Railey was also relieved to maintain his pursuit of Ainslie after a "disastrous first downwind" leg left him struggling in mid-division.

"I feel really fortunate to get seventh," he said. "It all went wrong."

The British and Dutch Yngling teams continued their battle for gold with five points separating them after seven races.

Britain's Sarah Ayton, Sarah Webb and Pippa Wilson hold the

advantage after a second place on Wednesday, two places better than Mandy Mulder, Annemieke Bes and Merel Witteveen.

Australia's Nathan Wilmot and Malcolm Page extended their lead in the men's 470 to seven points over France's Nicolas Charbonnier and Olivier Bausset.

The Australian triple world champions, only 12th at Athens, have not won a race in Qingdao but been remarkably consistent with a worst finish of seventh in the six races to date.



Ben Ainslie of Britain sails in Finn class before the seventh race of the sailing competition at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games in Qingdao yesterday. Reuters

Agencies