



FEI MAOHUA / XINHUA

Masayo Imura (center) acknowledges the crowd after China won the gold medal of the synchronized swimming team competition of the 16th Asian Games on Saturday.

‘Mother of synchro’ ready to go where needed

FIRST JAPANESE COACH OF A CHINESE NATIONAL TEAM WILL WEIGH HER OPTIONS AFTER ASIAD

GUANGZHOU — The sought-after Masayo Imura, who has guided both Japan and China into the limelight of synchronized swimming, is ready to go where her help is needed after the Asian Games.

“Swimmers have their goals and it is worthwhile for coaches to guide them there, no matter at what levels,” Imura said after helping China sweep all three Asian Games synchronized swimming gold medals in Guangzhou.

“That makes coaching an attractive job. That’s why I want to be a coach,” added Imura, who guided Japan to the podium in six Olympic Games up to Athens 2004, where it finished second behind Russia in the team and the duet.

“I want to remain a coach a little longer,” continued the 60-year-old, dubbed “mother of synchro” who also led China to its first ever Olympic medal in the event — a team bronze — in Beijing two years ago.

Asked what she would do if

China asks her to coach the team in next year’s world championships in Shanghai, she replied: “I will think about it if and when they do.”

Guangzhou was Imura’s second but brief stint with the Chinese national team, which has covered the Synchro World Cup in mid-September and the Asian Games.

China first hired her just after dethroning Japan as the region’s long-time synchro leaders at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha. She was immediately called a “traitor” at home.

“When I first coached them in Beijing, we started from scratch,” Imura said. “When I came back this time, I found they had maintained their power but forgot about techniques.”

Imura has enforced some 10 hours of daily training focused on technical details.

“We should thank our coach Imura because she helped to improve our strength and speed,” said 24-year-old Wu Yiwen, who was not on the Olympic squad.



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MASAYO IMURA
COACH OF CHINA’S SYNCHRONIZED
SWIMMING TEAMS

“It’s very hard to beat Russia in terms of technique and choreography, so we’ll try harder to improve.”

Over three days in Guangzhou, Jiang Wenwen and Jiang Tingting retained their duet crown and powered the hosts to a second straight team gold and a win in the inaugural combination event.

Swimming to the soundtrack music of “Alice in Wonderland,” 10 Chinese water ballerinas

performed as individuals, pairs, fours, eights and a whole, dazzling with high jumps and lifts in their combination routine on Sunday.

They collected 97.125 points with Japan second at 94.000. Japan finished runners-up in the duet and team events as well.

At the Synchro World Cup in the Chinese city of Changshu, the Jiang twins beat the Canadian pair of Marie Pier Bouderau-Gagnon into second spot. In the team event, China finished runner-up to Olympic and world champions Russia.

“If I ever coach Chinese swimmers again, we will aim for something higher than we did at the Beijing Olympics, of course,” Imura said. “It is the same if I coach Japanese swimmers.”

Looking ahead to next year’s world championships in Shanghai, she added: “Russia reigns far above the rest in the world.

“From second place down, there are little gaps among teams. Results will change depending on how they will build up.”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

FACT FILE >> MASAYO IMURA

Birth date: August 16, 1950

Birth place: Osaka, Japan

She is currently the head coach of China’s national synchronized swimming team and is the first Japanese coach of a Chinese national team.

CAREER

• **1963**

became synchronized swimmer

• **1968-1973**

is a member of the Japan’s national synchronized swimming champion team.

• **1973**

retired and then became a coach

• **1978-2004**

coached the Japan’s national synchronized swimming team
Her team won silvers at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games.

• **2006-current**

Head coach of China’s synchronized swimming team. Her team won bronze at the 2008 Olympic Games.