

## SPORTS

## SOCCER

# Heroic Wang books China's Tokyo ticket

Wuhan native nets double as Steel Roses edge qualification playoff thriller

By SHI FUTIAN  
shifutian@chinadaily.com.cn

Overcome with emotion, Wang Shuang sank to her knees and cried tears of joy as her Team China teammates rushed to celebrate with their savior.

After a nerve-jangling 120 minutes of soccer — and a roller-coaster last year and a half for Wuhan native Wang — the outpouring of emotion was hardly surprising.

Having netted in last week's 2-1 first-leg victory, Wang was again China's hero by bagging a double — including a sublime extra-time winner — to book the Steel Roses' ticket to this summer's Tokyo Olympics following a tense qualification play-off against South Korea.

The 4-3 aggregate victory sparked wild celebrations on the pitch and among the 13,000 ecstatic home fans at the Suzhou Olympic Sports Center.

"We never gave up, even when we were 2-0 down in the first half, and we always believed we could come back," said Wang. "We deserved the victory because we've run over 10,000 meters every day and trained together for over 100 days.

"The harder we train, the luckier we can be. We've been preparing for this for 130 days. We knew the South Korean team only trained for one month. We had to fight to the last minute."

That fighting spirit has never waned throughout the Steel Roses's pandemic-affected qualification campaign.



Wang Shuang celebrates after scoring Team China's decisive extra-time goal in the second leg of the Steel Roses' Olympic qualification playoff against South Korea in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. The game finished 2-2 as China won 4-3 on aggregate to book the remaining Asian zone ticket for this summer's Tokyo Games. XINHUA

The squad came through a tough third-round qualifying tournament in Australia last year after all Group B matches had to be relocated from Wuhan due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the city.

The change of location cost the squad both home advantage and star player Wang, who spent

months locked down in the city.

Wang, however, emerged from those tough times to lead her hometown team to the domestic league title — and now she has come up trumps for her country.

The 26-year-old was rumored to have fallen out with head coach Jia Xiuquan during a disappointing

2019 Women's World Cup campaign, however there was no questioning her dedication to China's cause on Tuesday as her sweetly struck winner and slightly fortunate opener saw off a plucky South Korean side.

In a disastrous opening 45 minutes for China, the visitor had

stunned the host by taking a 2-0 lead into the halftime break.

However, a floated Wang freekick in the 68th minute deceived the Korean defense to sail into the net and force the extras, before the former Paris Saint-Germain playmaker netted with a sweetly struck angled shot in the 103rd minute to



We never gave up, even when we were 2-0 down in the first half, and we always believed we could come back."

Wang Shuang, on China's extra-time win over South Korea

seal China's place at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Speaking before kickoff, head coach Jia had correctly predicted a tough task ahead, despite his team's 2-1 first-leg advantage.

"Theoretically speaking, the second match should be much harder. I told my players they must forget the result of the first match. To win the second match, they'll have to exert a lot more effort. We need to ensure our players stay in peak condition," said Jia, who took over Team China in 2018.

Suzhou had given Team China a hero's welcome upon its arrival over the weekend — even staging a drone show ahead of the match. The fans' excitement was indicative of just how much they crave a return of the Steel Roses' glory days, when they were runner-up at both the 1996 Olympics and the 1999 World Cup.

The rapid global development of women's soccer in recent years, especially in European nations, has seen China's powers wane somewhat. At the 2019 Women's World Cup in France, for example, Jia's team was eliminated at the last-16 stage following a 2-0 defeat to Italy.

However, Tuesday's gutsy performance and Wang's individual brilliance bodes well for Tokyo.

## OLYMPICS

## Skateboarders' pipe dreams hit pandemic-sized problems

By MURRAY GREIG  
murraygreig@chinadaily.com.cn

Skateboarding was confirmed as an Olympic sport in August 2016 and scheduled to debut at Tokyo 2020. But when the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the Games back to this summer, the world's best boarders were left in limbo.

With major competitions canceled by the pandemic, only three qualifiers are scheduled prior to the Olympics, which open on July 23: the May 17-23 Dew Tour in Des Moines, Iowa; the May 31-June 6 Street world championships in Rome; and the Park world championships from June 14-20, at a location yet to be determined.

Olympic skateboarding will consist of two disciplines — Street and Park — each comprised of preliminaries and finals. Street consists of urban obstacles like stairs, handrails, curbs, benches, walls and

slopes. Park competitions are held on a hollowed-out course, often involving halfpipes similar to those used in snowboarding.

Twenty skaters will compete in four heats of five, and the first eight from the combined ranking of the heats will advance to the finals.

For the youngest member of Canada's national skateboard team, the waiting is the worst part. Toronto's Fay Ebert, 11, just wants the opportunity to show she belongs with the world's best — and possibly join Syrian table tennis prodigy Hend Zaza as the youngest Olympian in Tokyo.

"If she goes to all three qualifiers and skates well, Tokyo remains very much a possibility," Ebert's mother, Elisabeth, told Canadian Press on the weekend.

"There's also a chance that Fay can go to the next Games in Paris in three years.

"There's no financial support,



Skateboarding will debut as an Olympic sport in Tokyo. REUTERS

that's a big one. Going to these events is all out of pocket. The pandemic has made it very difficult to get sponsors and have support so they can help fund the athletes' training for the Olympics."

Ebert, who has only been board-

ing for two years, is currently ranked No 44 in the world.

Meanwhile, 23-year-old Maddy Balt believes representing Canada at Paris 2024 seems a more likely scenario.

"I really want to be at the Paris

Games. I don't know, with everything that's happening with COVID, what Tokyo is going to look like and if that's really a possibility right now just because of the lack of qualifiers we're going to have," said Balt.

"Funding has been almost nonexistent, but Canada Skateboard has been able to help us out by giving us access to gyms, trainers and stuff like that. But because the national Olympic committee hasn't accepted us into the network yet, we don't have access to all the funding that we should."

A shortage of qualifiers hasn't been the only difficulty for the two boarders. Due to public health restrictions, the sense of community within the sport's culture has also diminished during their time training in Toronto.

"Because of COVID, I haven't been able to skate with anybody outside," Ebert said. "Some days I don't want to skate at all, but once I get to the

park it's fun, because I just practice all my tricks and get into the flow of skateboarding.

"Sometimes I'm a little bit down going there because nobody's around, but I have to take advantage of what I have right now."

Having been unable to train with anyone besides each other when Balt is in town, the two have grown closer in preparation for future competitions.

"We've definitely become closer in the past year or so," Balt said. "We did a trip where she came out to the West Coast and we were filming a little documentary, and we've been training together in Toronto for the past couple of months.

"Our relationship is pretty chill. Fay is a fun little kid and ... it's definitely been a blessing that we've had each other in the past little bit, because it would've been a lot different if we had nobody else to skate with."

## International Education Column

If you are interested in this, please contact: [i.education@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:i.education@chinadaily.com.cn)

香港教育大學  
The Education University of Hong Kong

3<sup>rd</sup> in Asia  
16<sup>th</sup> in the World  
in Education\*

\*QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021

2021/22 Undergraduate Programmes

Global Affairs Office  
The Education University of Hong Kong  
Add: 10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong  
Tel: +(852)-2948 7654  
Email: [gao@eduhk.hk](mailto:gao@eduhk.hk)  
<http://www.eduhk.hk/gao>

University of Primorska, Faculty of Management

Moscow State University, School of Economics, Faculty of Political Sciences

Connecting the East and the West

Economics and Finance

Political Sciences: international relations and economic diplomacy

Get your double master's degree from Moscow State University Lomonosov, Russia and the University of Primorska, Slovenia, Europe.

Two modern and dynamic study programmes that offer a wide range of professional knowledge and practical skills that will help you realize your business ideas, gain knowledge in the field of global economics and finance, strategic organization and management, or allow you to become an expert in economic diplomacy and international relations.

Apply now!

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO: <https://www.msu-lomonosov.eu/>

One program, two degrees

Lingnan University 嶺南大學  
University 香港 Hong Kong

Faculty of Business 嶺南大學商學院

Elevating Your Career  
with Postgraduate Programmes at Faculty of Business of Lingnan University

Doctor of Business Administration in Global Digital Economy and Governance  
全球数字经济与治理工商管理博士 (DBA in GDEG)

Master in Accountancy 会计学硕士

MSc in Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship 商业创新及创业理学硕士

MSc in Risk and Insurance Management 风险及保险管理理学硕士

MSc in Finance 金融学硕士

MSc in eBusiness and Supply Chain Management 电子商务与供应链管理理学硕士

MSc in Marketing and International Business 市场及国际企业理学硕士

MSc in Human Resource Management & Organisational Behaviour 人力资源管理及组织行为学硕士

MSc in Artificial Intelligence and Business Analytics 人工智能与商业分析理学硕士

Connect us DBA in GDEG Learn More

Enquiries: Taught Postgraduate Programmes Office Liberal Arts Education • Transformation For Life  
[tpgpfob@LN.edu.hk](mailto:tpgpfob@LN.edu.hk) (852) 2616 8193