

REALITY CHECK FOR CHINA

PHOTO BY ERIC GAY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

US' Diana Taurasi (12) drives past China defender Ma Zengyu (11) during their group game at the London Olympics on Sunday. The US won 114-66.



Bringing it home? Nope

Two Chinese weightlifters win gold for other countries; it's within the rules

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The world's weightlifting chief said he has no problem with young Chinese lifters changing their nationality to compete for other countries — as long as it's done within the rules.

"If this is the policy of China and if China is willing to help other countries, (it's OK), because China has many young and talented lifters," Tamas Ajan, the president of the International Weightlifting Federation, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily. "But we have a very clear rule. If a lifter has competed for one nation in international competitions before he or she wishes to change nationality, then the two national federations, the two national Olympic committees and the IWF should all get involved to reach an agreement."

"But if a lifter changes nationality without any international experience for his or her original country, there is no problem for us."

Ajan was commenting on Kazakhstan's two Olympic gold medalists, Maiya Maneza and Zulfiya Chinshanlo, who are reportedly originally from China.

Ajan said the IWF didn't interfere because neither had competed for China.

"Actually, I did not hear this before you told me," the 73-year-old Hun-

garian said. "It's not against the rules as long as they did not play for China before. It's not against the rules, and it's (the nature of) globalization. Like youngsters who were born in Hungary, then they can go to Germany and play for Germany."

Maneza (whose Chinese name is Yao Li) won the 63kg category, in which China did not field a competitor. Chinshanlo took the 53kg title, in which 17-year-old Chinese Zhou Jun failed on her first three attempts.

It immediately became a hot topic in China — why would the nation send such promising young athletes abroad?

Chinshanlo is reportedly on a five-year contract, which will allow her to return to China this year if she chooses. Since China does not accept dual citizenship, even if Chinshanlo claimed her Chinese citizenship immediately after returning to China, she would still have to wait five years before she could represent China in international competitions.

Ajan said competing for China could be problematic for Chinshanlo. "This is a problem. First, Chinshanlo must have permission from Kazakhstan and then there must be an agreement among the federations, and Olympic committees and the IWF. The IWF must be involved."

No sure thing

China won eight of the 10 gold medals on offer at the Beijing Olympics, but it didn't repeat that glory at



Gold medal winning weightlifters Maiya Maneza (left) and Zulfiya Chinshanlo of Kazakhstan are both originally from China.



HASSAN AMMAR / ASSOCIATED PRESS

the London Games.

Ajan thought China would win more but still thinks it has performed impressively.

"I expected six or seven gold for China," he said. "But it is still a fantastic result. You cannot compare it to what happened in the Beijing Games. That was on home soil. China is still very strong. I'm quite optimistic about the sport in China."

Of course, as the sport's international head, Ajan is happy that more countries are sharing the gold.

He said China is no longer assured of winning every event.

"China has to accept the situation that more and more countries are coming up against you," he said.

"Usually, if you see a Chinese lifter in a competition, boy or girl, you think it's 100 percent (that they will win). Now, it's not exactly 100 percent. Do not think that China is

always strong in every category. Do not think only China can win.

"Other countries are catching up. The Games are now more competitive. Weightlifting is spreading all over the world. Even very small countries came up to compete here like Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Kiribati, Samoa."

One of Ajan's biggest challenges now is finding a way to host more international events so the sport and its lifters can gain wider exposure.

"Our players do not have many events every year," he said.

"Some of them might have only two or three chances to compete on the international stage. It's our problem. If you want to make stars and top competitions, more events and exposure are needed. Like Roger Federer in tennis, if he plays two times a year, nobody will know him. He has to play lots of events every month. Rafael Nadal is the same."

Coach: To be the best, you learn from the best

FROM PAGE 1

Team leader Liu Qinlong, Giral's busy interpreter, must both translate and comfort.

The World Championships showed just what could be achieved.

"Once his strict demands produced good results, players seemed more cooperative," Liu said.

Women's hockey has also seen the benefits of bringing in expertise.

Kim Sang-ryul, who took the helm from compatriot Kim Chang-back after he led the team to silver in Beijing, also struggled to earn the trust of his players even after he guided the male side for more than four years. The 57-year-old worked hard on his Chinese-language skills and was not hesitant about offering forceful advice on the pitch but was always mild-mannered off it, to build up team spirit.

"During training, I would not smile and I always have my sunglasses on," Kim Sang-ryul said after China's 1-0 loss to defending champion the Netherlands on Thursday.

"I must be strict (in practice) so they can learn and improve. I stay 24 hours with them and try to be a family member off the pitch," Kim Sang-ryul said.



CUI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Juan Jane Giral, the coach for China's water polo team, is one of several international coaches who train Chinese athletes.

Foreign coaches must contend with the language barrier, culture shock and a different management philosophy before they can get around to passing on their tricks and ideas.

That's led to a new approach: Chinese athletes are being sent abroad to train with foreign coaches overseas.

The swimming team that won 10 medals, including five gold, in London is a good example.

China has recently begun sending

its best swimmers for lengthy training camps in Australia every year. Renowned coach Denis Cotterell helped fine-tune swimming prodigies Sun Yang and Ye Shiwen, both double gold medalists in London. Australian coach Ken Wood, United States former world-record-holder Mike Burton and Britain's David Lyles all plied their trade with China as well.

China track and field also looked

abroad, sending its coaches to Europe.

The latest gold proves they might be on to something.

Under the guidance of Italian race-walking expert Sandro Damilano, Chinese walker Chen Ding claimed the title in the 20km on Saturday to become the country's second men's gold medalist in track and field, following Liu Xiang.

Damilano also coached Liu Hong to a silver medal in the women's 20km at last year's Worlds.

"I've learned a lot from him on aerobic endurance — he's played an important role in my career," Chen said after the victory.

Among those foreigners are also New Zealand shot put coach Kirsten Hellier and German discus coach Karl-Heinz Steinmetz.

Steinmetz coached veteran Li Yanfeng to a bronze medal on Saturday, another major achievement after Li's gold at the Worlds last year.

"Our athletes improved their fitness and endurance significantly with foreign coaches' advanced methods," said Du Zhaocai, director of the national track and field administrative center. "We will stick to the Chinese-foreign combination to benefit more athletes in the future."

off track...

STAMPS OF APPROVAL

Britons are busy celebrating their record Olympic gold medal haul, but some are working harder than others to mark the occasion.

Spare a thought for the staff at Britain's Royal Mail, who are working overtime to rush out special next-day stamps for each of the six gold medals won by British athletes on Saturday.

The Royal Mail has promised fans that a celebratory stamp will be issued within 24 hours of each British gold medal win.

AT THE GATES

Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, stopped by Horse Guards Parade on Saturday night to watch Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh Jennings dismantle the Netherlands in straight sets in beach volleyball.

Asked what he thought of the Americans' performance, Gates told The Associated Press: "It was fantastic."

Gates is a bit of a beach volleyball groupie, it turns out. He says he went to see matches "at Bondi and Beijing". May-Treanor and Walsh Jennings won the gold medal in 2008 in Beijing but were not a team at the Sydney Games, when the competition was held at Bondi Beach. They won their first at Athens in '04.



MORE EXPLANATION

The Chinese team on Saturday demanded an explanation from the world cycling ruling body UCI on the relegation of the Chinese to silver medal.

The Chinese beat their German rivals in the women's team pursuit final on Thursday, only to be relegated to second place.

The Chinese team reviewed the race video, saying they didn't violate any rules of the sport. China's coach Daniel Morelon said the referees "robbed" his athletes of a gold medal.

The Chinese team's appeal was rejected, and it was fined for the intrusion into the referees' area.

Pan Zhichen, the Chinese cycling team chief, filed a written complaint to UCI President Pa Maquade on Saturday, demanding an explanation on "why the Chinese cyclists were relegated to silver medal".

Pan said his team would not pay the fine, saying Chinese team members were escorted into the referees' area by UCI officials.

GETTING THERE IS A BEAR

An honorary member of the International Olympic Committee, International Weightlifting Federation president Tamas Ajan, said he's impressed with the London Olympics by and large but not satisfied with transportation and the television coverage.

"I'm impressive by the Games. But there are some problems with the transportation," he said. "There is very crowded traffic and very heavy traffic jams. Yes the organizing committee gave us Oyster cards so we can use public transportation freely. But you can see we usually have to walk a long way — about 25 or 30 minutes from the underground station to the venue. That's a little bit difficult."

"I'm also a little disappointed with the television channels," he said. "Usually at an Olympic Games, you can have five or six channels, at least, to watch the Olympic competitions. But I can only have one channel in my hotel, BBC1. The problem is it only televises the British athletes. OK, we can watch at the restaurants, but I can still only see one channel because everybody is watching the same channel."

CHINA DAILY/XINHUA-AP

REPORTER'S LOG | FU JING

Douglas' win inspires a nation, and the world

When 16-year-old African-American gymnast Gabby Douglas stunned the world with her extraordinary all-around performance in the Northern Greenwich Arena last Thursday afternoon, I was using my long-distance lens to photograph every move.

I noticed a middle-aged Chinese person following her when the London Olympics gold medalist joined the players rotating from one sport to another. My first guess was that the man was her coach.

However, when another Chinese woman coach walked in front of my lens, my colleague next to me in the middle of the magnificent stadium started to search online using his iPhone.

The Chinese-American man was Liang Chow, a Beijing native born in 1968. Chow coaches Douglas, who's known as "the flying squirrel".

With Douglas holding the lead from start to finish during the two-hour competition, Chow relaxed, smiled and encouraged.

Several friends had prepared Chinese flags but didn't get the chance to wave them, as China's gymnastics teams took fifth and six places.

We were sitting next to a group of Americans, who were excitedly cheering for Douglas, shouting: "U-S-A! U-S-A!" We politely waved to them and threw up our thumbs as Douglas dazzled.

I pointed out to a friend that this was a competition in which an African-American won a gold for the US with coaching from a Beijing native.

When I later talked with former BBC presenter Alex Kirby and his

son, Thomas Kirby, Thomas jokingly said the gold doesn't belong to the US but rather to the world.

That wasn't exactly what I meant. I admire the US' gravity, which enables it to pull in talent from around the world.

I was surprised by the media attention Douglas received. Friday's USA Today featured her photo on the front page and had a whole inside page dedicated to her as a pioneer who made history as the first black gymnast to win gold in the individual all-around.

Douglas' quote in the newspaper took on an almost presidential tone: "I hope that I inspire people. I want to inspire people. My mother said you can inspire a nation."

The character of the US media coverage makes sense, considering the country values heroism, individualism and the American dream.

But there has been little coverage of Chow.

USA Today showed Chow posing with Douglas in a photo but never mentioned him otherwise. A Web search showed coverage of the coach is minimal.

This perhaps demonstrates a cultural difference. In China, your teacher is traditionally considered more important than your parents. And the story of the coach behind the victory is surely worth telling.

Fortunately, I met a retired American gymnast on the boat to where I'm staying in London, who said she could put me in touch with Chow.

I've got my fingers crossed I can get the interview.

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