



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Table tennis player Zhang Jike says his new uniform, produced by Li-Ning, gives him an edge. "It feels like the shirt can breath with me," he said. "I believe it has an impact on the game."

When dress does lead to success

Sportswear makers try to cash in on Olympic publicity with high-tech gear

By SUN XIAOCHEN

in London
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

Sometimes, the clothes really do make the man. Or the woman, as the case may be.

With elite athletes pushing their bodies to the physical limit, any tiny edge in equipment — things like lighter shoes and more breathable uniforms — can make just enough of a difference in the final outcome.

Technology has been playing an ever-larger role as athletes look to enhance their performance while earning money from sportswear producers.

The biggest sporting event on the planet, the Olympic Games provide a stage for sportswear suppliers to show off their latest innovations.

Li-Ning, one of China's leading sportswear brands, will provide gear for Chinese athletes competing in diving, gymnastics, badminton, table tennis and shooting in London. Those five teams won 28 of China's 51 gold medals in Beijing.

As part of the partnership, Li-Ning created new uniforms — known as "dragon shirts" — before the Games.

Inspired by the Year of the Dragon,

Li-Ning introduced a "scarlet scales" concept into the uniform design, which features scale-shaped vents at the back to provide optimum airflow.

These breathable vents adapt to athletes' movements. During intense moments of a competition, the vents provide air to the athlete by opening. In low intensity periods, the vents close to keep the athlete warm.

World champion table tennis player Zhang Jike hailed the uniform as his secret weapon.

"It feels like the shirt can breathe with me," said Zhang, the favorite for the men's singles title in London. "It allows more cool airflow in and makes me feel more comfortable. I believe it has an impact on the game."

The dragon elements were included in hopes of inspiring national pride.

"The dragon image represents Chinese culture, and the uniforms embody modern technology," said Jian Jie, director of Li-Ning's Olympic design crew.

"We hope our products will motivate our athletes with the dragon elements while helping them be higher, faster and stronger."

Li-Ning's new collection of Olympic equipment also includes rackets for the badminton team, which hopes to

improve on the three gold medals it won in London.

To match defending Olympic champion Lin Dan's aggressive style, which features heavy smashes, Li-Ning elevated the balance point of his racket, weighting its head while lightening its shaft.

There's also a special racket for women's world No 2 Wang Xin.

Wang's racket features an elastic shaft and a lighter weight to help her produce fast swings with precision during the offense-defense switch.

"I think this is the best racket I've ever used because it fits me better," Wang said after winning the Uber Cup (the women's team world champion title) in May. "It helps enhance my speed and quick response."

In 2008, Li-Ning's sales revenue jumped 53.8 percent to 6.69 billion yuan (\$1.05 billion), and that pace continued until 2010, peaking at 9.48 billion yuan to rank second only to Nike in China.

Li Ning, the gymnastics legend and founder of the brand, attributed the growth to the Olympics.

"Our group has successfully seized the opportunity (provided by the Beijing Games) to promote our integrated marketing strategy, which contributed a lot to our international image. So we definitely expect to do it again in London," he said.

Meanwhile, international giants like Nike and adidas continue to fight for



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The new Nike uniforms are produced with environmentally friendly materials derived from recycled bottles.

their own share of the pie.

Nike unveiled uniforms for Chinese athletes competing in basketball, track and field, tennis, weightlifting, wrestling, archery and beach volleyball.

"Nike has been bringing innovations to Chinese athletes since 1984. These new products can help athletes unlock their potential and perform at their best," said Craig Cheek, who is the vice-president and general man-

ager of Nike China.

China's Olympic champion hurdler Liu Xiang, who wore a Nike suit during three consecutive wins at the IAAF Diamond League meets, credited part of his performance to the gear.

"That was the first time I've worn such a compressed yet comfortable uniform. By offering aerodynamic drag reduction, it helps me do much better," he said.

The uniforms were produced with environmentally friendly materials derived from recycled bottles.

"The new uniform and shoes are lighter and more breathable. I also really appreciate the commitment to protecting the environment," said Yi Jianlian, a forward on the national basketball team.

Adidas, the official sportswear partner of the host British team, will supply more than 900 British athletes with about 175,000 items of apparel.

Adidas is also endorsing some top Chinese athletes, including reigning Olympic champion boxer Zou Shiming and basketball players Sun Yue and Wang Zhizhi.

"This is still an era in which sports brands have huge resources," said Ren Hai, professor at Beijing Sport University.

"An opportunity, such as the Olympics, will be taken by others if you don't bid for it. So, any company with enough strength will try to get involved."

briefly

ATHLETICS

Coe confirms run for IAAF presidency

Sebastian Coe wants to become president of track and field's governing body.

Coe told the Times of London he will run for the top job of the International Association of Athletics Federations in 2015.

"I'm ready. I know how to do this," he said.

Coe is head of London's Olympic organizing committee and a two-time Olympic gold medalist in the 1,500m.

He is already an IAAF vice-president. IAAF president Lamine Diack's term expires in three years.

"We have a great president in the post, so it would be when he stands down," Coe said.

CYCLING

Merckx leads peloton to London

Belgium launched a fitting promotion for its presence at the London Olympics on Wednesday, sending a delegation of its sporting personalities to London by bicycle.

Former Tour de France champion Eddy Merckx is leading 24 cyclists, including former Belgian sports personalities and celebrities, on a three-day route to London.

"We promote cycling, and we want to go biking to London," Merckx said on the sidelines of a news conference in Brussels.

Cycling is one of Belgium's national sports and Merckx, who won the Tour de France five times, is a highly regarded figure in the country and has an underground station named after him in Brussels.

OPENING CEREMONY

Will plan speed up athletes' march?

Olympic organizers have a plan for speeding up the march of athletes during Friday's opening ceremony. Just don't ask what it is.

IOC executive director Gilbert Felli said Tuesday there will be "some device to try to accelerate the march" by thousands of athletes in the Olympic Stadium.

Felli confirmed that part of the plan involves playing faster music, but wouldn't give away anything else.

"It's part of the show so I'm not going to tell you," he said.

Earlier, IOC member Dick Pound asked London organizing chief Sebastian Coe what was being done to deal with the potential "shambles" of athletes holding up the march by taking pictures and tweeting on their phones.

DOPING

Positive retests were known substances

Five suspect doping samples from the Athens 2004 Olympics that were discovered during re-testing in July involve substances that were known at the time, the International Olympic Committee said on Wednesday.

The IOC said it stumbled across the adverse analytical findings during re-testing, not for substances like the blood boosting CERA that became known a few years later, but for substances that drugs testers were already aware of and testing for at the time.

"There was no information that any substance would have been in use that was not already analyzed," IOC Medical Commission chief Arne Ljungqvist told an IOC meeting.

AP-AFP-REUTERS

Organizers brace for social media nightmares sure to come

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

in Paris

The London Olympics are set to be liked, tweeted, pinned and shared with more people than ever before as athletes, fans and organizers interact online in the first social media Summer Olympics.

Sportspeople and those overseeing the event are using social networks to communicate with legions of netizens — mainly on Twitter, which has 140 million active users, and the 901-million-strong Facebook.

But the sheer scale of this relatively new medium has brought up a host of challenges for organizers and national teams.

Already athletes have been given social media bans and juicy details of the opening ceremony have leaked online.

"This is going to be absolutely huge," said Ian Maude, an Internet analyst at research group Enders Analysis.

"Pretty much every event is going to be broadcast live, streamed to the Internet and a lot of that is going to

end up being shared with friends, linked to, discussed on social media platforms — far more so than anything before."

In the four years since the Beijing Olympics, the global number of social media users has exploded, as has the amount of people with smartphones.

As such, the London event will generate unprecedented scrutiny — a fact that the International Olympic Committee is capitalizing on with initiatives, such as a social media hub that links Internet users with athletes.

Olympians themselves are commenting online in real time on their social media pages, allowing regular netizens to get an insight into their lives — and sometimes characters — in a way that was not previously possible.

US hurdler Lolo Jones, for instance, is huge on Twitter thanks to a mix of funny comments, interaction with her 168,500-plus followers and juicy announcements — such as her revelation that she is a virgin.

"Sports fans are behaving in a new

way — they are increasingly using social media to follow sport," said Charlotte Lesage, spokeswoman for Synthesio, a social media monitoring firm.

"It brings a certain proximity to and intimacy with the athlete."

But the very public medium has its flipside and athletes have already blundered.

Australian swimmers Nick D'Arcy and Kenrick Monk have been slapped with a one-month social media ban by their country's delegation after they posted photos of themselves posing with guns while training in the United States.

The pair will be sent home right after their events at the Games, with the Australian Olympic Committee ruling "their conduct brought themselves into disrepute."

Swimming star Michael Phelps also caused a stir when he criticized the new Olympics swimming cap on his social media account.

US hurdler Kerron Clement, meanwhile, got more than he bargained for when his tweet complaining that it took hours to get to his



CUI MENG / CHINA DAILY

The IOC has already set some social media rules for Olympic athletes, including banning them from promoting non-official brands for one month.

London living quarters from the airport went viral.

"Athletes are sleepy, hungry and need to pee," he complained on July 16.

Darryl Seibel, spokesman for Team GB, conceded that communication blunders may be made during the Games, adding that while athletes had for the first time been briefed about social media, they had

not been given do's and don'ts.

"We're taking a fairly liberated approach, with the full knowledge that it will be imperfect, there will be some bumps and bruises along the way. But, generally speaking, we think it will be positive," he said.

For organizers, too, social media has caused a headache.

Details and photos of the opening ceremony were leaked online after

the show's technical rehearsal Monday, despite director Danny Boyle's plea for spectators to "save the surprise."

"Whatever your expectations are, forget them! It's beautiful," said Mims Reilly in one of the less-revealing posts.

The IOC has had to lay down some rules, partly to protect official Olympic sponsors.

Participants have been told not to promote non-official brands for one month, prompting a rush of online praise for sponsors just before the ban kicked off last week — all of which was covered by an amused press.

In one such example, Lucy Macgregor, Annie Lush and Kate Macgregor — who represent Britain in sailing — thanked a host of brands on their Facebook page before the ban began.

Overall though, organizers and sporting delegations are banking on social media to promote the Olympics like never before.

"We think it's a very powerful medium to reach new and different audiences, in particular to reach young people," Seibel said. "And, of course, the long-term growth and health of the Olympic movement is contingent in part on our ability to reach out to young people."