

# Collecting memories and medals

It is not just the athletes who have a passion for Olympic medals, In Shanghai, **Shi Yingying** and **Ma Yiyun** chance upon an old gentleman who collects these badges of glory.

Swimming superstar Sun Yang and hero hurdler Liu Xiang are not the only ones chasing after gold every four years during the Olympic Games. Chen Hongkang, too, shares that passionate pursuit — only he has been collecting them for more than 35 years.

As he proudly shows off cabinets full of badges, medals and emblems, the 78-year-old Shanghai native is ready to tell the stories behind each and every one.

Chen has been collecting them since 1976, and in 2004, he decided to turn a bedroom into a showroom, showing off 3,000 items by rotation, all hand-picked from his collection of more than 15,000 pieces. He has attracted about 2,000 visitors in the past eight years.

"My showroom is the only one of its kind in China, I think no one in the country has more of these sports souvenirs than me," he says proudly.

In his collection, the most treasured items are replicas of pins from the first and second Olympic Games in Athens and Paris. The oldest badge is from the 1918 Far Eastern Championship Games, considered as the precursor to the Asian Games.

Chen, short but wiry, with small eyes and big glasses, discovered his enthusiasm for sports when he was in his 30s, developing interests in snooker, table tennis, shooting and motorcycle sports.

"I was fascinated by sports," Chen says. He was once coach of a Shanghai-based motorcycling team while working for Shanghai's municipal sports committee.

As he traveled to various overseas competitions and on his business trips, Chen made the acquaintance of many sportsmen. He started exchanging souvenirs with foreign sports teams, and collected dozens of emblems, flags, souvenirs, medals and trophies from different games held in more than 100 countries. Some of his souvenirs are the only ones in China.

"They are treasures to me, even though they may mean nothing to others," Chen said.

After he retired in 1995, he started getting serious about collecting Olympic Games souvenirs, and lost no chance to seek them out to buy them.

He visits flea markets and second-hand shops almost every week, where he has discovered many badges and trophies. During the Athens and Beijing Olympic Games, any friends and colleagues visiting the Games were persuaded to buy more souvenirs for him.



Olympic medal collector Chen Hongkang showcases one of his collection.

ZHANG XINYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

**I was fascinated by sports. They (Olympic souvenirs) are treasures to me, even though they may mean nothing to others."**

CHEN HONGKANG  
OLYMPIC MEDAL COLLECTOR

"I manage to stay connected to sports by collecting these medals and emblems," Chen says.

Chen spends more than 20,000 yuan (\$3,140), or about 40 percent of his pension on these Olympic medals, commemorative silver coins and other souvenirs every year. His collection is growing and one cabinet can no longer hold it all.

Fortunately, Chen is supported by his family, especially his wife.

Zhu Hua, his wife, helped him turn space in their home into a showroom in March 2004, rearranging the room, displaying the collection and keeping it all neat and clean.

She takes a backseat when Chen shows his visitors around, quietly standing by with a camera in hand. She

loves to take photos for her husband while he talks to his visitors.

"He looks happy then," Zhu says.

Increasing numbers have come to visit Chen after his story was published by a local community newspaper. Sometimes he gets more than 10 visitors at the same time.

The showroom attracts not just visitors from various parts of China, but also foreign enthusiasts. Golfer Tom Lewis from Britain dropped in after he got to know about Chen's showroom and collection from the Internet in 2007.

"He was on a business trip to Shanghai and he showed great interest in the emblems," Chen says.

Chen hopes more people can see his treasures. He has taken part in 35 exhi-

bitions on sports, including two World Olympic Collectors Fair, in 2007 and 2010 in Beijing. He has never taken any money from the organizers although he had to pay for his train tickets.

"Every souvenir has a story," Chen says. "I hope people can know something about the history and culture of the Olympic Games."

But his wife worries that it may be getting too much for him. Whenever the old man travels to an exhibition, he takes all his medals and emblems with him, because he thinks they may be damaged by careless couriers.

"The collections are too heavy for him," Zhu says.

As his collection grows every day,

there are problems, Chen has run out of space, and he needs a larger showroom. He has already sold off some of his precious emblems and coins to other collectors, but he still has many lying in drawers waiting to be displayed.

Guo Guanyuan, an official of Kang Jian community's publicity department, says the local residential committee is planning to help him by offering a space over at the community sports hall.

"Chen is a constant reminder of the good old days of the different Games. We hope to propagate and nurture the culture of sports," Guo says.

Contact the writers at shiyingying@chinadaily.com.cn.

## Family: Campaign of parent cheerleaders helps boost spirit

FROM PAGE 1

Wang says about 15 sets of parents took part in the program. They included the parents of diving champion Wu Minxia, weightlifter Li Xueying, gymnast Deng Linlin, trampoline gymnast He Wenna, and track star Liu Xiang.

It has been a program that has been enthusiastically endorsed by Chinese web users, and the stories have enjoyed high ratings.

"I watched all of them," says Liu Na, a student from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. "It's emotional and moving and you hear interesting stories that you never heard before."

In China, many athletes come from families that are not rich, and it's a wonderful idea to reward them with a trip to London so they can watch and support their children.

Olympic sponsors are also behind this campaign of parent cheerleaders.

Proctor & Gamble, a worldwide partner of the International Olympic Committee, launched the "Thank You Mom" campaign during the London Games, sponsoring parents of Chinese Olympians to travel to London during the Olympics.

"We believe that behind every athlete is an even more amazing mom," says Marc Pritchard, P&G global marketing and brand building officer.

"P&G is in the business of helping

moms. Through our "Thank You Mom" program we will support not just the moms of Olympic athletes but every mom who does whatever it takes to make her child's life the best it can be."

Wang from qq.com echoes the sentiment that the program promotes a win-win situation for everyone.

"We not only meet the requirements of our viewers and Internet users, but we also provided a rare chance for Olympic champions to meet their parents right after winning the gold medals," Wang says.

Being able to support their children at ringside is becoming a more accessible trend for the parents of Chinese Olympians. Many are coming to London, with or without sponsorship. This reverses a previous attitude among trainers and athletes that their presence may be a distraction.

"At that time, we were told to fully concentrate on training and competition. I was afraid to have my parents come to see me play. I did not want them to come even in domestic matches," Lin Dan said, explaining why his parents did not come to see him four years ago in Beijing.

But now, he is confident that having his family around is the biggest morale booster for him.

"I could feel the support from the family on the court. My wife, my mother and my father together in London made me more relaxed and energetic,"

says Lin. His wife, Xie Xingfang, was a teammate in the national team, and is a former women's world champion.

"I am 29 now, I want them to be there. I need them to be there."

"I should thank the media and the sponsors. They took good care of my parents and let them cheer me on in the stadium. It was a special feeling."

For gymnast Chen Yibing, it was a comfort to know his parents were there for him, especially since he narrowly missed the gold in the rings in what could be one of the most controversial results in the Olympics.

"When I walked down and saw the score, my mind was blank for a moment. But when I turned around to see my parents, I told myself it's enough and it's all worth it," says Chen. His near flawless performance failed to outscore Brazilian Arthur Nabarrete, who finished with a stumble.

For the parents, their unflinching support can be depended upon in both low moments and high.

Sun Quanhong and Yang Ming was with their son, Sun Yang, throughout the pre-Games training camp at Bath, and when he stepped onto the winner's pedestal after winning two swimming golds in the men's 400m and 1,500m in London.

Sun Yang's success made them celebrities in London and household names back home as Chinese broadcasters turned the limelight on them during



FAN JUN AND LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

**Top: Parents of Chinese swimmer Sun Yang watch the 1,500m in London on Aug 4.**

**Right: Chinese weightlifter Zhou Lulu's parents (left and second from left) cheer as their daughter grabs the gold on Aug 5.**

Sun's golden performances.

"All I want to do now is to cook a big bowl of wonton for my son," says Yang Ming just before she accompanied Sun home. "That is his favorite."

Contact the writer at chenxianfeng@chinadaily.com.cn.

