

Asiad Daily

CHINA DAILY The official publication for the 19th Asian Games

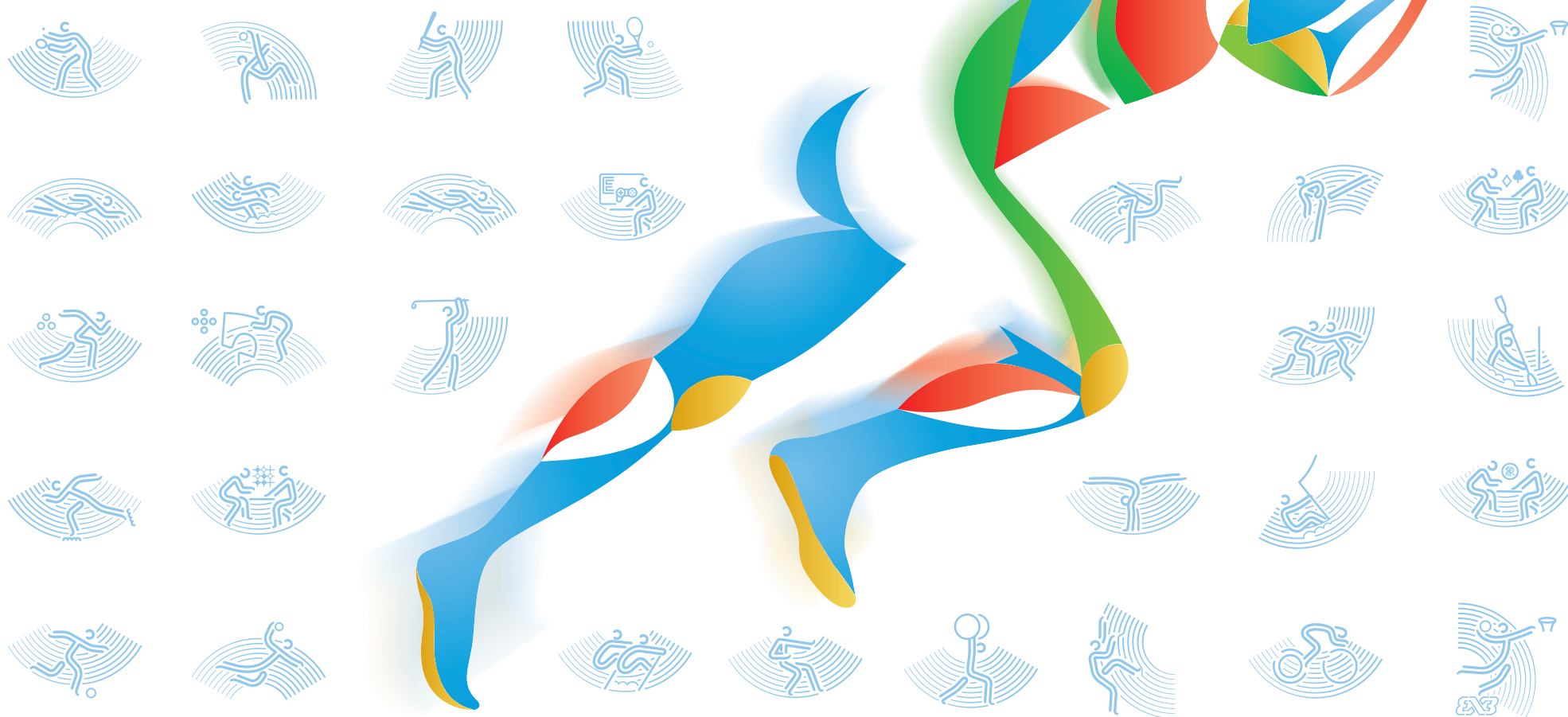


杭州第19届亚运会
The 19th Asian Games

No 3 · Saturday, September 23, 2023



HANGZHOU IS A GO!



The wait is finally over as Games
set to open in spectacular style





Foreign athletes can enjoy a diverse range of cultural activities at the Asian Games Village. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

'Asian Games for All' echoes beyond borders

By XING WEN in Hangzhou
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The "Asian Games for All" campaign to enable the 19th Asiad to engage the public beyond Hangzhou city, Zhejiang province, the country of China and the wider continent took center stage as the curtain came down on the program at the Main Media Center on Sept 22.

The campaign, organized by the Olympic Council of Asia, consisted of three events — namely, the Hangzhou Asian Games Fun Run, Asian Games Youth Reporter Project and Hangzhou Asian Games Children's Art Competition.

Media personnel who joined the Fun Run activity participated in such traditional Chinese exercises as *baduanjin* and tai chi.

Australian photographer for Al-Iraqia newspaper, Rafeq Mohammed, joins weekly tai chi classes near his home in Sydney and tried *baduanjin* for the first time during the Fun Run.

"Tai chi has made me more patient," he said.

"(*Baduanjin*) is amazing. It makes me feel powerful, relaxes me and enhances my mental strength. During the practice, I also acquired discipline."

Chinese University of Hong Kong junior Leung Nga Wing was honored to have been selected as a Youth Reporter Project representative. The 20-year-old translation major had previously participated in a sports reporting workshop and performed impressively enough to be sent to the Games in Hangzhou.

"It's my first visiting Hangzhou and to participate in such a comprehensive event," she said.

"It's a tremendous honor for me as a university student to have access to the media center, where I can observe how journalists work, and later get to witness the competitions."

OCA Life's honorary vice-president Wei Jizhong said, "I feel that the widespread participation in the promotional campaign indicates the high expectations and support from our Asian community for the Hangzhou Asian Games. I believe your expectations will definitely come true."

The biggest and best by far

With record participation levels and a message of inclusiveness at its core, the historic Hangzhou Asiad raises the bar for global sports community

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Hangzhou
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With the biggest field of competitors in the event's history, the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou uphold the cherished values of openness, unity and harmony, as excitement levels reach their peak on the opening day.

Recognized as the world's largest sporting gala in terms of scale, a new chapter begins on Saturday when all of the continent's 45 national and regional Olympic committees — represented by a record total of 12,417 athletes — march into Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium for the opening ceremony. They will compete in 481 medal events, another record for the Games.

The numbers speak volumes for the Asiad's unifying power as perfectly embodied by the Hangzhou Games' official slogan "Heart to Heart, @Future", said Raja Randhir Singh, the acting president of the Olympic Council of Asia.

"The slogan by itself means everything," Singh added during an OCA press briefing on the eve of the grand opening.

"It carries the message for the youth and for the world that we look for peace and harmony through sports. So, in that manner, you can't get a better slogan than 'heart to heart'."

"I think this is something that you should carry forward, not only in the world of sport, but all over the world that we live in. This is the attitude that we would like to keep and we would like everyone to promote."

With action in eight sports already underway, the host's exemplary preparatory work in all aspects — from the readiness of venues to the accommodation at the athletes' village to the



Members of the Thailand delegation pose with Lianlian, one of the Hangzhou Asian Games mascots, at the athletes' village on Friday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

diverse cultural events on offer — has deeply impressed participating delegations.

Malaysian athletes are enjoying their experience in Hangzhou even more than the Olympics, according to Dato Chong Kim Fatt, head of the Malaysia delegation.

"The sports world was stopped by COVID for a few years. Now the Hangzhou Asian Games allow us to move forward into a new era for the global sports community," Chong said on Friday, following a ceremony at which the Malaysian delegation gifted cultural exhibits to the Hangzhou Asian Games Museum.

"At a meeting of chefs de mission two days ago, a lot of us agreed that Hangzhou is the best Asian Games

ever, and could also surpass the Olympic Games," said Chong, who is also a vice-president of the Malaysian Olympic Committee.

Immediately after Saturday night's opening ceremony, rowers will contest the first gold medal of the Games at Fuyang Water Sports Centre, where the women's lightweight double sculls final will take place on Sunday morning.

China's national champion pair Zou Jiaqi and Qiu Xiuping will battle against five other competing teams, including Japan, Indonesia and Uzbekistan, for the coveted opening gold.

The fight for Olympic qualification quotas for next year's Paris Games headlines a packed schedule of world-

class athletic action across nine sports. The Hangzhou Asiad will also shine a spotlight on a number of youthful, fashion-oriented sports, including breaking, skateboarding and esports, as well as some traditional and regional disciplines, such as sepak-takraw, kabaddi and squash.

The diversity of the Asian Games is the event's biggest strength, reckons Wei Jizhong, honorary vice-president of the OCA.

"We are the Games for all Asian people, in all countries and regions. So the Asian Games are open to all NOC members of the OCA," he said. "This means our Games are not only concentrated on elite sports, but all the sportspeople and sports lovers in Asia are welcomed into our family."



The final leg of the torch relay has seen the flame carried through all 11 cities of Zhejiang province. XINHUA

Shining beacon of unity

Torch relay lights the way forward with message of peace and progress

By MA ZHENHUAN
and QI XIAO in Hangzhou

As with any Asian Games, the torch relay symbolizes the beginning of the sporting extravaganza.

For the 19th Asian Games, the torch relay celebration commenced on Sept 8 at the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Hangzhou. The flame, a beacon of fraternity, progress, unity and perseverance, traveled through all 11 cities of Zhejiang province, and returned to Hangzhou on Sept 20 for the final leg before culminating in the igniting of the cauldron at Saturday's opening ceremony.

"The 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou will fully showcase the courage and perseverance of the athletes, and demonstrate the goodwill of the Asian people for peace, friendship and progress," said Song Luzeng, vice-president of the Olympic Council of Asia, at the launch ceremony of the torch relay.

A total of 2,022 torchbearers, 732 of whom are women, from different Asian countries and regions, passed on the torch during the

relay, according to the Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee. The youngest torchbearer was 14 years old and the oldest was 84.

A total of 30 torchbearers were chosen through a random draw of public online applications, which totaled over 5 million entries.

Large crowds gathered along the route and cheered for each torchbearer.

"A healthy body is the foundation for a good education," said torchbearer Chen Liqun, a retired high-school principal who has won numerous awards and honors for helping poor students in remote areas.

"I have truly felt the anticipation and enthusiasm for the Asian Games from the Hangzhou people," said Olympic shooting champion Yang Qian.

Other torchbearers included table tennis world champion Fan Zhendong, Paralympic swimming gold medalist Song Maodang and Olympic champion shuttler Chen Yufei.

Weighing 1.2 kilograms and 73 centimeters in length, the torch takes its design cues from the 5,000-year-old Liangzhu civilization.



Crowds along the route of the relay cheer on the torchbearers. XINHUA

"The name of the torch reflects how Chinese culture has been passed down from generation to generation," explained Wang Yun, dean of the Industrial Design and Research Institute at the China Academy of Art.

The top of the torch resembles a *cong*, an ancient Chinese jade artifact. The burner nozzle takes its shape from the earliest oracle bone character of "*cong*", which means

"light traveling in a cylinder".

The surface engravings are inspired by spiral patterns highly valued by the Liangzhu civilization.

The base of the torch is embossed with eight "water veins", symbolizing the eight major river systems in Zhejiang.

Advanced technology helps the torch remain lit even in adverse weather conditions, gale-force winds and heavy rainfall.

Igniting the flame of innovation

By MA ZHENHUAN
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While hundreds of millions train their eyes on the igniting of the cauldron during the opening ceremony of the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou on Saturday, many will turn to their phones to soak in the excitement of that climactic moment.

They will be able to participate in the first ever virtual lighting of the cauldron in the Games' history, the culmination of its first ever digital torch relay.

First introduced on Nov 27, 2022, the digital torchbearer program aims to break through the constraints of time and space, so that more people can enjoy the Games, according to the Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee.

It was officially launched on June 15 this year, when the flame of the Asian Games was lit.

Over a hundred million users have signed up and passed on their digital torches, according to figures released by Ant Group, which developed the digital platform and made it part of Alipay, one of the most popular mobile payment apps in China.

The platform has integrated some of the most advanced technologies such as blockchain, big data and artificial intelligence to better serve the Games.

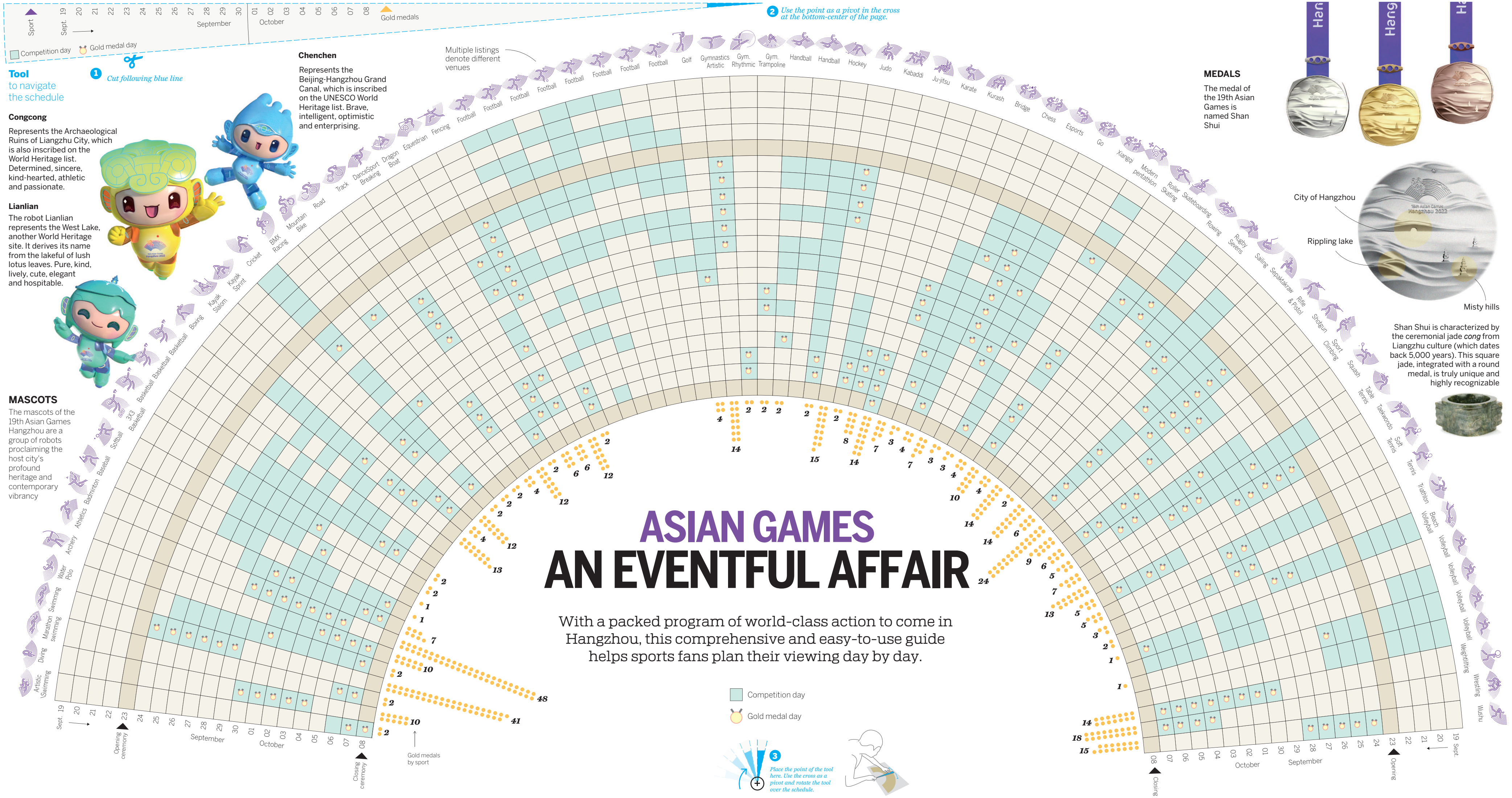
People can join the virtual torch relay on the platform by simply shaking their mobile phones. After finishing the relay, each torchbearer can choose to download a picture of the moment.

Empowered by AI technologies, over 2,000 billion avatars are on offer for users to choose from, according to Ant Group, making it a truly unique experience.

The program is instrumental in further deepening people-to-people exchanges, as users from more than 40 countries and regions in Asia, and across other continents, are able to join the celebrations in this innovative way, thanks to the participation of leading digital companies including Dana in Indonesia, GCash in the Philippines, Kakao Pay in South Korea, Touch 'n Go eWallet in Malaysia, and TrueMoney in Thailand, among others.

The combination of the physical torch relay with its digital counterpart is a highlight of the grand event, said Du Zuofeng, an official from the Games' torch relay command center.

"In this digital era, anyone can be a torchbearer," he added.





Clockwise from top: Zhang Boheng, Chen Yufei, Ma Long, Gong Lijiao, Zhu Yaming and Wu Yanni are all tipped to win medals for host China during the Hangzhou Asian Games which open on Saturday. XINHUA / REUTERS / WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

By **SUN XIAOCHEN** in Hangzhou
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With Paris 2024 fast approaching, Chinese athletes have embraced the home Asiad in Hangzhou as a much-needed test for the Olympic challenge, offering world-class drills against close neighbors in a variety of sports.

Featuring a blend of youth and experience, the 1,329-member Chinese delegation to the 19th Asian Games, which open on Saturday, has vowed to do the host country proud at the continental multisport gala by delivering excellent performances, both on and off the field.

Spearheaded by 36 Olympic champions, a total of 886 Chinese athletes will compete across 407 medal events of the total 481 to be contested in Hangzhou and the five co-host cities in Zhejiang. Crucially, 74 Olympic qualification berths for next year's Paris Games are up for grabs in nine sports, including artistic swimming, breaking, tennis and water polo.

Having topped the Asian Games medal table 10 times in a row since the 1982 edition in India, the Chinese delegation is set to go all out to extend its dominance on home soil, while using the quadrennial event to facilitate its preparations for Paris 2024.

"We hope to deliver the best possible performances in front of our

fans, and to do so in a clean and honest way with zero tolerance for doping," Gao Zhidan, director of the General Administration of Sport, said last week in Beijing.

"Not only are we trying to finish on top of the overall medal table again, we will also approach the Asian Games as a major test, ahead of the Paris Olympics, to gain international experience and assess our performances against Olympic standards.

"We are also looking forward to promoting the Olympic values and the positive image of China's sports community," Gao said.

As a sports powerhouse in Asia, China is especially aiming to excel in six sports in which it traditionally enjoys success — table tennis, diving, weightlifting, shooting, gymnastics and badminton.

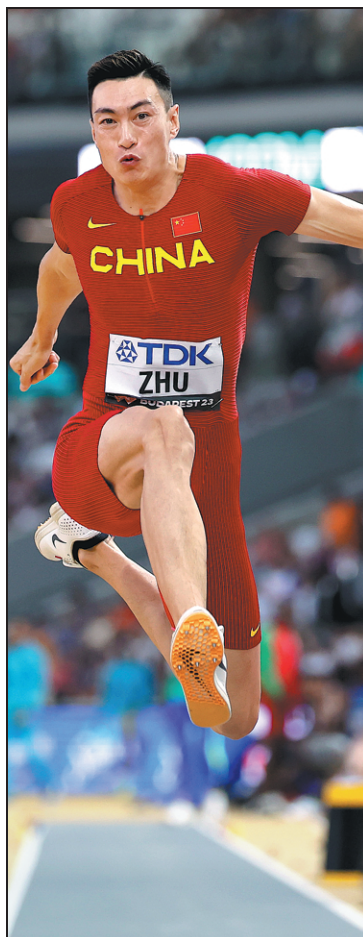
However, Team China is braced for tough competition from neighbors such as Japan, Republic of Korea and India.

Veteran gymnast Zou Jingyuan, the reigning men's Olympic and world champion on the parallel bars, said the competition at the Asian Games, particularly against archrival Japan, is a valuable rehearsal for Paris 2024.

"China and Japan have developed a strong rivalry in gymnastics, especially on the men's side, over the years. I hope both teams will perform to the highest possible standards to make it a real treat for

Testing times

With the Asiad seen as a major step on the road to Paris 2024, Team China is looking to measure itself against some of its biggest Olympic medal rivals



the audience," said Zou, a member of China's gold medal-winning squad at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta.

"The gymnastics contest at the Asian Games already represents the highest level in the world, so we are approaching it as a serious opportunity to perfect our routines for next year's Olympics," he added.

The results from the 2022 world championships in Liverpool last November bode well for China, with the squad collecting three gold and two silver medals to finish second in the medal table, behind the US but ahead of Japan (two gold, three silver and three bronze).

Intriguing matchups also await China in table tennis, where a surging Japanese side, led by teenage phenomenon Tomokazu Harimoto, is expected to challenge China's dominance, and badminton, which has seen Korean shuttlers overtake Chinese stars on the world stage. At last month's badminton world championships, the ROK flexed its muscles with a hat-trick of titles — women's singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles.

"The Asian Games will provide a thorough test of our preparations for Paris 2024, so that we can make timely adjustments to our tactics, talent selection and frontline management," said Zhang Xin, secretary-general of China's Asian Games delegation.

The performance of China's collec-

tive "big-ball" teams will also be considered a defining measure of the host delegation's success in Hangzhou, especially after a series of recent setbacks in men's basketball and football on the world stage, Gao asserted.

"If we cannot deliver decent results in the highly popular team ball sports, including basketball, football and volleyball, the Asian Games will probably not be viewed as a success, even if we win tons of medals," he added.

Outpaced and overpowered by international heavyweights, the Chinese men's basketball team finished 29th — its worst ever ranking — at the FIBA World Cup in Manila earlier this month, thereby failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Led by coach Aleksandar Djordjevic, who retained his position despite the World Cup disappointment, Team China's hoopsters will bid to restore some pride when they defend their Asian Games gold on their home court.

The country's long underachieving men's football team are also in desperate need of a morale-boosting campaign in Hangzhou. The squad triggered yet more criticism for a sloppy performance in a 1-1 international friendly draw against Malaysia on Saturday. The result against the Asian minnow cast a huge shadow over China's prospects in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, which will kick off in November.



Esports & breaking with tradition



The Games will showcase not only conventional sports but also shine a spotlight on regional events and youthful, action-packed additions, **Shi Futian** reports



In keeping with slogan of the Asian Games, the events on display in Hangzhou will have one eye on the future. While the classics will be present, the roster is also dotted with exciting new sports that are set to attract fans of all age groups and from different backgrounds.

The Hangzhou Asiad features a total of 61 disciplines in 40 sports, which include most of those found at the Summer Olympics, such as athletics, swimming and three big-ball team sports (football, basketball and volleyball). It also boasts regional sports with distinct Asian characteristics, including kabaddi and sepak takraw.

There is also the addition of new, action-packed events that appeal to a younger audience, such as breaking and esports.

"Among all the 40 Asian Games events, 31 are Olympic sports, while nine are non-Olympic sports. There will be major sports including athletics and swimming, and there are regional sports such as wushu and kurash, which show the rich culture

and tradition of Asia," said Zhou Jin-qiang, a vice-minister of the General Administration of Sport of China.

"The addition of new sports such as breaking and esports is welcomed by the younger generation. The sports of the Asian Games have strong Olympic elements, and these sports have also become a great chance for Asian countries and regions to display their cultures and traditions. The variety of sports at the Asian Games is the

best testimony to the inclusiveness and diversity of Asian sports culture."

The Olympic sports at the Asian Games, first of all, attract a huge number of Asia's Olympic and world champions. The fierce competition among the region's top athletes is guaranteed to deliver the most thrilling action for fans to enjoy.

Asia's regional sports are always a major attraction at the event.

Kabaddi, one of the oldest sports in the world, with a 4,000-year history, for instance, is included in the main program in Hangzhou. A fast, furious and physical sport, kabaddi competitions are always great spectacles.

Another fine example is sepak takraw, or kick volleyball. The sport is immensely popular in Southeast Asia and has a vibrant history. In 1990, sepak takraw was included at the Asian Games in Beijing. Since then, sepak takraw has grown not only as a sport but also in commercial and entertainment value.

"Sepak takraw is a very fashionable sport. Thanks to its development and promotion in recent years, a variety of regional competitions have emerged in Asia and across the globe. The Hangzhou Asian Games will be a milestone for sepak takraw," said Abdul Halim Bin Kader, president of the Asian Sepak Takraw Federation.

The inclusion of breaking and esports has attracted huge attention and generated a youthful buzz at the Games. Esports was included for the first time as a demonstration sport at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, with China winning two gold medals and one silver.

This year in Hangzhou, it will debut as an official medal sport, featuring seven competitions — *Arena of Valor Asian Games Version*, *Dota 2*, *Dream Three Kingdoms 2*, *League of Legends*, *PUBG Mobile Asian Games Version*, *Street Fighter V* and EA Sports' FIFA-branded football game.

China's esports medal hopefuls are well aware that all the attention comes with equally intense pressure.

"There are great expectations, but we will handle the pressure, so that we can focus on our competition," said Zhu Kai, head coach of the Chinese League of Legends squad.

"We will try to enable a fair environment for all the players to display their best at the Asian Games and to show the fans what they are capable of. We have arranged personality tests and psychology classes to ensure our players will have a great mentality."

Breaking was welcomed into the 19th Asian Games sports program at the OCA General Assembly in Oman in December 2020, following a successful appearance at the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2018 and its subsequent inclusion into the program of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

"The addition of breaking is because of its popularity among young people. Through breaking, we hope more people, especially the younger generation, will be attracted to the Asian Games and to sports," said Yang Meng, an official of the Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee.





Thriving rivalries

Games set to deliver some mouthwatering sporting matchups

Men's long jump world champion Wang Jianan

By **SHI FUTIAN** in Hangzhou
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The Hangzhou Asian Games promise to serve up a feast of engrossing action as the continent's finest athletes battle for glory. Here are some of the biggest rivalries to watch out for at the Games:

Table tennis



Japan's No 1 men's table tennis player Tomokazu Harimoto

Team China has been the dominant force in Asia, not to mention the world, for decades. Japan's fast-rising paddlers, however, stand in the way of the host's ambitions of a clean sweep in Hangzhou.

Japan's victory in the mixed doubles denied China a gold-medal sweep at the Tokyo Olympics, so the host is doubly determined to claim all the titles on offer this time around.

On the men's side, world No 1 Fan Zhendong, legendary veteran Ma Long and young talent Wang Chuqin

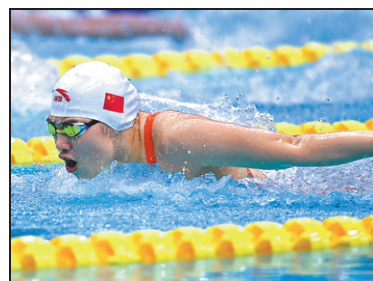
are well-prepared for the tough challenges posed by Japan, led by Tomokazu Harimoto. Spearheading the Chinese women's squad is world No 1 Sun Yingsha and Tokyo Olympics singles champion Chen Meng, with Japanese ace Hina Hayata among those expected to present the biggest obstacle to home glory.

Swimming

The swimming competitions at the Asian Games always produce some of the event's most thrilling contests, with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea traditionally the top performers in the pool.

Olympic and world champions Wang Shun, Zhang Yufei and Qin Haiyang will lead China's charge after impressing at July's World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka, Japan. Team China returned home from the worlds with five gold, three silver and eight bronze medals to rank third in the swimming medal table.

Breaststroke ace Qin wowed the



China's Olympic swimming champion Zhang Yufei

world with four gold medals in Fukuoka, while Tokyo Olympic champion Zhang claimed the women's 100m butterfly title. Up-and-coming youngsters Li Bingjie and Sun Jiajun also impressed at the worlds and will be hoping to reach the podium in Hangzhou.

Team China can expect stiff competition from the likes of Japan's Tomoru Honda, who won bronze in the men's 200m butterfly at the worlds, and Hwang Sun-woo from ROK, who won men's 200m freestyle bronze in Fukuoka.

Esports

The addition of esports to the Hangzhou Asian Games as an official medal sport has attracted huge attention, especially among the younger generation. Seven esports games will be contested in Hangzhou, with the League of Legends battle between China and the Republic of Korea the most hotly anticipated of the lot.

The teams' gold-medal matchup at the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games, when esports was included in the Asiad for the first time as a demonstration sport, went down in history as an absolute classic.

Tian Ye, aka Meiko, is the only player from China's victorious 2018 squad on this year's roster, so young players will need to step up and prove their worth in Hangzhou.

Athletics

China is usually a near-certainty to



Javelin world champion Neeraj Chopra of India

top the track-and-field medal table at the Asian Games. However, in Hangzhou, success is less assured as rivals up their game.

Five years ago at the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games, Team China pocketed 12 gold medals. This year the squad will rely heavily on veterans, such as women's shot put Olympic champion Gong Lijiao, men's long jump world champion Wang Jianan and star sprinter Xie Zhenye, for medals.

The likes of India's Neeraj Chopra, who triumphed in the men's javelin at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest, and Japan's talented young sprinters, are on form and the most likely to dent China's hopes of another table-topping campaign.

Fencing

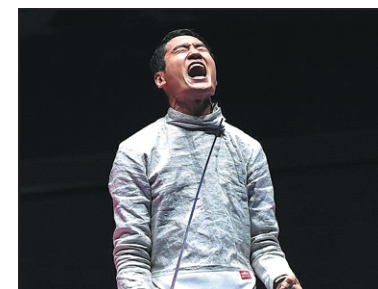
The fencing competitions at the Asian Games are simply world-class, with a number of Olympic and world champions in action across all three disciplines.

Japan's Misaki Emura, for instance,

arrives in Hangzhou fresh from victory at the world championships in Milan, where she won the women's individual saber.

The Republic of Korea's saber athletes are also considered major medal contenders after collecting men's team silver and women's team bronze at the worlds in July.

In the epee, Chinese Olympic champion Sun Yiwen will again be on the medal trail after winning bronze in Milan. The Koreans are also strong in the epee, having won women's team bronze at the worlds.



Republic of Korea's star fencer Kim Jung-hwan

The men's foil competition also promises to be tightly contested. In Milan, Japan topped the podium in the team event ahead of the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, China. Fans are anticipating another fierce battle in Hangzhou, with all eyes on Olympic champion, Hong Kong fencer Cheung Ka-long, after his individual gold at the World University Games in Chengdu last month.