

# Super Dan to lead court battles

## BADMINTON GREAT SPEARHEADS A STRONG CHINESE ASSAULT IN THE RACQUET SPORTS

By SUN XIAOCHEN  
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GUANGZHOU — Compared to China's struggling "big ball" teams, the nation's racquet sports squads always seem to be in contention at major events.

That's once again the case at the Guangzhou Asian Games, where the "little ball" competitions represent huge medal hopes.

China's shuttlers are expected to dominate the podium at Guangzhou after claiming all five titles at the Paris World Championships in August.

Although stunned by world No 1, Malaysian Lee Chong Wei, in the final of the Japan Open last month, China's world and Olympic champion Lin Dan is still the hot favorite in men's singles.

The Asiad title represents the only blank on Lin's list of major championships.

"I just take it easy about the singles title. They will be close games against any Asian opponent, and I'm mature enough to face any difficulties ... even another failure," said Lin, who lost to Indonesian Taufik Hidayat in the singles final at the 2006 Doha Asian Games.

Besides Lin, Chen Jin, China's No 2, who is drawn with Lee in the same half, is aiming to maintain the winning form he showed in taking the Worlds title in Paris two months ago.

The tandem of Lee and Taufik is not the only force capable of spoiling the Chinese party.

Hafiz Hashim, the second ranked Malaysian shuttler, Park Sung-Hwan of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan's Kenichi Tago are also medal contenders.

On the women's side, revenge against the ROK, which upset China at the Uber Cup finals in May, will be the biggest motivation for the home side.

China's highly-ranked squad, including world No 1 Wang Xin and No 3 Wang Shixian, has tuned up well after the Worlds triumph in August to get ready for medal challengers from Malaysia, Hong Kong and the ROK.

"Our target is to grab more gold medals than last time at Doha," said head coach Li Yongbo.

India's Saina Nehwal, the world No 3, is another to watch out for. The 20-year-old from Hyderabad



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LIN DAN

China's Lin Dan takes to the Asian Games courts, knowing the adoring home crowd fully expects him to steamroll anyone who gets in his way — and there is every chance he will do just that.

has enjoyed a fine year, including winning gold at the Commonwealth Games last month.

Meanwhile, the all-powerful Chinese paddlers are again expected to make a clean sweep in Guangzhou.

Singapore, which shocked defending champion China at the World Team Championships in May, stands a chance to break the host team's juggernaut, while Japan and the ROK could also surprise.

China will feature Doha Asian Games gold medalists Ma Lin, Wang Hao and Guo Yue and they will be joined by their younger and already well-established teammates, Ma Long and Liu Shiwen.

Three-time Asiad gold medalist Wang Linqin was replaced by 20-year-old Xu Xin on the roster just one week ahead of the games' tip-off on Nov 13.

"Replacing Wang with Xu is to let the youngsters learn more from top-level multi-sports games and to help them get ready for the 2012 London Olympics. But Wang

still has a chance to go to London," said men's coach Liu Guoliang.

Led by world No 11 Li Na, China's tennis team is hoping to break its Asian Games record of three gold medals at Beijing's Asiad in 1990.

As usual, the success is likely to come from the women's side.

"The Asian Games is a proper stage for the young aces to grow. But we are here for the gold medals, especially for the women's team," said head coach Jiang Hongwei, who led the female squad to two gold and three bronze at the Doha Games.

China is favored to win the women's team event, boasting balanced power in singles and doubles play.

Veteran Peng Shuai and upcoming Zhang Shuai are the top two singles title hopes, but they will face tough challenges from Japanese veteran Kimiko Date Krumm and Indian Sania Mirza.

The inclusion of Yan Zi, a two-time Grand Slam women's doubles



LIU JIN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Peng Shuai of China returns a shot against Sara Errani of Italy during the China Open at the National Tennis Center in Beijing on Oct 4.

title winner, boosts China's chances of winning the doubles event.

As the women go for gold, China's men's squad will be satisfied with a medal of any color.

The young team, led by Zhang Ze, Gong Maoxin and Bai Yan,

will gain valuable experience at the Asian Games, where Lu Yen-hsun, the world No 43 from Chinese Taipei, is the title favorite.

"What they need is patience and confidence," coach Lu Ling said of China's men's squad.