



'Iron Hammer' strikes call for reform

LANG WANTS CHINA TO BUILD VOLLEYBALL FOUNDATION AT UNIVERSITIES

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Lang Ping with her daughter, Lydia, on Aug 23, 2008, the day her US women's volleyball team lost to Brazil in the Beijing Olympic Games final.

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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SHENZHEN — Three decades after her first Universiade, China's volleyball icon, Lang Ping, has visited the Shenzhen Games, and has called for changes to university sports in her homeland.

"It (the Shenzhen Universiade) will remind people to pay attention to our college sports," she said on Sunday at an event organized by Qiaodan Sports to teach volleyball to underprivileged children.

"It provides a chance for youngsters to find something in common. During the meet, we can witness how sports talent develops from the campus to elite level in Western countries, such as the United States. And hopefully, we can learn something that can improve our situation."

Lang, who led the Chinese women's squad to its first international title as the ace spiker at the 1981 Romania Universiade, was a torchbearer during the Shenzhen event's relay.

The 51-year-old — popularly known as "The Iron Hammer" — has a long history of involvement with university sports.

After snapping up several major titles — including golds at the 1982 World Championships and 1984 Los Angeles Olympics — with the dominant Chinese squad in the early 1980s, Lang quit sports in 1986 to learn English at Beijing Normal University.

A year later, she began to instruct New Mexico University's team as an assistant coach, while completing her two-year master's degree there.

She coached the US national

team from 2005-2008, after guiding Italian league powerhouse, Modena, for five seasons. She returned to take the helm of domestic club Guangdong Evergrande in 2009.

"Most of the professional American athletes come from the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) and have equal academic requirements to non-athlete students," she said.

"They study to obtain knowledge for a living first, and then explore sports."

Lang said most US student athletes major in non-sports-related fields, so they have options after graduation, in case professional athletic careers do not work out for them.

"If they go with sports as their careers after school, they can still survive with a job in other fields

because they are as educated as other people.

"Most of them play for fun in school and do not start out with the intention of becoming a pro star," Lang said.

Lang said it is "impractical" for China to copy the US system. But her country could still study and learn from it, she said.

"The situation here is different because we start professional training so young," Lang said.

Under the State-run system, children are recruited by local sports schools and put into exhaustive full-time training camps at early ages. They do not receive higher education.

Lang suggested postponing the ages at which teenagers enter the system and called on universities to provide more scholarships to lure talented athletes.

"Strict regulations should be approved to guarantee student athletes' study time," she said.

The Volleyball Hall of Fame inductee said NCAA rules ban any coach who extends training time while taking away from study time.

In some universities, student athletes, who have already been offered scholarships, must pass an internal exam before enrollment.

Lang's daughter, Lydia — aka Bai Lang — studies at Stanford University while playing volleyball on the school team.

"During her entire freshman year she hasn't had time for a single party and often writes her papers or assignments waiting for flights in airports," Lang said.

"She receives no special treatment. She knows if she fails the exam, she can't play her beloved sport."