

# Hope for gold sweep still alive

GUANGZHOU — China's shuttlers overcame the huge weight of expectation on Monday to seize gold in the men's and women's team competitions at the Asian Games to keep alive their quest for a clean-sweep.

Huge favorites in both categories, the Chinese showed little mercy, the men beating a stubborn Republic of Korea 3-1 and the women thrashing Thailand 3-0.

Super star Lin Dan, touted as the best player ever by some, put the men on their way at Tianhe Gymnasium, but he was far from his brilliant best at the outset, conceding the first game 21-19 to the plucky Park Sung-hwan.

That spurred "Super Dan" to life against the man who dumped him out of the Worlds in August in Paris and Lin won the next two games against a fast-tiring Park to win 19-21, 21-16, 21-18 in 71 minutes.

The Koreans won the next rubber in the doubles to make it 1-1, but China, roared on by vociferous home support, would not be denied for long.

"The start was not satisfactory, I was not doing well and I lost several points," said Lin, the reigning Olympic champion.

"I couldn't keep the advantage when I was leading and let him catch up later, which gave him a lot of confidence in such an important match.

"I was the first player for my team and also, it's the final match, so I felt a bit stressed."

Park, the world No 11, said he was disappointed to make so many errors in the final game, but took consolation from knowing he had lost to such a talented player.

"Everyone knows that Lin is exceptional — I don't think there's anyone in the world that can beat him at the moment," said Park.

China coach Li Yongbo said despite winning gold with ease, the Chinese women could learn from bleeding youngsters so early on.

"We can see very clearly that badminton is improving in the world and more and more countries are making improvements so we are going to face more and more challenges, so we need to work hard," said Li.

"All 10 (women) players were making their debuts in the Asian Games and they performed quite well."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



LU HANXIN / XINHUA

Thailand's women's badminton players, Sapsiree Taerattanachai (left), Ratchanok Intanon (middle) and Nitchaon Jindapol, had a glorious run in the team event before falling to China in the final on Monday.

# Thailand shuttling to the top

## SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATION EMERGING AS A REGIONAL POWERHOUSE

By TANG YUE  
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Until recently, Thailand was always a peripheral player in an Asian badminton community long dominated by traditional powerhouses China, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea.



BADMINTON

But now the kingdom well known for Thai boxing and sepak takraw has shown its willingness to take on the big boys by pulling off stunning upsets in the men's and women's team competitions at the Guangzhou Asian Games.

Thailand's women's team, which finished seventh in Doha four years ago, upset second and third seeds Japan and Indonesia en route to Monday's final.

The Thais failed to topple China, but impressed all rivals with their strong showing.

On the men's side, Boonsak Ponsana, singles semifinalist at the 2004 Olympic Games, led his team to the bronze medal after downing world No 1 Lee Chong Wei in the opener of the teams quarterfinals against Malaysia.

"In the past, we couldn't beat Malaysia on the men's side and our women's team couldn't beat Japan and Indonesia — but now we can," Charoen Wattanasin, president of the Badminton Association of Thailand, told China Daily.

"But this is not a surprise for me. We have planned (for it). Thailand has made a lot of progress in badminton and we have very good young players."

Forty-four years ago, Wattanasin, a two-time singles runner-up at the All-England Championships in the early 1960s, led Thailand to its only Asiad badminton championship by winning the men's team title on home soil.

Thailand also finished in the top four at five Thomas Cup championships between 1958-76.

In Monday's final at Tianhe Gymnasium, Thailand benched its top two women's singles players, Worlds quarterfinalist Salakjit Ponsana and P. Buranaprasertsuk.

Instead, the Thais sent an under-20 contingent — including 15-year-old Ratchanok Intanon — to play the opener against China's 25-year-old Wang Xin.

The teenager gave the world No 1 a real challenge, winning the first game and holding the

lead until the middle game of the third before losing 20-22, 21-17, 21-14.

Last year, Intanon became the first Thai badminton player to win a world title by claiming the singles title at the World Junior Championships and also the youngest to accomplish that feat, at age 14. She then defended the championship in August.

Thais also claimed the men's and women's singles titles at August's Youth Olympics in Singapore, through Pisit Poodchalat and Sapsiree Taerattanachai respectively.

"Thai players have improved a lot in the past few years, especially in women's singles. They have shown great ability and potential here," said China's head coach, Li Yongbo.

"They also put the younger generation through such major tournaments. That will help them grow faster."

Inspired by the success in the team event, the Thai chief is now expecting more good news from the upcoming singles and doubles competitions in Guangzhou.

"I'm very satisfied with the team result. Now I'm looking forward to the other five events. I'm looking forward to an even better result," Wattanasin said.