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YOG 2014: Youngsters ready to shine in Nanjing

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A pool of young talents is gearing up for the second edition of the Summer Youth Olympic Games (YOG) taking place in China's "Southern capital" on August 16-28, 2014. After a dazzling inaugural edition in Singapore in 2010, which saw South African Chad Le Clos (swimming) and Chinese Qiu Bo (diving) start making their mark in the world arena, the 2012 Olympic medallists are inspiration for the youth, who then, hope to leave a strong impression in the pool and beyond. The world's up-and-coming elite aged 14-18 will compete in 28 sports, including swimming and diving. Nanjing 2014 will feature two new sports, golf and rugby, ahead of their debut at the 2016 Rio Olympics. Counting fewer events and disciplines, the YOG competition programme comprises 5% of non-Olympic, mixed-gender or mixed-NOC events.

448 athletes from 144 nations

A total 3,800 athletes from 204 National Olympic Committees will make the trip to Nanjing. Among them, 400 swimmers and 48 divers from 144 countries, still stranger to international podiums for the most part, will line-up in 36 and five events, respectively.

The swimming and diving competitions will be held at the Nanjing Olympic Sports Centre Natatorium, which is part of a huge, state-of-the-art complex that will host the opening and closing ceremonies but also athletics, gymnastics, modern pentathlon and shooting events.

In Swimming (August 17-22), 17 boys' and 17 girls' events, individual and team relays, as well as two mixed events complete the programme. Among those expected to make waves in the Chinese city is Lithuanian swimming sensation Ruta Meilutyte, who rose to fame after claiming two world titles (50m and 100m breaststroke) during the 2012 FINA World Swimming Championships in Istanbul, Turkey. The now 17-year-old renovated the success with gold in the 100m breaststroke at the 2012 London Olympics and FINA World Championships in Barcelona last year. In Nanjing, the Olympic champion is entered in four events: the 50m and 100m breaststroke – her signature event –, the 100m freestyle and 200m individual medley.



2012 Olympic champion Ruta Meilutyte (LTU) will be in Nanjing - *credit: Giorgio Scala*

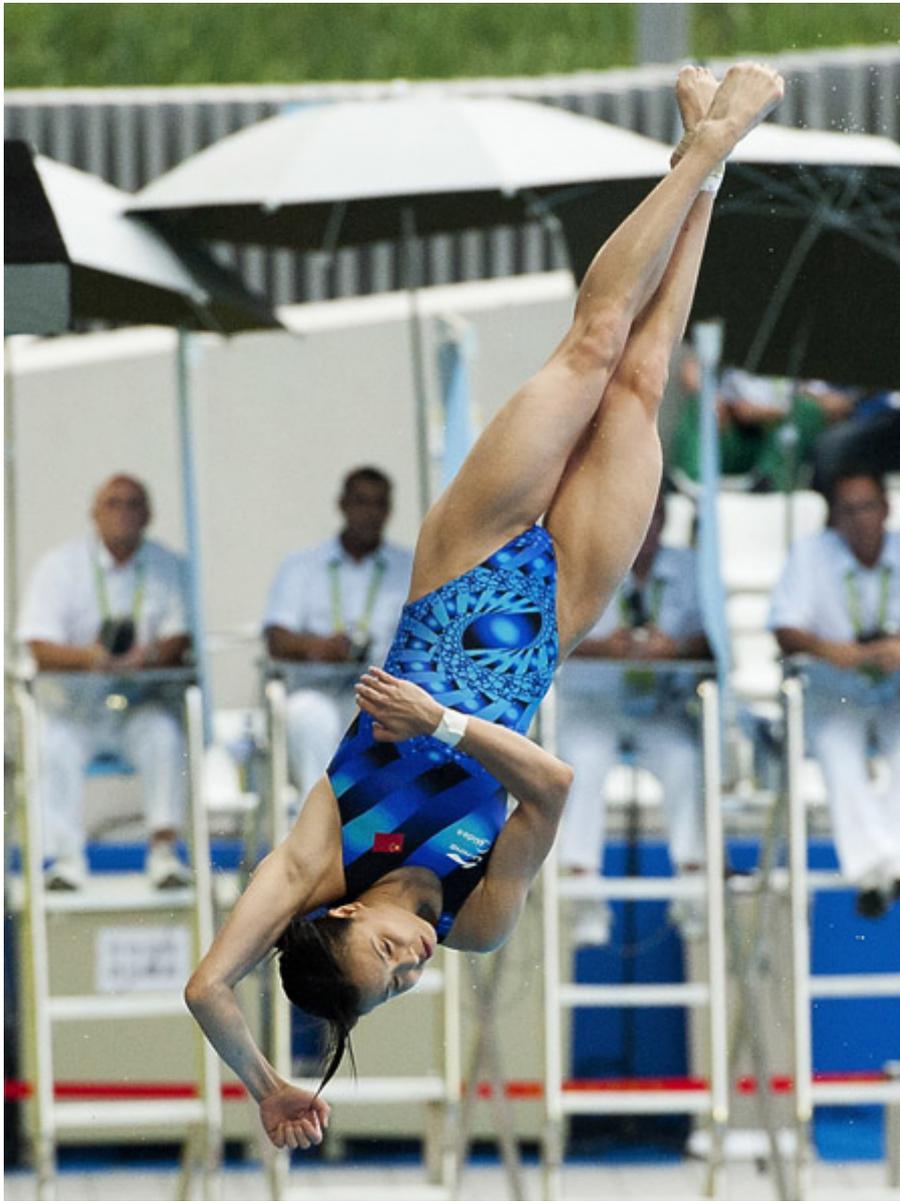
In Diving (August 23-27), the Nanjing 2014 programme features boys' and girls' 3m springboard and 10m platform, and a mixed team event, which will, for the first time, include 3m springboard and 10m platform.

Diving powerhouse China counts Qiu Bo among their many stars. Qiu was one of the positive discoveries of the 2010 Youth Olympics in Singapore, sweeping the gold in the 3m springboard and 10m platform. The Chinese great, who was 17 at the time, later earned three world titles in the 10m platform in Shanghai (2011) and Barcelona (2013) and finished second behind USA's David Boudia in the 10m platform.

Different cultures, same values

Equally important are the Culture and Education Programmes (CEP), during which young athletes, together with non-athlete participants, will have the opportunity to meet and learn about skills development, healthy lifestyles, environment protection, social responsibility and Olympic values.

To spread the message, home hero Wu Minxia, a four-time Olympic champion in diving, will be among the 37 international sport body-designated Athletes Role Models. Also part of the CEP is the Young Ambassador and Young Reporter programmes, making this event a truly youth-inspired experience.



Local star Wu Minxia is among the Athletes Role Models in Nanjing - *credit: Giorgio Scala*

South African swimming star Chad Le Clos is among the 104 IOC-nominated Young Ambassadors for this second summer edition. When Le Clos took the crown from fellow YOG Ambassador and idol Michael Phelps in the 200m butterfly at the 2012 London Olympics, he in turn became a source of inspiration for the youth around the world. Four years after his ground-breaking medal rush (1 gold, 3 silver, 1 bronze) at the inaugural Youth Olympics in Singapore, the 22-year-old swimmer will be present in Nanjing to pass on this experience to aim for success and never stop believing in one's dream.

During the Singapore YOG, Michael Phelps said: "Taking part in the YOG is an excellent opportunity to encourage youth from all parts of the world to practice a sport and go to meet young people from different cultures and countries. The YOG will offer a great sport and life lesson."
