



LIU JIN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sharmi Ulahannan of India (center) is tackled by Bangladesh players during their women's kabaddi group B opening round match at the Asian Games on Monday. India won 34-20.

Indian women covet kabaddi gold

TRADITIONAL POWER ON COLLISION COURSE WITH IRAN AFTER BOTH WIN OPENERS

By CUI JIA
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — India's men have long dominated kabaddi at the Asian Games, but its female players now have a chance to shine as the women's version of the sport debuted in Guangzhou on Monday.

"We will definitely win the gold medal at the Asian Games. We have to, because Indians invented the sport," said 19-year-old Deepika Henry Joseph after the team defeated Bangladesh 34-20.

She said the girls know that a loss in their first Asian Games will not go down well back home given the unblemished record their male counterparts enjoy.

India has won gold in the last five editions of the games dating back to Beijing 1990.

Like Joseph, most of the players on the team cut their hair short

before the Asiad to get into a more competitive spirit.

"Of course we prefer having long hair, but this is what we had to do," said Joseph, whose family was initially opposed to the non-traditional trim.

For a majority of the girls, a good performance at the games will lead to greater recognition in India.

Despite a hat-trick of Asian kabaddi championship titles, they are still struggling to get decent jobs.

"Job opportunities are hard to come by despite our repeat success at the international level. But a gold in China will draw everyone's attention to women's kabaddi," said coach Sunil Dabas. "This is the best opportunity for the girls to give their careers a boost."

India's toughest opponent is



KABADDI

likely to be Iran, which thrashed Chinese Taipei 62-18.

"The Iranian women are very strong, even though they don't look like it," said Lin Tsan-hui, head coach of Chinese Taipei.

"When our players tried to tackle them, we were the ones that fell over. I just feel lucky that none of our players were hurt."

Coach Dabas said each of the teams has different strengths.

"This sport requires height, speed, stamina and power. Whereas the Iranians are tall, the Japanese are swift. Still, our girls can overpower them," she said.

As a retired physical education teacher, Lin plans to promote kabaddi at schools in Chinese Taipei because it requires scarcely any equipment and can be played anywhere.

Kabaddi is the only event out of the 42 sports at the Asian Games

that China is not participating in, because the world's most populous country could not organize a team.

"It is just not popular in China," says Gong Yemin, an official from the state's sport for all administration center in Beijing.

"There are no teachers, no coaches, no culture, no tradition — this is the main problem."

The Nepalese women's team is also unable to participate at the Asiad due to a dispute between the National Sports Council and the Nepal Olympic Committee regarding players' participation. Their absence on Monday benefited Korea, as it enjoyed a walkover.

In a letter to the Asiad organizing committee, Nepali chef de mission Umesh Lal Shresth on Sunday informed the chief of the organizing committee that Nepal's kabaddi team would not be participating in Guangzhou.

GOLD RUSH >> TODAY'S MEDAL EVENTS

30

Archery

16: 15 Women's Individual

Athletics

9: 05 Women's 20km Race Walking
17: 00 Men's High Jump
17: 05 Women's 800m Heptathlon
17: 10 Women's Long Jump
17: 20 Women's Discus Throw
17: 35 Women's 1500m
17: 50 Men's 1500m
19: 00 Men's 3000m Steeplechase

Beach Volleyball

20: 00 Women's Gold Medal

Cycling Road

9: 00 Women's Individual Road Race

Diving

14: 00 Women's Synchronized 10m Platform
17: 00 Men's Synchronized 3m Springboard

Fencing

18: 00 Men's Team Foil
19: 30 Women's Team Epée

Modern Pentathlon

8: 30 Women's Individual
8: 30 Women's Team

Roller Sports

9: 00 Women's 300m Time-trial Race
9: 35 Men's 300m Time-trial Race
15: 45 Women's 500m Sprint Race
15: 55 Men's 500m Sprint Race

Rugby

17: 48 Women's Gold Medal Match
18: 18 Men's Gold Medal Match

Shooting

9: 00 Women's Skeet Team
15: 00 Women's Skeet

Tennis

13: 00 Men's Singles
13: 00 Women's Singles

Wrestling

17: 20 Men's Greco-Roman 120kg
18: 15 Men's Freestyle 55kg
19: 10 Men's Freestyle 60kg