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OLYMPIC SPECIAL

CHINA DAILY

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CHINA CAMP BUILDS UP FLAG DRAMA

Most of nation's top candidates will probably be unavailable at opening ceremony, **Tang Zhe** reports.

The Chinese Olympic delegation hasn't selected a flag bearer for the 2012 London Games, as many favored candidates probably can't make the date.

Many fear participating in Friday's opening ceremony will affect their preparations.

While authorities haven't yet announced who will take the honor, deputy chef de mission Xiao Tian told media at the Beijing airport on Tuesday, before jetting to London with a group of officials: "You will get a pleasant surprise when the name of the flag bearer is announced soon. The flag bearer should represent the image of China well. He or she needs to have an impressive record in sports, be tall, handsome and influential."

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DAYS TO GO

Most are putting their money on basketball players Yi Jianlian or Wang Zhizhi. Every Chinese flag bearer in the past seven Olympics has come from the national basketball team. China's retired NBA player Yao Ming brandished the flag at the past two Games.

Yi and Wang fit the bill described by Xiao — they enjoy high physical, athletic and national statures, they don't face scheduling conflicts and they would continue the tradition of choosing hoopsters to take the flag.

Yi said: "It would make my sports career more perfect if I had the honor, but the candidate hasn't been decided. The most important thing for me at the moment is to focus on training to enhance my form."

But neither Yi nor Wang can be considered a slam dunk.

SEE **"FLAG"** PAGE 3

LIN DAN
Event: badminton
Date of birth: Oct 14, 1983 (age 28)
Height: 1.78m
Olympic appearances:
2004 Athens Games: first round
2008 Beijing Games: men's single gold

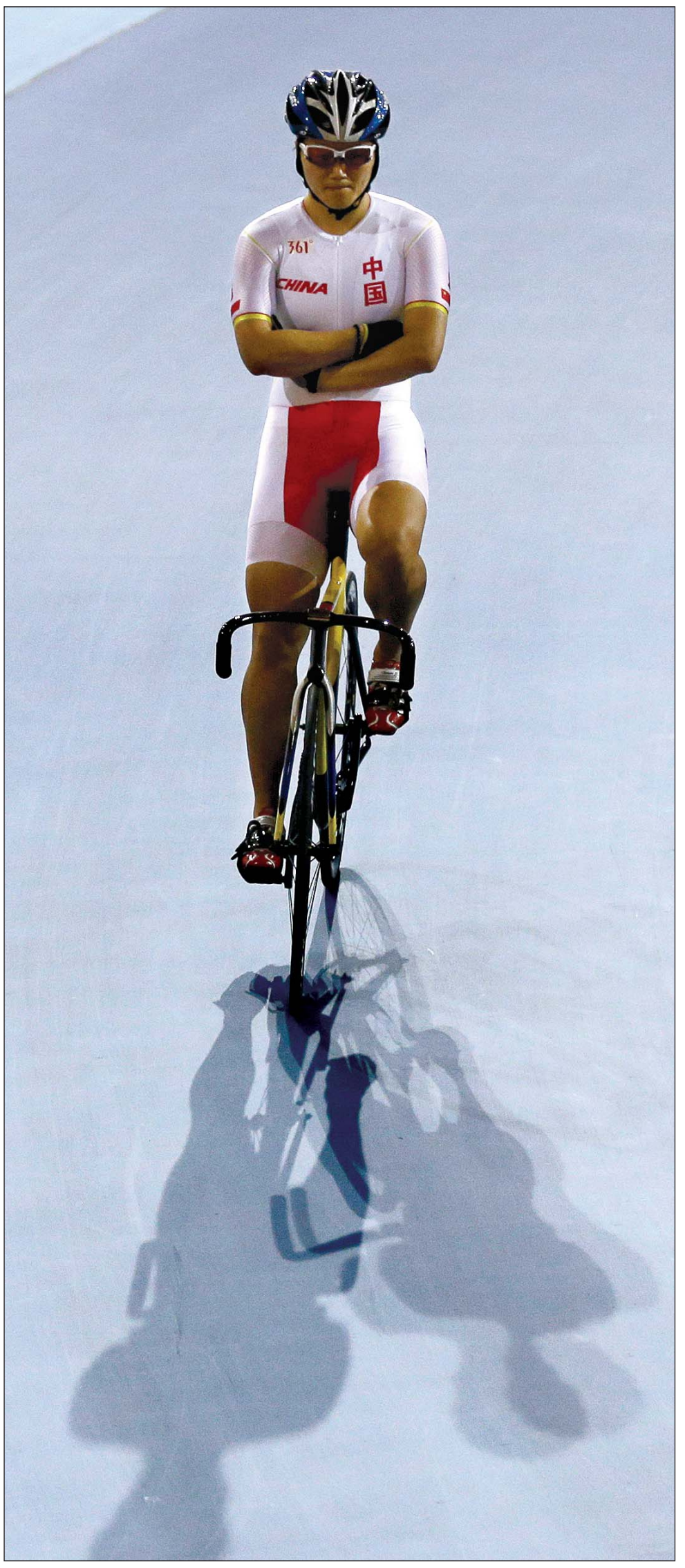
LIU XIANG
Event: 110m hurdles
Date of birth: July 13, 1983 (age 29)
Height: 1.89m
Olympic appearances:
2004 Athens Games: gold (Olympic record)
2008 Beijing Games: withdrawal

LI NA
Event: tennis
Date of birth: Feb 26, 1982 (age 30)
Height: 1.72m
Olympic appearances:
2008 Beijing Games: fourth
Career highlight: 2011 French Open champion

SUN YANG
Event: swimming
Date of birth: Dec 1, 1991 (age 20)
Height: 1.98m
Olympic appearances:
2008 Beijing Games: 400m freestyle, 28th; 1,500m freestyle, 8th
Career highlight: 2011 Worlds 1,500m gold (world record)

YI JIANLIAN
Event: basketball
Date of birth: Oct 27, 1987 (age 24)
Height: 2.13m
Olympic appearances:
2008 Beijing Games: 8th

WANG ZHIZHI
Event: basketball
Date of birth: July 8, 1977 (age 35)
Height: 2.14m
Olympic appearances:
2000 Sydney Games: 10th
2008 Beijing Games: 8th



LOOK MA, NO HANDS!
PHOTO BY **SERGEY PONOMAREV** / ASSOCIATED PRESS
China's Zhang Lei trains at the velodrome for the Olympic Games on Tuesday in London.

Chinese hostages finally return home

Fishermen recount their 19-month ordeal at the hands of Somali pirates

By ZHANG YUNBI and **ZHAO SHENGNAN** in Beijing and **AN BAIJIE** in Ruzhou, Henan province

With his weather-beaten face creasing into smiles, 30-year-old fisherman Zhang Leilei said he felt "reborn" the moment he arrived in Beijing on Tuesday after more than 570 days at the mercy of Somali pirates.

Zhang was among 26 rescued crew members of the *Xu Fu 1* trawler, a Taiwan ship with 13 fishermen from the Chinese mainland, one from Taiwan and 12 from Vietnam.

The boat was hijacked by Somali pirates in late December 2010, off the Madagascar coast and forced to Somalia.

The fishermen told the media they felt helpless and survived on meager rations, often less than a meal a day, during their 19-month captivity.

They were released and picked up by the navy last week.

Zhang was in no doubt as to what he would do once he got home. "I will kneel in front of my father and pay my respects. We haven't seen each other for around five years."

Zhang signed a contract with a local company to work as a sailor for a Taiwan company in July 2007 to earn more money to support his family.

Zhang Qian, 56, Zhang's mother, told China Daily, from her home in Ruzhou in Central China's Henan province, that she felt "the sky had collapsed" when she heard her son had been kidnapped by pirates two years ago.

Her relief was obvious but so too was the concern and worry of the past two years.

She only received two phone calls from her son during his captivity.

"I fainted with the telephone in my hand when I heard that his nails had been pulled," she said, adding the ringing phone over the past two years made her nervous as it could have brought bad news.

After their rescue, the fishermen boarded the naval frigate *Chang Zhou*, one of several Chinese naval ships on regular anti-pirate patrol off Somalia.

Once on board, they were escorted to the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania for transfer on Saturday.

As a key force in the fight against piracy, China had overcome major hurdles to rescue the fishermen, and "implemented both the letter and the spirit of humanitarian law and met its international obligations during the escort mission", said Wang Teng, deputy director at the Center for Consular Assistance and Protection under the Foreign Ministry.

The fishermen underwent daily physical examinations and a 24-hour emergency medical response team was on standby.

Considering their ordeal, they were in goods shape, but still weak, Wang said.

The Vietnamese fishermen were handed over to embassy officials on arrival on Saturday and the Taiwan crew member has also returned to Kaohsiung.

The Chinese embassy in Tanzania helped the fishermen to phone their families.

Most of the Chinese crew members came from Anhui and Henan provinces.

Looking to the future, fisherman Liu Renxiong, 33, said he could not rule out the possibility of another sea trip due to his financial circumstances.

"Our families have spent a lot of money over the last two years, and financial conditions are not good."

SEE **"PIRATES"** PAGE 2

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