



“Breaking the mold with Nanjing”

Progressive strides in China’s sports community

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August 20 2019

Bravo! The crowd cheers as Zhang Shuai strikes the final shot, defeating Yastremska in a three-set match, claiming yet another victory at the 2019 Wimbledon Tennis Championships, and earning a position in the quarter-finals.



Students are taking tennis course which is a type of special campus physical education

Tennis, once thought an exclusive Western sport, has amassed popularity among the Chinese public in recent years. Owing to Li Na's success in winning two of the prestigious grand slam titles, Chinese people are uncovering the once-neglected sport and many are taking their discovery to the local tennis courts. It's becoming increasingly difficult to order a satisfactory tennis court in Nanjing. Especially at weekends, people often need to order a court three days ahead at all tennis clubs in Nanjing (Sang), according to Annie Sang, a tennis player who has tennis lessons on a weekly basis.

"Tennis is my life, I come here every Sunday morning," says Mr. Zhang, a gentleman who plays on court one at Nanjing Olympic Center every Sunday morning, "the courts are free in the morning and we have so much fun participating in this sport" (Zhang) Not far from Mr. Zhang's court is a group of children starting their first tennis lesson. With the coach tossing

the tennis balls at the service line, the children are giving their best effort to swing the heavy racket and hoping that the shot will go over the net. Most of these lessons last two hours and the children are usually drenched in sweat under the scorching sun after just an hour. While the children compete to knock down colored cones, the parents on the benches also shout encouragements.

According to a CMMS (China Market & Media Survey) report, the number of people participating in tennis has increased by over 400% in the last five years and the number is expected to reach 40 million by the year 2020 (环球体育传媒 Global Sports Media). How did this happen? The answer lies in multiple aspects. Jack Guo, one of the boys playing in the monthly tennis tournament hosted by the Olympic Center, said that he first learned about the sport by watching Li Na competing in the French Open finals. The intense game style, along with the immense physical strength and powerful mentality required to succeed in the game, intrigued Jack. As a result, he has been training at Nanjing Olympic Center twice a week ever since (Guo).

Most of the players that just joined the tennis community here resonate with Jack. People learned about the unique game through national stars, became engrossed, and got involved. As more people like Jack begin to play tennis, talented professional Chinese players are bound to appear, more Chinese people will learn about tennis, and thus, drive the sport forward.



Young baseball players of BATTOFORCE baseball club are practicing in Nanjing Olympic Center

Moving on to baseball, the Chinese national team was never one to come out on top. This, resulting in baseball being not relatively well known in China, is one of the major reasons why it is a sport played by the minority. However, participation in baseball is becoming almost phenomenal amongst the public, so it comes as no surprise that schools like Jingling Hexi Middle school and Eton Primary School and kindergartens are collaborating with baseball clubs to establish clubs.

“People from all walks of life are getting the chance to experience and enjoy baseball.” Observes Zhu Ye the spokeswoman of Batto Force—one of the few baseball clubs in Nanjing, “But more importantly, people’s views are changing. In cities like Shanghai, which are more internationally in touch with the rest of the world, inhabitants are comparatively more open-minded, therefore more inclined to try out various sports” (Ye). When asked if baseball will continue to gain popularity, she nodded in the affirmative, “Being more open-minded means that parents have more likelihood of encouraging their children to try activities that were originally unfamiliar. It also means that more students study abroad, where they

grow into the habit of playing sports like baseball. Many of whom will continue to do so when they return to their native country – China.”

Within a rapidly advancing society, people will inevitably come into closer contact with diverse cultures, especially different sports. It is this open-mindedness thus engendered those people to embrace “imported sports” as they seek for an alternative to “commonplace” games of football, basketball and the like.



Yong hockey players from Ice Sports Club in Nanjing Olympic Center

With the upcoming winter Olympics hosting in Beijing, ice hockey has also gained massive attention. Hockey, a sport that is known for violent physical contact, stayed unknown to the Chinese until recent years. Since its first Olympic appearance back in 1920, the Chinese national team only had rare appearances. Fortunately, in recent years, the establishment of new hockey facilities, the introduction of summer hockey camps, and the collaboration with junior schools reveal the Chinese’s growing passion for the North American sport.

Constructed for the Tenth National Sports Meeting in 2005, the ice rink in Nanjing Olympic Center is now open to the public and serves a series of winter sports, including ice hockey. Being the only standard-sized arena in Nanjing, the center cooperates with several local schools regularly, including two nearby middle schools. Five teams are formed, three of which competed in the National Ice Hockey Tournament representing Nanjing this year.

“I believe that it is necessary to encourage people to try new sports,” claims Yuan Jun, the director of the hockey club at Nanjing Olympic Center, “I think only by being good at different sports, can we truly be a strong sporting nation” (Jun). The elderly man has also made plans to ensure his vision comes true. “I’m trying to work with surrounding elementary and middle schools. The next step is to see if we can create a school hockey league.”

Thanks to national stars’ influence, tennis begins to gain more popularity. Even more, with the alteration of students’ and parents’ perceptions, baseball gradually earns its chance to welcome larger amounts of players. Due to the collaborations of schools, ice hockey becomes more and more well-known.

Seeing the strides that China has taken to strengthen its niche sports community is astonishing, we consider that China still has a long path to further popularize these sports as well as competing at their highest levels on the global stage. “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been.”— Wayne Gretzky

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