

UNDER PRESSURE

Diver Qiu Bo and his British rival, Tom Daley, face heavy expectations of victory from their homelands, **Chen Xiangfeng** reports in London.

Chinese diver Qiu Bo wears a jade necklace and a bracelet with gold coins as good luck charms.

His British counterpart Tom Daley doesn't rely on superstition.

The Briton is the darling of the Aquatics Centre crowd, and the two rivals will meet in the men's 10m synchronized final

on Saturday night (Sunday morning Beijing time).

Since China unexpectedly lost the men's 3m springboard final — which it usually dominates — to Russian underdog Zakharov Ilya, British fans have more reason to expect their diving sensation will grab another gold.

The ambitious Chinese diving team had originally sought to sweep all eight gold medals at the London Games.

Daley, 18, who knocked Qiu into second place at the 2009 World Championships, was cheering on Twitter right after China's 3m springboard flop.

He realized the 3m springboard failure offered him new hope and placed additional pressure on the Chinese team.

"Crazy night at the pool. Chinese domination is over in the men's 3m springboard event! Well done," he tweeted.

Qiu, 19, who beat Daley at last year's World Championship, tries to keep a low profile and avoids speculations about their clash, which he believes are distractions.

He said he will only focus on himself.

"The biggest challenge is for me to beat myself. The aim is to win everything," he said.

"I never think about winning the gold medal (in London). I focus on good preparation. If I perform well, the results speak for themselves."

China claimed seven out of eight gold at the Beijing Games, all 10 gold at last year's World Championships and all eight at this year's diving World Cup in February.

Many Chinese would consider it unacceptable for Qiu to lose because China would then only take six gold in London.

"China was expected to sweep every gold before the Games," China Youth Daily sports reporter Guo Jian said.

"Now, it has lost one in the

men's 3m springboard. It can't afford to lose another one. Coming home with six gold medals is like losing."

China's former diving queen Gao Min said the Chinese have some psychological disadvantages compared to foreign athletes, especially in high-difficulty dives.

"All the foreigners regard themselves as challengers, and they have the courage to undertake difficult dives," Gao said.

"It does not matter if they fail. But if they make it, they have a good chance of beating the Chinese."

"So, it's sometimes a contradiction for Chinese. If you choose to make relatively low-difficulty dives and stay consistent, you might be beaten. If you choose high-difficulty dives, you take the risk of making big mistakes."

THOMAS DALEY, British diver on medal pressure

"The biggest challenge is for me to beat myself. The aim is to win everything. I never think about winning the gold medal (in London). I focus on good preparation. If I perform well, the results speak for themselves."

QIU BO, Chinese diver on medal pressure

Australian Matthew Mitcham was a great example at the Beijing Games. His last dive, which scored 112.10 points — the highest single-dive total — earned him a gold medal that had been expected to go to Chinese favorite Zhou Luxin.

Daley is also not satisfied with silver at home.

"Normally in diving, silver is gold because the Chinese dominate everything, but you never know what can happen in the Olympic Games," he said.

'Extra adrenaline rush'

Both face high expectations from their homelands.

British reports said: "London will be about an 18-year-old British platform specialist who will bring a nation to a standstill on Aug 11."

Daley, who reached the Beijing final as a 14-year-old and won the world title in 2009, was even criticized by his own federation earlier this year for his casual work ethic and glut of endorsements.

"That's all in the past now," Daley said.

"I've been training as hard as I possibly can. I've been working as hard as I can."

The diving idol explained that he views the pressure as a positive push.

"Pressure isn't a bad thing," he said. "I quite like pressure going into a competition. In a

BATTLE ON 109C



The 109C, a forward 4 1/2 somersault tuck, has become a pet dive for elite divers after FINA elevated its degree of difficulty from 3.5 to 3.7 in 2009. Among the 12 finalists at the 2011 Shanghai World Championships, 10 divers included it on their lists. There will be no exception in London, as all the finalists are expected to perform this dive. Despite the growing number of performers, only a few can score a 100-plus score on the dive, including China's Qiu Bo, Britain's Thomas Daley and American David Boudia.

Qiu Bo has scored 100-plus on the dive more than anybody in the world. He scored a perfect 111 points during the World Cup series in Beijing last year.

QIU BO
Birthday: Jan 31, 1993
Height: 162cm
Weight: 59kg
Events: 10m, 10m synchro
Highlights:
World Championships
 Gold 2011 10m
 Gold 2011 10m synchro
 Silver 2009 10m
FINA Diving World Cup
 Bronze 2010 10m
Youth Olympic Games
 Gold 2010 3m
 Gold 2010 10m

Thomas Daley has been running hot on the dive, scoring over 100 points three times this season in World Cup series stops in Beijing and Tijuana and the European Championships.

THOMAS DALEY
Birthday: May 21, 1994
Height: 175cm
Weight: 70kg
Events: 10m, 10m synchro, 3m
Highlights:
World Championships
 Gold 2009 10m
European Championships
 Gold 2008 10m
 Gold 2012 10m

QIU AND DALEY SHARE AN ALMOST IDENTICAL ROUTINE. HERE ARE THEIR OTHER FIVE DIVES:

<p>Arm back Triple Somer 626B</p> <p>Arm stand Must be held for 5 seconds</p>	<p>Back 3 1/2 Somersault 207B</p>	<p>Reverse 3 1/2 Somer 307C</p>	<p>Inward 3 1/2 Somersault 407C</p>	<p>Back 2 1/2 Som. 2 1/2 Tw 5255B</p>
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Source: China Daily



Qiu Bo settled for silver behind Thomas Daley at the 2009 World Championships in Rome, his only defeat to the Briton in major international competitions. The two are scheduled for a marquee showdown in London on Saturday.

competition, divers either handle pressure or they don't. I've had pressure going into competition for a long time now, and it's something I've been able to get used to.

"For me, when you are under pressure, in theory, it should bring out the best of you because you've got that extra adrenaline rush."

Daley said it has been a

tough year for him. His father died in 2011.

"Going into this competition, the only thing I can focus on is my performance," he said.

"I know all my family are going to be there, watching. (I'm) really looking forward to having my family there. It's always there in the back of your head. It would be extra special if I could do well at

these Games."

Qiu faces greater pressure from his homeland. It's up to him to maintain China's top position in the event and to live up to his moniker, "Mr Full Mark."

Chinese diving manager Zhou Jihong is confident about Qiu's techniques but admitted psychology is the key to Qiu's Olympic debut.

"I'm not worried about Qiu's technique because he has mastered it," Zhou said.

"I'm just worried about whether he can stand the pressure. The Olympics are different from other tournaments. It could be a challenge for him."

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

DEFENDING CHAMP HAPPY TO BE AN UNDERDOG

Beijing Olympic 10m platform diving champion Matthew Mitcham of Australia is not the favorite anymore, as recent injuries have made him an underdog at the London Games.

But he is pleased by a development that has placed the pressure of favoritism on the world champion Qiu Bo and Thomas Daley.

"I feel quite grateful," he said. "Because of all these injuries, a lot of expectation has been lifted off me. People underestimate how much having the weight of expectation can affect you. Some athletes deal with that better than others."

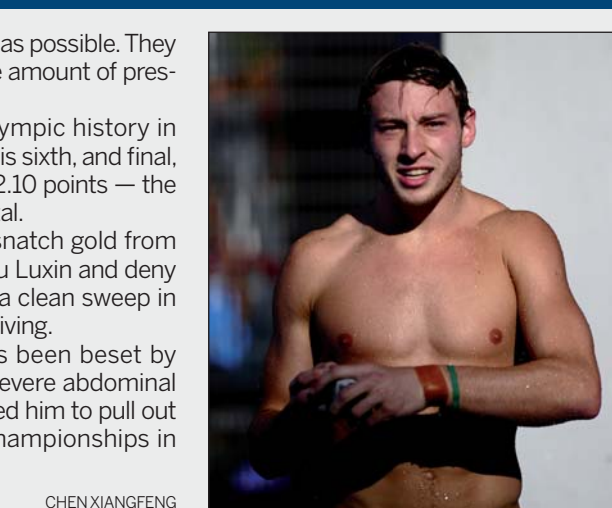
"The Chinese divers will be going for

as many gold medals as possible. They will have an incredible amount of pressure on their backs."

Mitcham made Olympic history in Beijing in 2008 with his sixth, and final, dive, which scored 112.10 points — the highest single-dive total.

It enabled him to snatch gold from the local favorite Zhou Luxin and deny China the chance of a clean sweep in men's and women's diving.

Since then, he has been beset by injuries, including a severe abdominal muscle tear that forced him to pull out of the 2011 World Championships in Shanghai.



CHEN XIANGFENG

Is being at home an advantage, or just a burden in disguise?

By ZHANG HAIZHOU in London

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As British diving star Tom Daley prepared to face China's Qiu Bo on Saturday, four-time Olympic gold winner Guo Jingjing — the world's most successful diver — pointed out that competing at home brings greater pressure.

"It's very hard to predict (who will win), especially at the Olympic Games," Guo said.

"(Daley's) performance could be really good, but underperformance is also possible because of the stress. There are definitely home-turf advantages, but also the disadvantage of additional pressure."

China's retired diving queen said she faced "the same big pressures and advantages" when she competed in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, where she won two gold medals.

Qiu is widely considered the favorite to win the men's 10m platform on Saturday.

The 19-year-old from China's Sichuan province won two gold in the platforms in the World Aquatics Championships in Shanghai last year.

But Qiu finished second in the 2009 World Champions in Rome, losing the title to Daley, who was then 15 years old.

The 18-year-old from Plymouth is seen as the most competitive contender to upset Chinese divers' goal of winning gold in London.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he finished seventh in the individual platform and eighth in the synchronized with his partner, Blake Aldridge.

Chinese divers won seven gold medals in Beijing in 2008 and only lost the men's 10m.

"Pressure isn't a bad thing," Daley had said before the London Games.

"I quite like it. Divers either handle it or they don't. Pressure should bring out the best in you because you have that extra adrenaline rush."

Daley had told the (London) Guardian: "Normally in diving, silver is gold because the Chinese dominate everything. But then you never know what's going to happen in the Olympic Games."

"Take Athens 2004. The Greek team didn't even qualify, but got in because they were the host country ... Anything can happen in the Olympic Games."

Greek duo Thomas Bimis and Nikolaos Siranidis won gold in the men's 3m synchronized dive, beating much more competitive divers from China and Russia.

Despite his confident words, Daley and Peter Waterfield finished fourth in the men's 10m synchronized platform on the Games' third day.

The British duo led the first three dives but failed the fourth of six in total.

"You can't afford to miss a dive at this standard. Bring on individual!" Daley tweeted after the game.

But despite the poor start, Daley remains Qiu's major threat.

Xiong Ni, another retired diver who won three gold Olympic medals in Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, said he believes competing on home turf is advantageous.

"It'll be more difficult for Chinese divers this time than in Beijing because it was China's home territory," he said.

"I think Daley will be a strong rival for Chinese divers in the next few years."