

Chinese women unleash 'unstoppable' steamroller

By CUI JIA
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — China demolished Korea 51-0 on Sunday in the first-ever women's rugby match at the Asian Games to confirm its status as the gold medal favorite.

China, the dominant force in women's rugby sevens, turned the match into an artful try-scoring exercise that left the Koreans aghast at the host's speed as it squeezed out nine tries in 15 minutes.

"We didn't know what to do with them. They were so fast and unstoppable," said Korea captain Lee Min-hui, whose team only made its international debut in July. "We felt completely helpless."

China captain Liu Yan said the victory was "easy and comfortable", and predicted it would spur more young Chinese to consider picking up the rough-and-tumble sport.

"It is a great opportunity for the sport to be recognized in China so more people can start to play," said the 24-year-old, who described her introduction to rugby as a case of love at first sight.

"People have so many misconceptions about girls playing rugby in China. They think the sport is violent and not suitable for women," she said.

"But the truth is that we try to avoid body contact as much as possible by picking our tactics carefully and keeping a high pace. It's as much about brains as it is about brawn."

There are less than 30 women playing rugby at a professional level on the mainland, compared to 10 times that number in Hong Kong.

Nine of China's 12 national team members hail from China Agriculture University, which established the country's first women's team in 2004.

With rugby sevens set to join the Olympic roster at the Rio de Janeiro Games in 2016, Liu's team has managed to secure funding and training equipment to assist its progress. Teams have also been set up at the provincial level in China to scout more talent for the national side.

"The biggest problem is that we don't have any income playing



SAM YEH / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China's Bai Ying carries the ball against Korea in the women's rugby preliminary round Pool A match on Sunday. China won 51-0.

rugby. We need to hold down full-time jobs to support our dream," Liu said.

"There are many talented students who can't juggle both and have no choice but to quit when they find a job, even though they are passionate about the sport and would love to keep playing."

Zhang Xiaoning, chairman of the China Rugby Football Association, said rugby's popularity at the Asian Games has grown consistently since the men's sevens and union debuted in Bangkok in 1998.

"The highly-competitive, non-stop action has proven a hit with

fans and broadcasters across Asia," he said. "We are particularly excited about welcoming women's rugby sevens to Guangzhou. I'm sure it will also be a hit."

Judging by the size of the crowds at University Town Main Stadium, Zhang's prediction was spot-on.

More than 30,000 people turned up on day one of the competition — the highest attendance rate at a venue so far at the Guangzhou Games — to see China make mincemeat of a shell-shocked Korean side, one of four women's games scheduled on Sunday.

"I've never seen this many people cheering for us before.

All of the players are thrilled," said Liu. "The fans have filled us with confidence that we can win the gold."

China's biggest rival is Kazakhstan, which took India to the cleaners 50-0, and Thailand, which edged Hong Kong 17-14. Japan beat Singapore 19-12 in the final women's game of the day.

The men's preliminaries also included three fantastically lopsided results, with Japan crushing Mongolia 55-0, Thailand shutting out Mongolia 52-0 and India only managing five points to Korea's 43 on a day that also saw China and Hong Kong win.

Host fencers fulfill focus

By CUI JIA
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GUANGZHOU — China beat Korea in the women's team sabre final on Sunday, while Kazakhstan toppled the hosts

in a semifinal of the men's team epee, relegating the top seed to bronze in one of the biggest upsets of the day at the Asian Games.

"We wanted this gold medal so badly, that's why we were a bit tight at the beginning," China's world champion Tan Xue said after the 45-40 triumph over Korea.

"Actually, 'wanted' is not the right word. I should have said we needed this gold medal to lift the spirit of the whole team."

Tan said she was disappointed she failed to win the gold medal in women's individual sabre due to an injury that limited her training.

Her 22 points during the match secured the gold medal for the team, but Tan won't lead China at the 2012 London Olympics "because she is no longer young", said coach Jia Guihua.

Top seed and world No 8 Korea advanced to the final by defeating fourth seed Kazakhstan 45-29, leaving the Kazakhs with bronze.

It marked the first time Kazakhstan has won an Asian Games medal in women's team sabre.

"It's a pity ... we intended to win, but China was very competitive," said Korea's Kim Keum-kwa. "Its strong team spirit made us lose some confidence in the middle of the match."

China had only managed to win two gold medals in fencing as of Sunday night after bagging seven in Doha four years ago.

Meanwhile, the Korean men clinched team epee gold by defeating surprise finalist Kazakhstan 45-31.

Korea is the biggest winner in fencing so far, with six gold medals.