

TEAM CHINA BOUND FOR LONDON

We're not in Beijing anymore

China has named a strong delegation for the London Games, but **China Daily** tells you why not to expect a repeat of 2008.

Despite an expected decline from Beijing 2008, China remains a legitimate favorite to finish high on the medal table again at the London Olympics. After topping the last Games with a massive haul of 51 gold, 21 silver and 28 bronze medals, China has a large target on its back in London and is highly unlikely to repeat that feat on foreign soil and waters. Still, the Asian powerhouse has vowed to finish in the top three after expanding its prowess beyond its traditional strengths like table tennis, badminton and diving. World-class performances from hurdler Liu Xiang, who recently tied the world record (in a tailwind), and long-distance swimmer Sun Yang have shown China's ability to win medals in more mainstream events.

A group of tennis players, led by the nation's first Grand Slam winner, Li Na, is set to challenge for medals in the singles and doubles events at the All-England Club.

Meanwhile, some of the events in which

the country isn't quite as dominant, such as fencing, judo and taekwondo, could provide surprise successes as long as the athletes perform up to their capabilities.

In a best-case scenario, China could finish

the Games with at least 35 gold medals and finish close to the United States.

Senior Chinese sports officials are confident the country will do well in London, but admit it will be hard to crack the

40-gold barrier.

"In the gold-medal rankings, China will for sure end in the top two," said Wei Jizhong, former secretary-general of the Chinese Olympic Committee. "Compared with our main rival, the United States, we will face less competition in our strongest events."

Jiang Xiaoyu, former vice-president of the Beijing Olympic organizing committee, said any country that bags more than 40 titles would top the table.

"If a country wins more than 40 golds, it must be No. 1," he said. "But it will be hard for China to do that. Finishing in the top three should be the goal ... the higher the better."

Former deputy sports minister Cui Dalin said, "China has considerable strength in

many fields, but it will face strong challenges without its host status. It's not an easy job."

Although Liu and Sun are expected to steal the spotlight in high-profile events at the Games, China's success will boil down to its traditional medal-rich sports — table tennis, badminton, diving, shooting and gymnastics, as well as weightlifting.

The six sports provided 36 of China's 51 gold medals in Beijing and have produced 123 of its 163 titles since the country's Olympic debut in 1984.

Boasting almost every international title over the past two years, the Chinese table tennis, badminton and diving teams are poised to sweep and lead the nation's gold hunt again.

★ denotes medal chance

GYMNASTICS

A handful of gold is still disappointing

Of the "Big Six", the gymnastics team seems most likely to take a tumble following the retirement of several veterans and a lack of multi-talented performers

With the retirements of all-rounders Yang Wei and Li Xiaopeng, the male squad will struggle to handle rising Japan while the women's side also suffered a blow when former leader Cheng Fei crashed out of the team with an injury last month.

China will try to retain its men's and women's team crowns, but can realistically expect to compete for four or five titles this time, about half the nine golds it mined in Beijing.

RESULTS AT PREVIOUS OLYMPICS

2004 Athens Games: 1 gold medal (men's pommel horse)

2008 Beijing Games: 9 gold medals (men's team, individual all-round, floor, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars and horizontal bar, women's team and uneven bars)

China Daily's gold-medal projection for London: 4 gold medals

ROSTER

Men: ★Chen Yibing (main picture), ★Zou Kai, Teng Haibin, Zhang Chenglong, ★Feng Zhe

Women: Deng Linlin, He Kexin, Huang Qiushuang, ★Sui Lu, ★Yao Jinnan

STARS TO WATCH

CHEN YIBING, 27

Birthplace: Tianjin

Highlights: Four-time World Championships team and rings titles (2006, 2007, 2010, 2011)

Two-time Olympic champion (2008 Beijing Games team and rings titles)

Dubbed the "Prince of Rings", Chen will have to shoulder more responsibilities for the young team after veterans Yang Wei and Li Xiaopeng retired in 2008. He will at least claim a gold in his favorite event, the rings.

YAO JINNAN, 17

Birthplace: Fuzhou, Fujian province

Highlights: Two-time floor, balance beam and uneven bar champion in the World Cup series the last two years (in 2011 in Cottbus and Doha, and 2012 in Zibo)

A rare all-rounder on the women's roster, Yao will lead the multi-talented contingent to face the strong United States and Russian squads at the team event while also looking for podium finishes in individual categories.



DIVING

Expectations, medal count will be high

China's formidable diving squad swept all eight titles at last year's Shanghai World Championships, and it will be desperate to go one better than in 2008, when it missed out on gold in the men's 10m platform and finished with seven golds.

Although host diver Thomas Daley boasts high-difficulty routines and home support, world champion Qiu Bo, dubbed the "Consistency King", should be up for the challenge.

Still, team manager Zhou Jihong remains cautious.

"Our winning streak may lead to complacency and make us neglect our weaknesses. It is quite a challenge, actually," Zhou said.

RESULTS AT PREVIOUS OLYMPICS

2004 Athens Games: 6 gold medals (men's and women's 3m board, men's 10m platform, women's 3m synchro board, men's and women's 10m synchro platform)

2008 Beijing Games: 7 gold medals (all except the men's 10m platform)

China Daily's gold-medal projection for London: 7 gold medals (all except the men's 10m platform)

ROSTER

Men: ★Cao Yuan, ★He Chong, ★Lin Yue, ★Luo Yutong, ★Qin Kai, ★Qiu Bo, ★Zhang Yanquan

Women: ★He Zi, ★Hu Yadan, ★Wang Hao, ★Wu Minxia, ★Chen Ruolin

STARS TO WATCH

WU MINXIA, 26



Birthplace: Shanghai

Highlights: 2004 and 2008 Olympic 3m springboard synchro champion

Five-time World Championships 3m springboard synchro titles

Wu had the misfortune of sharing the spotlight with retired "Diving Queen" Guo Jingjing. Wu regularly finished major events as the runner-up to Guo. She expects to win her first Olympic individual title at what might be her last Games.

QIU BO, 19

Birthplace: Neijiang, Sichuan province

Highlights: 2011 World Championships 10m platform individual and synchro titles

Boasting consistency in difficult routines, Qiu has been the best contender on the men's roster to handle tough challenges on the high platform, which is arguably China's only weakness. His solid performances in recent years have proved his caliber.



TRAMPOLINE

What's left after you've won everything?

Trampoline was included in the Olympic Games at the 2000 Sydney Games. China has already managed to become a dominant nation since then. It convincingly swept the two gold medals at stake on home soil. With returning veteran Huang Shanshan, who won a bronze medal at the Sydney Games, China is looking forward to a gold-medal sweep once again.



RESULTS AT PREVIOUS OLYMPICS

2004 Athens Games: 1 bronze medal (women's)

2008 Beijing Games: 2 gold medals (men's and women's)

China Daily's gold-medal projection in London: 1 gold medal

ROSTER

Men: ★Dong Dong, ★Lu Chunlong

Women: ★Huang Shanshan, ★He Wenna (left)

STAR TO WATCH

HE WENNA, 23

Birthplace: Longyan, Fujian province

Highlight: 3 World Championships team titles (2007, 2009, 2011)

Olympic champion (2008 Beijing Games)

She shot to fame at the 2008 Beijing Games when she outshone a talented field to take the coveted title. Although struggling through a form slump, she is still the one to watch in London.