



The British Team at the Shenzhen Universiade Village flag-raising ceremony on Aug 8.

TANG YUE / CHINA DAILY

AUDITION, REHEARSAL

BRITISH TEAM WILL USE GAMES AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HONE OLYMPIC SQUAD

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — The British team has brought 220 athletes, its largest and probably strongest squad ever, to the Shenzhen Universiade, with many viewing the event as a dress rehearsal for next year's Olympics in London.

The athletes were selected from 44 universities across the country and will participate in 16 sports in Shenzhen.

Women's water polo and basketball will be the highlights as many of the players will appear at next year's Olympics, according to chef de mission Graeme Maw.

"The women's water polo team is our Olympic team, so they are here to get prepared for next year, to get some international competition. I'm sure they want to make it to the end of the competition," Maw said at the UK team's welcome reception hosted by the British Consulate in Guangzhou on Tuesday.

"As for women's basketball, we have the Olympic team's coach here to watch their play. Next year will be the first time Great Britain will have a women's basketball team at the Olympics. So there

will be some of the basketball players thinking, 'well, it could be me (to be selected for the Games).'"

Maw is also expecting medals in the swimming pool and on the track.

"We quite often win some medals in swimming and athletics. We hope to win some again here," he said.

"The World Swimming Championships just happened in Shanghai and the World Athletics Championships are going to be held in Daegu. In both cases, the level of teams here is very, very close to those at the World Championships.

"We are just giving them chances to participate in the next-best international competition and that may help them make the Olympic team."

He said all the team's athletes were in good shape and had no injury concerns. They just need to adjust to the heat in Shenzhen.

"It is very hot here; you know it is hotter than England. We are going to deal with that. But we like the rain; it is good. If it keeps raining, it will be fantastic.

"The training facilities here are excellent and the accommodation is very good — at least where we



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are. We are in a good place and we are in a good mood. It really helps because it keeps the team very high."

At the 25th Summer Universiade in Belgrade in 2009, Britain finished 18th of 142 countries with three gold, one silver and three bronze medals. Three-time world champion Beth Tweddle, the flag bearer of the 2009 team, returned home with two gold medals in gymnastics. Britain's other gold was won in the pool by Stephanie Proud, who broke the Universiade record on her way to the 200m backstroke title.

The chef de mission is reluctant to give a specific number of medals he is expecting in Shenzhen and just hopes his athletes can give their best performances.

"I'm not going to give you a number, we just hope everybody does the best that they can. It is just a developmental team; it is a university team. I think all the sides want to get into the knockout stages. When you get there you meet some strong teams," Maw said.

"In water polo, our women play China, in football our women play China, in basketball, our women play the US, that will be pretty strong competition. We will see what we can do."

NEW METRO LINES AN ASSET TO THE CITY

With Shenzhen's five metro lines all opened to the public by the end of June, the city's metro population almost doubled within a month.

"Our average daily traffic volume was 600,000 people for May, and this figure turned to 1.1 million on June 25, three days after the opening of Line 5 and three days before the full operation of lines 2 and 3," said Zhao Penglin, deputy secretary-general of the Shenzhen municipal government, who is in charge of the city's transportation.

"It was an 83 percent increase and this figure will continue to grow," said Zhao.

Shenzhen's 155 kilometers of subway lines will be able to carry about 2 million passengers per day by the end of this year.

The city only had two metro lines before June 15 and one of them closed at about 7 pm, said Yu Qiang, a 25-year-old Shenzhen University post graduate student.

"That meant lots of bus and metro transfers and lots of arriving late for me," he said.

"I'm living in Longgang, a relatively faraway district about 20 km to the CBD area where I work," said Yu. "The opening up of the Metro Line 3 saved me at least one hour during the morning's rush hours."

Zhao said one of the most frequent questions he is asked by the media is whether Shenzhen built the metro system for the games.

"Definitely not," said Zhao. "We planned the second phase of the rail project as part of the government's agenda at the end of 2004. Then came the successful bid (for the games in 2007). The initial motivation for the metro was that the speed of our urban road construction couldn't keep up with the people's needs."

"We can only say that the Universiade sped up the railway project," he said. "It also slightly changed the original plan. For example, we wouldn't name the related station 'Universiade Station' if there were no games."

Zhao said the metro's operations would be adjusted during the Universiade.

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