

Olympic fever boosts fitness clubs' business

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As China continues to rack up gold medals in London, Beijing's fitness centers are also enjoying golden times.

Gyms across the capital have seen a spike in new members, with many residents inspired to get in shape by Olympic heroes such as badminton ace Lin Dan.

"Although the summer is a traditional peak season for fitness clubs, the number of new members in July was higher than last year," said Zhang Wei, who works in membership registration for Hosa Fitness in the Chaoyang district of Beijing. The fitness club has 86 centers nationwide, including Shanghai and Chengdu. "Many people step into the fitness centers for a toned figure, thanks to the inspiring six-pack abs and toned figures of the athletes in the London Games," he said.

However, the marketing department of another fitness club in the capital, Tera Wellness Club, said it witnessed a year-on-year increase of new members of less than 10 percent in July.

Gao Feng, a salesman at Hosa, said he signs up most new members in spring, but added the sales performance last month was "impressive". According to the club, women account for more than half of the gym's members. Most of the women are in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

The enthusiasm of the new recruits, partly inspired by the Games, also provided inspiration for the clubs' marketing departments.

In addition to the annual membership dues during the Olympics, clubs across Beijing also come up with various promotions to attract customers.

"For those who came to register for a year, we give away film tickets, the amount of which was the number of

gold medals the Chinese athletes won the day before," Zhang said.

Tera Wellness Club also gives out gifts such as T-shirts, sneakers and sports bottles.

The clubs also serve as a place for networking with like-minded people.

Many members came after work for a jog on the treadmill while watching the Games, said a marketing officer who gave her name as Wu at Nirvana Fitness and Spa, a high-end gym chain.

Jia Nan, 27, a Beijing resident, comes to the gym with his wife when time allows, to keep fit after his wedding.

"I used to play soccer during college, but after I started working and got married less than two years ago, I have had fewer chances of doing it, so I choose to go to the gym to keep fit," he said.

"We watch the Games live while lifting or exercising and talk it over with each other," he said.

"Some choose to watch the Games while walking and jogging," Wu at Nirvana said. "That's also the spirit of the Games."

The increasing membership at the gym and growing popularity of the fitness clubs is not a short-term effect of the London Games alone, said Zhang at Hosa. He believes the fitness craze will keep its momentum and bring considerable prospects to the business.

According to the marketing department of Hosa, to welcome the upcoming National Fitness Day on Aug 8, it will also come up with various promotion activities like free experience and lottery draws.

Sports events can always spark enthusiasm for fitness among the public, and it is necessary to seize the opportunity of the Olympics, as well as the National Games next year in Shenyang, Liaoning province, to further encourage more of the public to exercise, he said.



YU FANGPING / FOR CHINA DAILY
Shenqianhao, China's first ship that carries a saturation diving system allowing divers to work at depths of up to 300 meters, is put into operation in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Monday.

Ship advances deep-sea salvage rescue work

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China's largest submersible-support vessel was delivered and put into service on Monday in Qingdao, Shandong province, marking a breakthrough in the development of the country's deep-water salvage force, officials said.

The Shenqianhao is the nation's most advanced submersible-support vessel, capable of completing submarine rescue and lifting missions as well as other underwater projects, according to a statement from the rescue and salvage bureau under the Ministry of Transport.

The ship was built by Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry and will be managed by Shanghai Salvage Co, which is affiliated with the bureau.

The vessel is equipped with a deep-water saturation diving system, which allows 12 divers to work

in turns at a depth of 300 meters — 100 meters deeper than in the past, said Shen Hao, director of Shanghai Salvage Co.

The system has living capsules, adapter modules and other life support facilities, the statement said. It allows divers to live in an enclosed pressurized environment before they enter the water.

A diving bell then takes three divers at a time into deep waters to carry out underwater operations, and returns them to the living capsule to change shifts.

The divers can be decompressed to surface pressure only once — at the end of their tour of duty. The process, known as saturation diving, enables divers to work uninterrupted in deep waters for long periods without the risk of decompression sickness.

Saturation diving technology is widely used in underwater operations performed in waters more

than 120 meters deep or that require divers to stay in the sea for more than one hour.

The technology is different from that of the Jiaolong, the Chinese manned deep-sea research submersible that can dive to a depth of more than 7,000 meters.

"Divers can work for 28 days straight with the support of the system," Shen said. He said innovations have been made to tackle the technical problems of saturation diving at great depths.

The 13,000-ton ship is 125 meters long — about the length of 28 sedans if placed end to end.

The ship is equipped with a helicopter landing platform and a crane with a lifting capacity of 140 tons, capable of pulling sunken ships and cargo from the sea.

The large submersible carrier fills the vacancy of such ships in the country. It will greatly enhance China's ability to clean up large oil

spills, respond to maritime accidents and conduct deep-water, large-tonnage salvage, said Xu Zuyuan, vice-minister of transport.

At Monday's delivery ceremony, Xu also said developed countries have long possessed saturation diving technology, while China's new breakthrough in the field will be further applied to maritime rescue, salvage and ocean resource exploration.

Eight countries have used this technology to allow divers to work 400 meters below sea level, China Central Television reported on Monday.

The ministry's next goal is to develop saturation diving technology that will make it possible for divers to work 500 meters below the sea, the statement said.

Xie Chuanjiao in Qingdao contributed to this story.



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