

# Husband, coach, punching bag

Perhaps Jiang Shan's most important role is corralling wife Li Na's infamously volatile temper, **Sun Xiaochen** reports in London.

**W**hat has led to Chinese tennis ace Li Na's success?

An inherent gift? Her escape from the State-run system? An international agent?

All of the above contributed. But the main reason is her husband and coach, Jiang Shan, a low-profile man who has been training Li on and off the court for more than 10 years, while accepting all that comes with her — good, bad and sometimes ugly.

Their relationship budded in 1995, when they played on the Hubei provincial team. They married in 2006.

Jiang gave up his aspirations of becoming a professional player and started to coach Li in 2004.

He has also served as a shock absorber for Li's notoriously ferocious temper, which usually flares in close rallies and results in emotional meltdowns.

The good-natured Jiang is the yin for Li's yang. She sometimes calls her husband-cum-coach onto the court during match breaks to cathartically release her fury.

The public has seen this often on TV.

In the semifinals of this year's Sydney International WTA Premier tournament, Li asked for guidance when she was 4-0 behind Czech Petra Kvitová in the first set but disagreed with Jiang's advice and then publicly slammed his suggestions as "nonsense" during the live broadcast.

The Hubei province native even yelled at Jiang, commanding him to leave the stand during her third-round match against Agnieszka Radwanska at the Wimbledon in 2009.

"He was talking too much, so I was annoyed," she explained, after the straight-set loss to the Pole.

Li often publicly cracks jokes at Jiang's expense.

"My husband kept snoring so I couldn't sleep well last night," Li said, blaming her first-set nerves on Jiang after winning the semis against Danish Caroline Wozniacki at the Australian Open last year.

Li also had trouble remembering their anniversary date. Just after joking about Jiang's snore, Li admitted she felt flustered when asked if that day was their fifth anniversary.

To make matters worse, Li often loses the gifts, such as jewelry, that Jiang buys her overseas.

"They just disappear easily, and I have no idea where they go," Li said, on a recent talk show.

"Maybe next time, I'll have to



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CHINA'S TENNIS ACE, ON HUSBAND  
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tape them to my neck."

But the 30-year-old knows Jiang is irreplaceable as the reason for her success.

Right after her first Grand Slam final appearance at the Australian Open last year, Li said to Jiang, in front of the media and the packed Rod Laver Arena: "Fat or skinny, handsome or ugly, I will follow you forever."

Li has even tattooed declarations of her adoration of her husband on her chest and lower back.

Jiang is notoriously shy and rarely shows affection in public. But his latest declaration moved his wife to tears.

Jiang said to Li in a video: "Every couple meets and stays together for a reason. Although I rarely say it, it's my destiny to be with you."

After her Grand Slam win at Roland Garros, Li fell into a career slump, failing to go beyond the fourth round at any major while developing a tenuous relationship with the media, who criticized her for being distracted by too much off-court work.

Things were never dandy between Li and the media, but that period marked a new low.

Jiang took care of all of her off-court affairs, including travel plans, accommodation arrangements and scouting, so she could focus on the court.

"I know it has been really tough for her to handle all that she had never imagined since last year's French Open," Jiang says.

"She must shoulder more than ever, but she works it out and hangs in there. I believe she'll fulfill more dreams and achieve better results. I definitely believe in her."

Jiang temporarily relinquished his helm to Danish coach Michael Mortensen around the French Open, but resumed his position as coach before last year's China Open.

Despite media calls for a renowned coach to replace Jiang following her lackluster performance at the WTA year-end finals, Li backed her husband.



**Top: The love between China's tennis ace Li Na and her husband and coach Jiang Shan is one of the important motivating factors in Li's career. Left: Li celebrates with Jiang after winning the gold medal with the Hubei team at the 10th National Games on Oct 11, 2005, in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. Right: Jiang gives Li instructions during a first-round match at the China Open on Oct 2, 2011. "No matter whether Jiang is a good coach or not, he knows me best," Li said.**

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It's undeniable that Mortensen contributed greatly to Li's success, but it's Jiang who deserves the credit for improving her mental game.

Meanwhile, the 32-year-old Jiang also serves as the lubricant between the rebellious Li and the governing body.

In the belief that the State-run system is too suffocating, Li temporarily retired for two years in 2002 after being banned by sports officials from managing her own career.

Jiang followed Li to study at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology and then persuaded her to return to the game in 2004 — before the governing body finally allowed her to fly alone with three other top aces in 2009 to play as a

professional player.

After that same body forced Li to play the doubles at the London Olympic, Jiang interceded between the two sides and persuaded Li to accept.

Li will see legitimate challenges after being drawn in the tough first half at the 2012 Olympics.

She will face Daniela Hantuchova in the opening round on July 28.

Li must dig hard to oust the

Slovakian, who holds a 3-2 record over Li.

If Li makes the third round, either world No 8 Wozniacki or promising Belgian star Yanina Wickmayer will be there.

And US world No 4 Serena Williams will likely be Li's opponent at the quarterfinals.

"The draw is very hard for us, and it won't be easy at the Games," China's tennis chief Sun Jinfang said at the draw release in London on July 26.

"All we can do is fight to the end for the strongest Olympic tournament. No matter who we play, we must deliver our best."

Li and three other teammates — Zheng Jie, Peng Shuai and Zhang Shuai — won't move into the Olympic Village and will instead stay in a hotel near Wimbledon.

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## offtrack ...

### INDIANS UPSET WITH UNIFORMS

Indian medal hopefuls at the London Olympics are upset with their "poor quality" kit and uniforms, a newspaper reported on Friday.

"To be honest, this is the worst kit I have seen," Indian boxer Jai Bhagwan, who is to compete in the men's lightweight (60-kg) category, was quoted as saying by the Mumbai Mirror newspaper.

"It's of poor quality, lacks durability and some of it does not even fit right. Our kit in national competitions (back home) was of much better quality," he told the paper from London.

The tabloid also said Indian hockey ace Sandeep Singh had been seen playing in ill-fitting shorts which were "bursting at the seams".

Singh later trained in an old pair of torn shorts "as a mark of protest", the Mirror reported.

### ATHLETES CAN KEEP PANTS ON

Danish soccer player Nicklas Bendtner's ambush marketing stunt will not lead to a series of checks on athletes' underwear during London 2012, a senior International Olympic Committee member insisted.

In June, Bendtner was fined by European soccer governing body, UEFA, after revealing underpants bearing the name of Irish bookmaker Paddy Power during the European Championship.

Ambush marketing, where companies who haven't paid for the privilege of sponsoring an event still try to gain free publicity on the back of a major sports tournament or match, is a problem that the senior IOC member Denis Oswald said Olympic officials were determined to combat.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

### REPORTER'S LOG | CHEN XIANGFENG

## Olympic spirit is here, but you have to look for it

Visitors in London were faced with two options on Friday: Enjoy a normal weekend of vacation, or go cheer the London Games opening ceremony.

But were all of them thrilled by the Olympic atmosphere? I doubt it.

When I walked along High Holborn Road — friends in London told me it's one of the busiest areas in town — on Friday, I found few traces of the Games in the corner of the city. It wasn't much different from when I arrived a week ago.

Some banners and flags were the only signs of the event. Even those went mostly unnoticed by passers-by, most of whom were busy reading newspapers, waiting in line for buses or talking on the phone.

"I have to go to France to do business. I did not pay much attention to the Olympics," said Italian Alessandro Monfregola, an architect living in London.

I remember four years ago in Beijing, the whole nation was embracing the opening ceremony. People got off work

earlier to go home or to bars with family or friends, enjoying the glamorous gala.

I'm not a local and thus not quite sure of the exact reasons.

Maybe some people prefer having a vacation rather than sitting in a stadium watching a show.

Maybe some care more about their savings account than entertainment, as the shrinking world economy has hit Britain hard.

Honestly, I was a bit dismayed. It's my first Olympic Games, a great sporting event that a journalist should be proud to be involved with.

Before my flight took off out of Beijing, I imagined saying hello to people all around me to celebrate the special moment.

But, with an empty stomach and heavy heart, I instead searched for some fast food.

It was an employee from Bangladesh in a small shop who finally cheered me up. She was set to be a performer for the opening ceremony.

"It's a once-in-a-life experience for

me," said a delighted Arfuman Choudhury, who began working in London 4 and 1/2 years ago.

She told me her part on Friday night was in a production called *Industrial Revolution*, featuring more than 1,000 people.

"There are Chinese in our group," she said. "Everyone is happy to be part of it." What surprised me more was that the 40-year-old watched the Beijing Games opening ceremony on TV and remained impressed by the city.

"I watched the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony part by part," she said. "It's amazing. So many people are still talking about the Beijing Games."

"But I do not want to compare. Every country wants to present their best. We should respect them."

I walked out of the shop, took a deep breath and smiled.

Yes, the Olympic spirit is always spreading. Sometimes, you just can't see it.

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