

YOUTH



OLYMPIC RECORD

Veteran DJ recalls his experience of playing music at the 2022 Winter Games, **Chen Nan** reports.

When Su Yiming, 17, won a silver medal for snowboard slopestyle on Feb 7, during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, with his stellar performance of a triple cork 1800, he soared into the sky over the Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, to the hearty Chinese song *Flying Higher*.

When well-known athlete Gu Ailing was enjoying *jiucai hezi* (pan-fried dumplings stuffed with chives) while she waited for her score in the women's freestyle slopestyle qualifying round at the same venue on Feb 14, she was shown on camera as the Chinese song *Your Smile Is So Beautiful* played in the background.

The man who played the songs is Li Honglei, one of the 30 DJs working at the Winter Games. Li was in charge of music for two courses — halfpipe and slopestyle — held at the venue.

"It's not like being a DJ to make people dance. It's totally different from playing music in a nightclub. It's more like you're there to create a vibe, an atmosphere and a musical experience for the athletes and everybody else, both for the spectators at the events and those watching on TV at home," Li says.

A week before the 2022 Winter Games, Li, who lives and works in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, arrived in Beijing to prepare. He got up at 6 am and worked at the venue till midnight.

During the Games, he played up to 5,000 songs, which were selected from more than 16,000 songs in different languages.

Sometimes that meant choosing songs to ramp up or relax the competitive tension or to cheer up athletes who failed, or to build up an atmosphere when some

important moments were about to take place, such as the award ceremonies and the appearance of the mascot Bing Dwen Dwen.

"The right music was as important as the Games. The second the music was heard, the atmosphere was bursting with energy to the songs," says the 38-year-old DJ.

Like thousands of people working behind the scenes at the Games, DJs did jobs that are often invisible yet important. Li says he felt happy about sharing great moments in sports with people by contributing with music.

Heartwarming moments

This was Li's first Olympics — the veteran DJ usually works at more than 100 sports events a year, from basketball to volleyball.

Li describes the 2022 Winter Games as a "dreamlike experience" to witness history-making and heartwarming moments, especially watching US snowboarding star Shaun White at the last Olympics of his career.

"The people, both participating in the Games and watching them, are not only from China. I needed to expand my music library to keep people from different countries entertained," Li says.

Originally from Harbin, Heilongjiang province, he was a big fan of sports as a child, especially basketball, and later studied at Harbin Sport University. After graduation, Li became a physical education teacher, a job that he did for over 10 years. He also worked as a basketball announcer and is a qualified referee, with a first-grade national accreditation.

In 2009, Li was introduced to the profession by well-known Taiwan sport DJ



Top and above: DJ Li Honglei celebrates at the competition venue to mark his first Olympics. He is in charge of the music for two courses at the Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province.

Center: Xie Xiao, trained by Li, works at an ice hockey event during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Adam Tse. Li met Tse during a basketball game in Beijing that year, which allowed Li to get a glimpse of working as a sport DJ.

"There was lots of equipment and he not only played music from his laptop but also worked as a commentator during the game. It was so cool that I decided to do the job immediately," recalls Li.

After a year of training, Li made his debut as a sport DJ during the 2011 Women's Chinese Basketball Association competition. Though he was fully prepared, he still got nervous.

"I remember how nervous I was. I couldn't even feel my hands during the game. That experience still has an impact on me," he says.

"I always feel energetic and young when I play music during sports events. I guess that is why I love this job. When I play a song that helps to raise the energy, that's what gets me going and gives me a great sense of achievement."

Training others

Li says there were 15 DJs from China working during the 2022 Winter Games. As a mentor, Li invited eight younger sport DJs in China to the Games, working on different courses both indoor and outdoor.

One such sport DJ is Xie Xiao, who has received training from Li since 2017. Li introduced Xie to DJ work at the FIBA Basketball World Cup in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in 2019.

During the 2022 Winter Games, Xie worked at ice hockey events, teaming up with US DJ Dieter Ruehle.

"I have been a DJ for basketball games since 2016. This was the first time that I was playing music for ice hockey events, so I spent months learning about the rules of the sport," says Xie, 31. "The job was to play along with the mood in the stadium."

Born and raised in Huizhou, Guangdong, he worked as a civil servant after his graduation from university. He opened a basketball venue in his hometown in 2015, along with a friend, who had graduated from Beijing Sport University.

"It was my friend that introduced me to the world of sport DJs. I watched lots of videos, realizing that the profession is a perfect combination of two things I love — sports and music," says Xie, who founded his own band when he was a university student.

Once he decided to become a sport DJ, Xie bought equipment and trained himself by watching videos online. In 2017, he started to learn from Li at basketball games.

"My mother is a teacher and my father works as a civil servant. They used to think that being a sport DJ was not a decent and stable job," Xie says.

"I am happy that I have won their support now. I am happier that people are getting to know about sport DJs, which will inspire more young people to pursue the profession."

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

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