

Combat readiness at all-time high

FIGHT SPORTS SET TO PROVIDE SOME OF THE FIERCEST COMPETITION AT ASIAD



JACQUES DEMARTHON / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's Zou Shiming (left) fights against Ireland's Paddy Barnes during the 2008 Olympic Games.



GOH CHAI HIN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's Wu Jingyu delivers a kick at the World Taekwondo Championship on May 17 2007.



SAM YEH / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's Cui Wenjuan competes during the wushu event at the World Games on July 24, 2009.

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Riding a wave of confidence inspired by a stellar showing at August's SportAccord Combat Games in Beijing, China enters the Guangzhou Asiad aiming to match or surpass its success in Doha four years ago that resulted in 20 gold medals in wushu, boxing, taekwondo, judo and wrestling.

However, the absence of some key veteran athletes, combined with an overall heightened competition level in these events, will make rising to that challenge all the more difficult.

Taekwondo

Heading into the Guangzhou Asiad, coaches appeared cautious about China's prospects by stating their goal is to win gold in the women's event and any medal on the men's side.

That's in sharp contrast to China's record haul of three golds in Doha four years ago and the Republic of Korea's stated goal of seven golds in Guangzhou.

Without two-time Olympic champion Chen Zhong, who retired after the Beijing Games, China is looking to Wu Jingyu, gold medalist in the 49kg class in Beijing and the defending Asiad champion.

Another medal hope for China is Luo Wei, who won the 67kg class at the 2004 Athens Olympics. However, the defending Asiad champion's competitiveness has come into question as she has seldom appeared on world stage in the past three years.

Boxing

Four years ago in Doha, Zou Shiming became the first Chinese boxer to strike gold at the Asian Games by triumphing in the 48kg class, while teammate Hu Qing added another gold by claiming the title in the 60kg division.

Zou then made history again by winning at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Zou and Hu will lead China's ring contingent at the Guangzhou Asiad.

Women's boxing makes its debut at the 2010 Asian Games, and expectations are that the competition will be fierce since three women's weight classes have been approved for the 2012 London Olympics.

According to the sport's chief in China, Chang Jianping, China failed to win gold in any of the three events of the Asiad that were part of the Asian Women's Boxing Championships in May.

Wushu

Since wushu was included in the Asian Games in 1990, Chinese athletes have won 34 of the 45 gold medals awarded, including nine at the 2006 Doha Asiad.

The event had a heightened profile this time around, as the first gold medals of Guangzhou Asian Games were awarded in men's long boxing on Saturday morning.

Defending champion Yuan Xiaochao of China went into the opening match as the clear favorite.

Judo

China and Japan have always been archrivals in women's judo. Four years ago at the Doha Asiad, China's women's contingent won five gold medals while Japan won two. The Chinese women then edged their Japanese counterparts by one gold at the Beijing Olympics.

That success might be difficult to duplicate in Guangzhou, however.

Tong Wen, winner of +78kg class at the Beijing Games, has been banned for two years after failing the doping test at the 2009 Worlds, while another winner in Beijing, Xian Dongmei, retired last year.

Yang Xiuli, the only Olympic champion left on the team, led China to two silvers at September's World Championships.

Without setting a gold standard, coach Fu Guoyi expects the team "to show their best" at the Asiad.

Heading into Guangzhou, China's men's team has only one gold at the Asian Games.

Wrestling

China men's and women's teams each won one gold medal four years ago in Doha and hope to repeat the feat at home.

But it won't be easy. In the women's draw, Japan, which took three of the four women's titles in Doha, is still a dominant force.

"Japan is definitely our biggest rival in the women's event," said China's coach, Zhang Haojie.

"Considering the fact we have a very young team, I will not push them. My hope is that they will gain valuable experience for the 2012 London Olympics."

The obstacles are greater for the Chinese men, as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Iran have some of the world's top wrestlers.

China men's wrestling is still catching up, after winning a historic silver medal at the Beijing Games.