



DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

PHOTO BY BEN STANSALL / AFP

Russia's Evgeniya Kanaeva performs during the individual all-around qualifications of the rhythmic gymnastics on Thursday at Wembley Arena. Kanaeva ranked second after the qualifications, following compatriot Daria Dmitrieva.

Volleyball can't save day

Flummoxing struggles in ball-based sports complete with loss by Zhang, Xue

By SUN XIAOCHEN

in London
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

China looks good in the medal tally at the London Olympics, with one glaring omission.

With the exception of table tennis, China has struggled mightily in ball-based sports at the Games, the only dark patch as it closes in on topping the gold-medal count for the second straight time.

The last hope fizzled on Wednesday night, when Xue Chen and Zhang Xi lost the bronze-medal match in beach volleyball to Brazil's Juliana Silva and Larissa Franca.

Xue and Zhang, who won bronze at the Beijing Games, were the only ones to make it to the final four as the women's volleyball, basketball and water polo teams all bowed out in the quarterfinals and men's basketball didn't survive the pool stage. Neither the men's nor the women's soccer team even made it to London following lackluster performances in the preliminaries.

Under pressure to save face, Xue and Zhang struggled to hang on Wednesday night, tying the first two sets 21-11, 19-21 against the world's No 1 pair. They couldn't hang on in the decider, losing 12-15 to swallow their 23th

defeat in the teams 32 encounters.

"It was so regretful that we couldn't deliver a medal this time — we could have done better when we led in the second set," Zhang said in the mixed zone.

"In terms of the final outcome, yes, we are pretty upset as we came here for at least a podium finish," Xue said. "But as far as the process goes, we feel satisfied that we improved our chemistry a lot."

The combo became the top in the nation after veteran pair Tian Jia and Wang Jie, the silver medalists in Beijing, retired in 2010.

They lived up to it with a series of impressive performances on the

world tour the past two years, and came to London as the No 2 seed in the world.

Xue and Zhang became a focal point for the Chinese media, followed by a fairly large group of reporters at the venue.

They shrugged off the attention, saying the sport needs as much as it can get in China.

"I don't think so," Xue said when asked if the attention was affecting them negatively. "Actually, we were expecting increased focus on us and hoping that could get more people involved in the sport so the event could develop sustainability with an improving foundation."

Zhang agreed. "We didn't feel uncomfortable being the nation's only big-ball hope — we actually enjoyed it. Hopefully,

more youngsters can emerge quickly and we won't be the only ones again at the 2016 Rio Games."

To prepare for the Games, Xue and Zhang spent six grueling months in Hainan province to hone their serves, passes, sets and spikes for at least five hours every day.

Zhang, for one, is ready for a break. "I think I will probably throw up if I hit the ball again back home," Zhang joked after the match.

"My next plan is to travel across the country with my friends. I have several friends who all invited me to see them, and I am afraid my schedule will be packed."

Meanwhile, Zhang, 27, said she was jealous of US veteran Kerri Walsh, who claimed her third straight Olympic title with partner Misty May-Treanor.

"She's been able to play so long because she's been able to have a life apart from the sport," Zhang said after losing to the US in the semifinals. "For us, during my career as an athlete, I've only been able to have training and competitions."

Walsh, 34, came back to the sport after having two children following her 2008 Beijing Games victory, refreshed and ready to play at a high level.

Walsh also plays different roles on TV and the radio.

"When they get tired, they can quit for a while," Zhang said. "And when they come back, they will be more passionate. In our system, it's almost impossible."



China's Zhang Xi (left) digs out a ball in front of teammate Xue Chen during the women's bronze medal beach volleyball match on Wednesday. Zhang and Xue lost to a Brazilian team, 11-21, 21-19, 15-12.

A golden era ends quite appropriately

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

in London

For 11 years, they have been Kerri and Misty, the most recognizable faces in Olympic beach volleyball and a team that dominated the sport.

No one could beat them in the Summer Games.

And no one will get another chance.

In their final competition together, Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh Jennings beat fellow Americans Jennifer Kessy and April Ross to extend their Olympic record to 21-0 and win their third gold medal in a row. May-Treanor said she will retire from international play, perhaps to coach and definitely to spend time with her husband, Matt, a catcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers who also travels often for his job.

"This is my last match," May-Treanor said. "Beach volleyball's not going to be my career anymore. It's time for me to be a wife. I want to be a mom and share time with my family. All of us as athletes sacrifice more on the family end than people realize. And it's getting back to that. My mind says it's time. My body says it's time. And it's the right time."

The match started with nearby Big Ben pealing the hour and ended with the "Star-Spangled Banner" rising from the iconic venue in the Prime Minister's backyard, just down the Mall from the royal residence at Buckingham Palace.

Playing on Henry VIII's former jousting tiltyard, with the current Prince Harry in the crowd, Walsh Jennings and May-Treanor contin-

ued their reign as champions of the beach.

"I'm just really proud to finish the journey with Misty how we finished it," Walsh Jennings said.

"It's been 11 years of really, really fun and crazy times. She's the best there ever has been. To have been with her so long and call her a dear, dear friend and a sister now is the greatest gift ever. I'm glad she went



The United States' Kerri Walsh Jennings (right) and Misty May-Treanor hug during the podium ceremony after winning the women's gold medal beach volleyball match on Wednesday.

out on top."

Dominating the sport for three Olympiads, Walsh Jennings and May-Treanor have won every match they've ever played at the Summer Games and lost just one of 43 sets.

No one had ever won even two beach volleyball gold medals before the Americans won their second straight in Beijing.

No woman had ever won three Olympic beach volleyball medals of any kind.

"I know how hard it is to win one tournament. And the amount of tournaments they've won is crazy," said Kessy, who jumped for joy on the medal podium after she and Ross won silver in their Olympic debuts. "For them to do it for years and years and to be on top is just really impressive. We learn a lot from them."

Walsh Jennings and May-Treanor pulled away midway through the first set of the title match and were never threatened in the second, falling to their knees and hugging as Ross' serve went long on match point.

Then they took the celebration to the stands, circling the stadium that was built on the 500-year-old parade grounds now used by the Queen's household cavalry.

offtrack ...

CHINA APPEALS AGAIN

The Chinese cycling team sent a second appeal letter to the International Cycling Union (ICU) on Wednesday (London time) after the first appeal was rejected last Friday.

The cycling team appealed to the ICU and the International Olympic Committee after China was stripped of the gold in the women's team sprint track cycling for making an early relay.

However, ICU president Pat McQuaid said in an interview that the referee's decision will be the final judgment, and the organization will not interfere. China was also fined 200 Swiss francs (\$205) for intruding into the referees' area.

Pan Zhichen, manager of the Chinese cycling team, said in the second letter that quoting the game's rules did not violate the regulation. He also questioned the referees' double standards in the qualification criteria and the final.

The Chinese team used the same riding techniques in three matches, the letter explained.

It also said that if China violated the rules, the judgment should have been made in the early rounds instead of after it won the title. The judging panel still didn't give a believable explanation, which has hurt the riders and coaches, the letter said. The subjective judgment also exerted a negative influence over the sport's development in China, it added.

RELATIONSHIP DENIED

Chinese swimmer Sun Yang on Thursday denied having a relationship with a young model, despite a magazine report that claimed the Olympic champion has had a one-year affair with the woman.

The report said Sun, who scooped the gold in the men's 1,500m and 400m freestyle in London, was introduced to a Chinese model born in the 1990s last summer.

Sun's sister said the report made the family very angry.

"We know that all support him," she said. "But I want to say the relationship mentioned in the report doesn't exist. Some people are seeking popularity by making up rumors. Don't believe it!"

Sun tweeted: "Rumors find no credence with a wise man."

GOLD FOR GULFPORT



Three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated her hometown, Brittney Reese hoped to give Gulfport, Mississippi, a medal in the Beijing Games.

She came up short, and was crushed.

"When I placed fifth, I was devastated and cried the whole way back to the (athletes) village," she said. "I had the whole Gulf Coast behind me ... I wanted to come out there and do that for them."

She delivered four years later with a long-awaited gold medal in the long jump. She repeatedly recalled the struggles her family had been through after Katrina, which pro-

duced rain that collapsed the roof on her home and displaced the family for several months.

"We had mold and we were living out of mobile homes and trailers," she said.

ROYAL WATCH

Prince William's wife, the former Kate Middleton, was on hand for the women's field hockey semifinal between Argentina and Team GB on Wednesday.

Kate — now known formally as the Duchess of Cambridge — cheered on the home team despite its loss 2-1 to Argentina.

Sporting a white Team GB shirt under a navy blazer, Kate — who captained the field hockey team at her high school — joined the crowds in a round of applause for the losing team as it left the field.

She had visited with the team prior to the Olympics, taking the field with Team GB players in a morale-boosting mission ahead of the London Games.

AP - CHINA DAILY

REPORTER'S LOG | LI XIANG

London police provide solid protection, and a few laughs

These days during the Olympic Games, I've been finding the police officers on London's streets to be surprisingly amusing.

In their fluorescent yellow jackets, they're easily spotted in subway stations, traffic junctions and the Olympic Park.

One thing — and I'm not complaining, mind you — If you ask for directions, you will probably be disappointed. I was lost the other day on my way to the London Media Center when I got out at the Westminster Station. I saw a police officer patrolling the street, so I asked him for directions. To my surprise, he smiled, shrugged his shoulders and apologized.

"I really want to help, but I'm not from London either," he said. "You'd better ask the volunteer in the pink jacket over there."

Later, I found out that he was actually from Scotland.

The city requested extra officers from Wales, Scotland and even Northern Ireland to boost security.

The Metropolitan Police of London said there were about 12,500 police on duty at peak times during the Games.

I often found the officers polite and amiable, though I can't help but wonder if these chubby-bellied men in their big heavy black

hats would be able to catch up to a criminal if the situation arose.

I read a funny piece about the London police in the newspaper. A 52-year-old man named Mark Worsfold was arrested by police for not smiling while watching the men's cycling race.

The police said his behavior had caused concern, as he had not been seen to be visibly enjoying the event.

It turned out that Worsfold, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's two years ago, suffered from muscle rigidity that affects his facial expressions.

He was released after two hours without charge or caution. Worsfold said he understood the actions taken by the officers and appreciated their apologies.

I am not a security expert so I don't feel qualified to comment on London's security preparation. But recalling the Beijing Games, where you saw obviously heightened levels of security that could be annoying at times, the London security efforts seemed to be much lighter.

The best part is, none of it spoiled the cheerful atmosphere surrounding the Games.

Contact the writer at lixiang@chinadaily.com.cn.