

'Super Dan' is still the man

CHINA'S ICON TREATS FANS TO STYLISH SALUTE AFTER NAILING ELUSIVE ASIAD TITLE

By YU YILEI
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — First he ripped off his shirt. Then he made a military salute to the audience. Then he took off his shoes and threw them into the crowd at the packed Tianhe Stadium.

Lin Dan of China finished off a mouth-watering showdown with archrival Lee Chong Wei of Malaysia with an emotional celebration as the badminton icon completed a career grand slam by being crowned the Asian Games singles champion.

The Beijing Olympics and two-time world champion overcame Lee in a three-set tussle, 21-13, 15-21, 21-10 on Sunday, to clinch the only major title missing from his glittering resume.

"This is one of the most outstanding games of the Asian Games so far. Both of us played very hard and I am just the lucky one," said the man known as "Super Dan".

As expected, Lee, the current world No 1 who defeated Lin in the Japan Super Series final earlier this year, put up a gallant show against the Chinese title favorite, particularly after Lin won the first set with ease.

With fine placement of the shuttle, Lee built an early lead in the second set and then dragged the match into the deciding set by leveling the score.

However, his form fell off in the third set and turned a neck-and-neck competition into a predictable victory for Lin, who raced to a 10-1 lead in quick fashion and was never seriously threatened after that.



LIU JIN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Lin Dan of China throws his shoes to supporters after beating Lee Chong Wei of Malaysia during their badminton men's singles final on Sunday. Lin captured the one major title missing from his bulging trophy cabinet as he fought his way to a pulsating 21-13, 15-21, 21-10 win.

Lee tried his best to hang on, but could not stop Lin from wrapping up the match with one of his trademark smashes.

"That was the best I could do. In the third game I couldn't keep my stamina up, especially after last night's long match. I tried my best and although I am disappointed, I am happy with my overall performance," Lee said.

The Malaysian was somewhat hampered by a back injury that almost kept him out of the Guangzhou tournament.

"After Japan and the World Championships, I sustained a back injury and could not attend full

training. So I am satisfied to have won the silver," he said.

The match was also a battle of mental power as both finalists were playing under huge pressure.

Lin is currently the hottest sports figure in China. Playing in Guangzhou, known as a badminton-crazy city, and in front of his girlfriend Xie Xingfang, a former women's singles world No 1, made his task more difficult.

Since arriving in the city last month, he has received the sort of attention that could only be matched by NBA star Yao Ming, who played a pre-season NBA China game here earlier this month.

Meanwhile, Lee was desperate to get rid of his "choker" image and give his country its first men's singles gold medal since the 1970 Bangkok Games.

"Both of us were under huge pressure and our performances tonight deserve recognition. I have to say that Lee is a very respectful and good opponent," Lin said.

Even Chen Jin, the reigning world champion and the bronze medalist who was beaten by Lee in the semis, was wowed. "After watching the game, I realized I don't have the kind of patience and flexibility they showed tonight. They are very respectful players," said Chen.

To the fans' disappointment, that could be the last showdown at the Asian Games as both players said they would like to make room for younger players.

"This is likely to be my last Asian Games and I am pleased that I could deliver an excellent performance," Lin said.

When asked what is next on his agenda, Lin said he would take a good rest first.

"I am not thinking that far ahead. I need time to adjust back to normal after enjoying this kind of huge excitement.

"I am just glad I could fulfill the fans' expectations of me."

GOLD MEDALISTS >> OTHER OUTSTANDING ATHLETES



AFP

BASKETBALL

Host's hoopsters stay unbeaten

China rode the outside shooting of guard Sun Yue, who scored 19 points, as the reigning champion knocked off Korea 76-66 on Sunday to remain unbeaten at the Asian Games basketball.

Former NBA center Wang Zhizhi led China's inside attack with 16 points, while his front court mate Ding Jinhui scored eight of his 10 points in the third quarter.



REUTERS

BADMINTON

Lee/Shin lift mixed title

Korea's Lee Hyo-jung and Shin Baek-cheol (left) gesture after receiving their gold medals in the mixed doubles badminton final at the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou on Sunday.

Firm home support failed to help China's Zhang Nan and Zhao Yunlei as they lost to the Korean pair 21-19, 21-14 in the final.



AFP

SHOOTING

China wins 3 trap golds

Gold medalist Li Qingnian and her son celebrate during the medals ceremony for China's women's shooting double trap individual and team finals on Sunday. China won three of the four double trap golds to take their tally to 19 from the 40 shooting titles contested so far in the 44-event competition.