

End in sight for Date Krumm

JAPANESE VETERAN LOSES MARATHON MATCH, HOPES SHE STILL HAS ANOTHER SEASON IN HER

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

GUANGZHOU — Forty-year-old Kimiko Date Krumm, who returned to professional tennis in 2008 after a 12-year layoff from the sport and returned to the top 50 this season, said next season is likely to be her last.

The Japanese, competing in Guangzhou 16 years after her last Asiad, was the women's singles top seed but lost to China's Peng Shuai in a marathon, 165-minute semifinal on Sunday.

When asked whether she expects to be competing at the Incheon Asiad in four years' time, the veteran said: "I will be 44 four years from now. I am not a robot. I am just an average person."

"I'm not even sure whether I can manage to play until the end of next season, let alone the next Asian Games?"

The then 20-year-old won her first Asiad title by leading Japan to the women's team championship at the 1990 event in Beijing. In 1994, she pocketed singles gold in Hiroshima.

Although she only managed to win two bronze medals in the team and singles events in Guangzhou, Date Krumm said appearing at the event was a dream come true.

"I hadn't played at the Asian Games in a very long time. But I really wanted to play again," she said. "I didn't play tennis for 12 years and then I came here as the top seed ... it was beyond my dreams. What's more, I managed to stand on the



NICOLAS ASFOURI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kimiko Date Krumm of Japan returns a forehand against Peng Shuai of China during the women's singles semifinal at the Aoti Tennis Center on Sunday. Peng won 7-6, 3-6, 6-2.

podium, and that meant so much to me."

Picking up tennis at the age of seven, Date Krumm broke into the elite level in the 1990s and achieved a career-high world ranking of No 4 in 1995. She called time on her career after the 1996 Olympic Games at the age of 24.

Returning to the tour in April 2008, she picked up a WTA title

at the 2009 Korea Open, becoming the second-oldest player in the Open era to do so after Billie Jean King.

At this year's French Open, Date Krumm defeated former world No 1 and 2009 runner-up Dinara Safina in the first round. It was her first win in a Grand Slam main draw since 1997, and she became the oldest player ever to beat a top

10 player at 39 years, seven months and 26 days.

She then received a wild card to enter the 2010 Commonwealth Bank Tournament of Champions in Bali, Indonesia. She upset China's No 1 and the tournament's top seed, Li Na, in the opening round and then defeated Daniela Hantuchova. She finished the year as the world's No 46-ranked player.

"I had a good season. But I'm very tired now as the year is coming to an end. I'm in my best condition now. It's a pity that I can't participate in the final," she said after losing 7-6 (6), 3-6, 6-2 to Peng.

"Now I need some rest before continuing to compete next year. I will focus more on the singles and hopefully, I can have some good results in the Grand Slams."

Peng Shuai flies the flag after stars pull out

By TANG YUE
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GUANGZHOU — After struggling through a year which saw her WTA Tour ranking fall to a six-year low of 95, China's Peng Shuai came into the Asian Games as a dark horse for the crown.

However, with the host's top two players, world No 11 Li Na and defending champion Zheng Jie, not competing in the singles, the 24-year-old picked up the

national team's hopes when she upset top seed Kimiko Date Krumm of Japan in a marathon semifinal on Sunday.

Peng, seeded fourth in Guangzhou, will battle for the gold medal with third seed Akgui Amanmuradova of Uzbekistan, who defeated India's Sania Mirza in the other semi.

"We were running all the time. There were a few balls during which I felt my arms and legs were about to fall off," an exhausted

Peng said after the 165-minute match.

"I was leading sometimes and was falling behind, too. In the second set, I felt very tired and she was bouncing back. But the fans kept cheering for me and that gave me strength and I kept telling myself not to give up," said Peng.

She said her mental preparation for the encounter against the 1994 Asiad singles gold medalist helped her.

"She is very tough and experi-

enced. I know she has defeated a lot of high-ranking players this year," Peng said of her doubles partner at October's China Open.

Date Krumm, a former world No 4, was full of praise for Peng.

"I think she had a great match today. She had good attacks and good defense. Competing on her home court put her under pressure, and she had to fight that as well as me. But I think she controlled it well and then took charge of the match," she said.



ZOU ZHONGPING / CHINA DAILY

Peng Shuai returns a shot to Kimiko Date Krumm on Sunday.