

OPENING CEREMONY



VERY PRESENTABLE

Etiquette volunteers for awards ceremonies during the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games practice during a training camp. PHOTO BY XINHUA

All in the family for African fencers

By XINHUA

Fencing is still an eccentric sport on the African continent, but fortunately for Tunisia's Fares Ferjani and Algeria's Abik Boungab, eccentricity runs in the family.

Neither of the countries was represented at the inaugural 2010 Youth Olympic Games, but Ferjani looked comfortable as he practiced on a piste at the International Expo Center. The sabre fencer hummed as he went to get the last part of his uniform, a red-and-white suit with "Tunisia" written on the back.

Ferjani will be the only fencer wearing his team's uniform in Nanjing.

"Why do I like fencing?" Ferjani asked. "All of my family is in fencing. It's like water to me."

The 17-year-old athlete's family is made up of professional fencers: His father, mother, older brother, uncle and cousin all trained in the sport. His father is one of the most respected fencing referees and his brother, Ayoub Mohammed Ferjani, is a top contender in men's epee in the African fencing championships.

Ferjani said he doesn't remember when he started fencing. As a child, he would watch his brother practice, which led to his interest in the sport.

At the 2014 World Cadet Championships, Ferjani placed 21st in the men's sabre, but says he is working hard to improve his results in Nanjing.

Algeria's sabre fencer, Boungab, also took up the sport because of family ties. Her uncle was a professional fencer and is now the assistant coach on the national fencing team.

"I learned everything from him. He was my first coach," Boungab said.

Her uncle also taught her how to mentally prepare for competition. Although Boungab is not a top contender, placing 32nd at the 2014 World Cadet Championships, the 15-year-old doesn't get intimidated by stronger competitors.

"He told me that you can't be nervous. You have to be excited to fight," Boungab said. "I'm excited to fight."

Some of her friends don't share this enthusiasm.

"They think it's a weird sport," Boungab said, laughing. "Nobody in Algeria knows it. It's not popular."

Martial artists, up, up and away

By ZHENG XIN

zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Sun Jianzhong, a 17-year-old student from Tagou Martial Arts School, has been practicing for more than half a year for what will amount to mere 10 minutes on stage during the opening ceremony of the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing.

Hoisted high in the air while doing all kinds of stunts, Sun, who has been practicing martial arts for five years, said he suffered from numbness in his thighs for a while as the harness that raised him in the air was too tight.

"You couldn't feel your thigh after a day's practice," he said. "And it's all for a 10-minute appearance on stage!"

Together with 120 of his peers, Sun practiced day and night, mostly working on flexibility and strength training.

"Considering we have practiced for martial arts for years, most of the training was specifically designed for the acrobatics up in the air," he said.

"We practiced handstands and headstands a lot so as to make our bodies become used to being suspended upside down."

Sun said hundreds of days of practice has made him used to hanging in the air and also quite



PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"It is a great pleasure to be here and I am quite excited about it. I was as nervous as I was thrilled at first."

SUN JIANZHONG

Student from the Tagou Martial Arts School

agile up there.

Tagou Martial Arts School, in Henan province, has participated in a lot of ceremonies at grand events, including the closing ceremony of the Olympics held in Athens, the opening and closing

ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Guangzhou Asian Games and the CCTV Spring Festival Gala for 12 consecutive years.

However, for Sun and most of the performers from the school, the Games will be their first time performing at such a big event.

"It is a great pleasure to be here and I am quite excited about it," said Sun.

"I was as nervous as I was thrilled at first."

Sun said he has talked a lot with senior apprentices who have participated in such performances to learn from their experiences and try to produce a flawless performance for the audiences at home and abroad.

Sun's parents, along with neighbors and friends in his hometown of Xinyang, Henan province, have been waiting a long time to see him on TV, he said.

"It's something that my family and I take colossal pride in. I will let no one down."

Sun said he will continue studying martial arts for two more years and plans to participate with the special troupe that tours the country.

"The (Games) aerial performance has not only enhanced my physical condition, but also psychologically strengthened me and that should help me qualify for the troupe," he said.

According to Zhu Hai, planner of the opening ceremony, it will mark the first time that martial artists will perform in the air.