



Strongman Zhong Man remembers

CHINESE FENCER POINTS TO THE PAST IN BELGRADE WHILE AIMING FOR FUTURE GLORY IN LONDON

BY TANG ZHE
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — The memories are enough for Zhong Man.

They have to be.

Zhong, China's Olympic fencing champion, is too engrossed in preparations for next summer's Olympics to participate in the Universiade. But he has fond memories from Belgrade two years ago.

"I remember when we had dinner in the village, some foreign athletes — they were quite outgoing and liked to express themselves — always went into the canteen while singing and dancing," said Zhong, who is in training in Beijing.

"Infected by their enthusiasm, athletes from other countries soon joined them and the atmosphere quickly became high-spirited. That was really interesting."

Unlike some athletes who used the Universiade to launch themselves onto the international stage, Zhong went to the 2009 Universiade with an Olympic title already under his belt.

He claimed China's first men's Olympic individual sabre gold in 2008, 24 years after Luan Jujie won the women's foil gold in Los Angeles.

He said his Olympic experience contrasted nicely with that at Belgrade.

"The atmosphere of the Universiade is more relaxing and dynamic because you can find the power of youth everywhere," Zhong said.

He eventually finished his Belgrade sojourn with a team gold in the men's sabre and an individual bronze.

"I didn't think too much about the result and just wanted to enjoy myself," he said. "Unlike other international tournaments, which put us under huge pressure, relationships are more important at the Universiade."

Zhong started his athletic career in track and field but turned to bas-

ketball at 15 because of his height. He was discovered by fencing coach Huang Baohua while playing basketball in Nantong, Jiangsu province.

He peaked in Beijing, upsetting France's Nicolas Lopez in the title match.

Zhong is looking for a repeat in London, but for now his priority is to qualify. The departure of former coach Christian Bauer made things more difficult for him.

Bauer, who masterminded Zhong's victory at the Beijing Olympics, left the national team last year and was replaced by

Hungarian coach Laszlo Szepesi.

"Bauer's departure had a considerable impact on me. I can't concentrate on matches without him," said Zhong, who once described his relationship with Bauer as "son and father."

After losing to rising South Korean star Gu Bon-gil in the men's sabre final at the Asian Games — where the Chinese secured a team gold, edging South Korea by a point — Zhong decided to focus on the team game in London.

A loss to the Koreans at July's Asian Championships put Zhong in a difficult situation.

As only one berth was slotted for Asia, Zhong and his teammates have no choice but to win as many qualifying points as possible at the upcoming World Championships in Italy in October and three World Cup tournaments in the hope they can leapfrog South Korea.

Zhong said his daughter is his biggest motivation. To support Zhong's career, his wife, Wu Zongwen, quit her job as a university teacher in Nanjing, and moved to Beijing, where Zhong trains, for more family time.

"My daughter is 2 years old. She has learned how to walk and can call me 'papa,'" Zhong said. "I don't have much time to stay with her because of a tight training schedule, but I will be with her as long as I have time."



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ZHONG MAN
FENCING OLYMPIC CHAMPION



MIKE CLARKE / AGENCE
FRANCE-PRESSE

China's fencing Olympic champion Zhong Man has fond memories from the Belgrade Universiade two years ago where he won a gold medal in the men's sabre team event and a bronze in individual event.

FACTBOX

Birthdate: Feb 28, 1983 (age 28)

Birthplace: Nantong, Jiangsu province, China

Height: 1.9m

Weight: 75kg

Event: Sabre

Record

Bronze - China National Games (2005)

Gold - Asian Championships (2008)

Gold - Beijing Olympics (2008)

Gold - Guangzhou Asian Games team event (2010)