

JAPAN HOPING TO PADDLE NEW ASIAD SPORT INTO THE MAINSTREAM

Row, row, row your boat



Dragon boat racing will make its Asian Games debut on Thursday in Zengcheng, Guangdong province.

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GUANGZHOU — Japanese nurse Kazuhiko Fujii is hoping his efforts in dragon boat racing will help the new Asian Games sport gain global exposure as it chases a berth in the Olympics.

"I feel very happy I want the world to know about the sport through my efforts," said the 33-year-old.

Fujii, a member of Japan's 24-strong dragon boat squad, took part in a fancy boat parade at the start of the Asian Games opening ceremony in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou late Friday.

Dragon boat racing, which has its ancient roots in southern China, was added to the Asian Games program along with the traditional Asian board game of (*weiqi*), cricket, sports dance and roller sports.

Japan is represented by members of a 12-year-old dragon boat club that won a third straight national open championship in July to qualify for Guangzhou.

The club, founded by a teacher at a nursing school in the western Japan city of Aio,



DRAGON BOAT

is mostly made up of local male nurses, including Fujii.

Fujii said his goal is to "compete against the whole world and show world-class form with my team-

mates."

The time-honored paddling race — featuring colorful boats fitted with dragon-shaped heads and tails and a crew of one steerer, one drummer and 20 paddlers — was revived as a competitive sport in 1976 in Hong Kong.

It has been contested worldwide after the

International Dragon Boat Federation was formed in 1991.

Apart from China and other Asian countries and regions, Canada, Russia, Britain, the United States and Germany are among the top nations at the world championships in recent years.

"The Asian Games is the biggest event in my sport. We are so honored to participate," said Japan team manager Keita Haruna, adding that China, Myanmar and Indonesia are the best three in Asia.

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Triathlon queen opens Japan's gold account

GUANGZHOU — Favorite Mariko Adachi won Japan's first gold of the Asian Games on Saturday with a comprehensive victory in the women's triathlon.

Akane Tsuchihashi came second, over 46 seconds behind to complete a Japanese one-two while the Republic of Korea's (ROK) Jang Yun-jung won bronze.

Jang was over two minutes behind the champion and, exhausted by her efforts,

had to be escorted from the course, desperately clinging to a pair of officials.

"I was not competing alone," said the 27-year-old Adachi, who finished ninth in the world championships series this year and has set her sights on the 2012 Olympics in London.

"Back in Tokyo we have a whole team sup-



TRIATHLON

porting us," added the Osaka native who finished the gruelling event in a time of 2:05.44.

Tsuchihashi admitted she had come off second best.

"Mariko is a model who I respect and want to follow. I want to compete with her again in the future and do a better job," she said.

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Gold medalist Mariko Adachi (left) of Japan poses with silver medalist Akane Tsuchihashi after winning the women's triathlon.