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Talented forward emerges from Yao's lengthy shadow to become the force behind an improving, young team, writes Sun Xiaochen.

Team China finds a true leader in Yi

Team China, without retired superstar Yao Ming, has found a new backbone in Yi Jianlian. With Yao starring as a guest commentator, Team China's men's basketball squad opened against Spain, who defeated China in an overtime quarterfinal match at the Beijing Olympics four years ago.

After an impressive start to the game, China lost 97-81 on Sunday, despite the superior play by Yi, who had game highs of 30 points and 12 rebounds in just 31 minutes. Yi, who played for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks last season, carried his team throughout the game.

"It's been happening over the past three years," said China head coach, Bob Donewald, of Yi's stellar play. "He's taking over the team because of his maturity. He has earned (the leadership). I don't know why he didn't play like that in Dallas. I think he's one of the best players and he showed tonight."

Facing towering brothers Pau and Marc Gasol, Yi helped China handle Spain, the 2008 silver medalist, over three periods. Spain gained its rhythm in the last quarter, crushing China's hopes of an upset with consecutive 3-pointers and an effective post-up game to seal the victory.

Los Angeles Lakers' power forward Pau Gasol led Spain with 21 points and 11 rebounds, while captain Juan Navarro and workmanlike Serge Ibaka contributed 31 points combined.

Spain's veteran guard, Jose Calderon, credited Yi for filling the big shoes left after Yao's retirement.

"The team used to revolve around Yao and now it's the same with Yi, who is a good heir," said the playmaker for the Toronto Raptors. "He can play outside or inside. He's hard to match up against and he's surrounded by good point guards and good shooters."

Former NBA swingman Rudy Fernandez, who now plays for Real Madrid, echoed his fellow countryman, saying Yi is too tough to handle alone.

"Yao used to be dominant, but Yi just came up strong (in replacing Yao). We should have put more defense on him," Fernandez said.

A close fight against the 2006 FIBA world champions serves as a confidence boost for China, which entered the tournament without high expectations.

Donewald said Spain's tough counterattack in the fourth quarter is reason for China to maintain its focus until the last second of the event.

"We lost focus in the last period. Their intensity wore on us and we succumbed to it. We have got to stay with what we do," Donewald said.

Watching his former teammates and friends, Yao praised the new team's maturity, but also said it must be more aggressive.

"What we lack is the drive to the basket. We finished our offense far away from the rim and we drew much fewer fouls than they did," Yao said.

Yi said the team is still a work in progress.

"We know we have to play together, trust each other and play hard. We are improving. We need to stay focused. We know we can win games," he said.



China's Yi Jianlian slams down a dunk during the team's game against Spain on Sunday. China lost 97-81.

CUI MENG / CHINA DAILY

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Flying start for Chinese

By REUTERS in London

China has taken a commanding early lead on the Olympic medal table after two days of action London.

The Asian powerhouse had 12 medals, six of them gold, and leads the United States, which has 11 medals (three gold).

Guo Wenjun produced a near-perfect last shot to retain her Olympic title in the women's 10 meter air pistol shooting in a topsy-turvy final of nerve-jangling action, beating out France's Celine Goberville, while Wu Minxia and He Zi took an easy gold in the women's synchronized three meter springboard diving competition with an inward 2-1/2 somersault.

On Saturday, China's Yi Siling was the first gold medalist of the Games, in the 10-meter air rifle, and compatriot Wang Mingjuan extended a 10-year unbeaten international record to win the women's 48-kg weightlifting crown.

Chinese swimmers Sun Yang and Ye Shiwen also took gold on day one, with 16-year-old Ye wiping more than a second off the world record in the women's 400m individual medley final.

Sun, who became the first Chinese man to win an Olympic swimming title when he took gold in the men's 400 freestyle, is the overwhelming favorite to win the 1,500 and is also targeting the 200, in which he recorded the fastest time in the semifinals on Sunday.

He topped all the final qualifiers and will square off against long-time South Korean rival Park Tae-hwan and American star Ryan Lochte in Tuesday's biggest event in the pool.

While the Chinese have gotten off to as flying start, the same cannot be said for the Games' organizers.

The sight of rows of vacant seats at soccer stadiums, Wimbledon, the aquatic center and has angered Britons who tried and failed to buy tickets in the build-up to the Olympics after being told they had sold out.

More empty seats were reported on Sunday including at the equestrian dressage at Greenwich Park, despite the draw of Queen Elizabeth's granddaughter Zara Phillips making her Olympic debut.

Olympic organizers launched an urgent inquiry into the seating fiasco to nail down precisely who had not taken up their places and why.

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New rules for blood donors, but concerns linger

Screening process for potential givers far from perfect, reports Yang Wanli in Beijing.

Karen has donated blood six times since she was a college student in 2006, despite the fact that as a lesbian she was banned from doing so until an amendment to the blood donor health

requirements came into effect on July 1.

"I'm healthy. Sexual orientation has no relation to blood safety, it just depends on whether you engage in risky behavior or not," said the 26-year-old.

Common Language, a community-based support and rights group for lesbian, bisexual women and people who are transgender, conducted a survey in 2008 of 21 lesbians and bisexuals. The result showed that all the interview-

ees had donated blood and 14 of them had donated more than twice. Two were initially refused as donors when they revealed their sexual orientation but when they went to other centers and kept quiet about their sexuality they were

both accepted as donors.

The survey also found that the blood of only one of the 21 donors could not be used and that was because of tuberculosis.

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