

The time is now for Zhao

By CHEN XIANGFENG
in London
chenxiangfeng@
chinadaily.com.cn

In a lot of ways, China's women's basketball team just wants to be left alone.

With a roster chock-full of players who are either a little too young or a little too old, they'd like to fly under the radar and avoid comparisons to the team that took fourth place at the Beijing Games.

Twenty-two-year-old Zhao Shuang might ruin that plan.

The media in London are already calling Zhao one of the most beautiful athletes in the Chinese contingent. She's also caught the attention of the sport's governing body, FIBA, which featured her in a story about budding stars.

Slim and shapely at 1.84m tall, her eye-catching photos on the Internet have put her in the company of popular female athletes like Maria Sharapova.

Zhao said she's been surprised at the attention after scoring 2 points with one assist in five minutes in her Olympic debut against Croatia on Monday.

"Are you sure you want to interview me? I only had 2 points," she smiled. "I appreciate it that so many people support me and cheer for me."

The name "Shuang" means frank and straightforward in Chinese, leading to the nickname *Shuang Mei Zi* (little sister Shuang).

She lives up to it on the court. Zhao takes pride in her defense and found herself in the thick of the action on both sides of the floor as China won its third straight game on Wednesday against Angola.

Three rabid Chinese fans have attracted attention standing together with the words "Shuang Mei Zi" on their T-shirts at her games.

"I am eager to play — I didn't want to miss any game," said Zhao, who didn't play during the team's opener against the Czech Republic, which China won 66-57 on Sunday.

Zhao was given 13 minutes against Angola, in which she had 7 points and three assists as China advanced to the quarterfinals.

"I like the young players' attitudes, although they're still struggling to find their rhythm at times," said coach Sun Fengwu. "Zhao is energetic and has great potential."

Rapid emergence

Zhao was mostly unknown until she led her Shenyang Army team to the national championship, averaging 11.1



Angolan forward Felizarda Jorge (right) vies with Chinese guard Zhao Shuang during their Group A match at the London Olympics on Wednesday. China won, 76-52, to improve to 3-0 and secure a spot in the top eight.

points and six rebounds during the 2010-11 season.

Sun was impressed, awarding her a spot on the national team's training camp in April.

She seized the opportunity, playing a number of big games in international tournaments before starting every game in last year's Asian Championship.

Zhao and her teammates won the title and claimed Asia's only ticket to the Olympic Games.

"Sometimes, young players have a hard time finding themselves on the court," Sun said. "So I ask them to calm down and give them more minutes, game after game. This is their first Olympic Games. We

should not put too much pressure on them.

"Just let them play their game and learn from their mistakes. The Olympics are the best place to push them to mature as players."

Zhao knows a pretty face isn't going to get her anywhere on the court. If she wants to make it

to the WNBA eventually, she'll have to push herself. Some of the league's scouts did take notice of her last year.

Former center Zheng Haixia, Sui Feifei and two members of the current team — Miao Lijie and Chen Nan — all made it to the WNBA.

Zhao might be next.

Olympic style a perfect fit for US women

By DOUG FEINBERG
in London
Associated Press

The US women's Olympic team has an edge over its male counterparts when it comes to international basketball: The style of play is second nature to them.

That means the women don't have to make major adjustments.

"The European game is different, we all know that," said US guard Diana Taurasi, who has played in both Turkey and Russia. "The best thing about it is that we've all played probably more European basketball than WNBA basketball. So we're all really familiar with it, the way it's reffed, the way they call things, the way you have to adjust during the game."

"For us, it's pretty easy."

It was against Croatia and Angola. They expect a stiffer challenge from Turkey.

Taurasi and five of her Olympic teammates have played in Istanbul so they are very familiar with the Turkish players.

"She's definitely been a great change-up," Auriemma said.

"Lindsay is much more direct, more physical than Sue. There's bodies flying when she's in the game. The tempo gets a little quicker when she's in the game."

Whalen has spent the past few years playing in the Czech Republic and was excited for the change. Her new team held a press conference for her when the US was training in Istanbul.

"A lot of these girls will be my teammates next year or my opponents," Whalen said. "That's the way international basketball is. You get to play with girls one day and the next you're playing against them. Having the familiarity helps as you know what they can do."

The Americans (2-0) could be playing without Sylvia Fowles against Turkey. She didn't play in the team's 52-point win over Angola on Monday night, resting a sore left foot. Fowles took it easy in practice on Tuesday.

"We'll see how it feels tomorrow morning," she said. "If I can go I'll go, if I can't I won't. We're not going to rush it and be smart."

The Turks played well in their

wins over Angola and the Czech Republic and feel they have a chance to beat the US.

"Being that we were in the game with them with 3 quarters our confidence is up," said center Quanitra Hollingsworth, who was born in the US and starred at VCU before becoming naturalized to play for Turkey in May. "We know that if we come ready to play and focus we can give them a run for their money."

The one thing that the Turks won't have in London is the huge home crowd that backed them in the exhibition game. Still Auriemma doesn't think that will make too much of a difference.

"Home fans wherever we play other than their home team, their next favorite team is whoever is playing the US," he said. "The atmosphere here has been great."

After facing Turkey, the Americans — who have won 35 straight Olympic contests and four consecutive gold medals — still have contests against China and the Czech Republic in the preliminary round.

Young stars make plunge for glory

By XINHUA in Beijing

In a diving center in Jinan, Shandong province, children aged 5 and 6 are doing their routine boardwork on a trampoline, all of which reflect the basic movements of diving.

While their peers are only about to enter primary school, they have already started pursuing a dream — to one day compete in the Olympics.

Six-year-old Zhang Xinyue has been practicing diving for almost three years. She hopes that one day she will represent China in the Olympic Games.

"I've seen Guo Jingjing on TV. She did so well, and it inspired me to want to be a world champion someday, just like her," she said.

Qualifying for the Olympics is a huge challenge. For diving, most children start practicing as early as three years of age, and they go through a variety of early training, such as breaststroke and how to hold their breath.

Zhang Xinyue, Zhang Leyan, Cao Shuier and several other children are the new recruits this year. They showed great potential in swimming as kindergarten students and, because of their outstanding physical condition, they were selected to join the diving training team.

The training is long-term, tedious and extremely high pressure. The children's initial curiosity and enthusiasm is quickly supplanted by pain from strict professional training. Despite being about 10 years old, they have callused hands and their eyes and ears reveal the damage suffered from the frequent impact of diving practice.

"Sometimes my nose and ears hurt when I have to hold my breath," said Zhang Leyan, "My eyes get irritated under water."

Eye damage is the most common health malaise in diving. Olympic champions such as Guo Jingjing, Hu Jia, and Xiao Hailiang all have suffered from eye problems, which have led to poor eyesight. Guo had an operation on her retina in late 2001.

Although the intense training can be physically and mentally grueling, the children seldom complain.

They attend literacy classes in the morning and exercise in the afternoon. After warming up, they start diving. Although repetitive and boring, it's the first step toward their monumental dreams.

To reduce the training's monotony, coaches sometimes play music.

"They have to jump more than 100 times every day," said Zhou Yilin, who has been coaching at the center since 2010. He was the winner of three gold medals at the FINA Diving World Cup

and was invited to join the center under the encouragement policy of the local government.

According to Zhou, maintaining a disciplined training regimen is the key to success. In order to achieve perfect diving, which creates little or no splash, a 10-meter platform diver climbs the stairs more than 190km every year — that is almost 20 times the height of Mount Qomolangma (also known as Mount Everest).

During the past two years, his students have won two gold medals and one silver in top competitions in China. Zhou says those results have greatly encouraged the children and their parents.

The center currently has more than 60 students, all aged from 5 to 16.

In addition to the tough training, teenage divers face another challenge — weight control.

Xing Yiyi, 14, has a host of national and international awards to her name. Yet keeping fit has been a major task for her.

Xing had just had lunch during our visit. She had eggs with tomato and broccoli, and some tofu.

"I have to control my weight or I will not be able to flip," she said.

The girl admits she always feels hungry, even after she has just eaten. However, in order to keep fit and improve her performance, she has to maintain a strict diet. To fend off hunger, she drinks water constantly.

As the children grow older, coaches not only need to focus on their physical movements but, more importantly, they must pay attention to their mental state.

"I must improve myself as well, especially to gain more psychological knowledge about teenagers," said Zhou. "I should know what they are thinking and what they are interested in."

Each of the young divers has spent their precious childhoods diving — doing the same workout day after day. But only the top performers will see their dreams realized by qualifying for the national team. Zhou says it is his job to tap their potential.

"My ultimate goal is to help them participate in events from the lowest level to the highest, step by step, and then make their championship dreams come true," he said.

As for the young divers, the dream of the Olympics is extremely alluring. In front of the camera, they smile innocently.

"We have to win the championship, everyone wants to be No 1, so we have to deal with the hardships," one of the youngsters said.

RÖDER Temporary Warehouse Solutions

Take care of your products with German quality

Light-weight aluminum frame with TÜV certified wind and snow safety
Tailor-made concepts that suit your needs
Flexible rental periods from 1 month up to 3 years
Up to 50,000 sqm available instantly

Tent systems for rent and for sale
400-820-6030

info@roeder-china.com | www.roeder-china.com | www.r-zs.com

RÖDER Opening the world