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Golden Gwangju – diving: Yang Jian (CHN) “Make winning a habit”

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Against all doubts and odds, Yang Jian has shrugged off the ‘runner-up curse’ and snatched his first individual world title in the men's 10m platform on his third trip to the World Championships. Yang, bronze medallist in Budapest and runner-up in the World Cup last year in Wuhan, first claimed mixed team event gold with Lin Shan in Gwangju and then added the most appreciated individual title of his career in the last event of the diving competition, the 10m platform.

Yang, 25, kissed the pool as he climbed out of the water after performing a flawless last dive, a record-high attempt worth 114.80 points to amass a winning aggregate of 598.65. This sealed the 12th gold medal for Team China of the 13 at stake in the diving, which ended on July 20.

“I felt released after doubting myself”

Congratulations on your new world title. How was the feeling at the top of the podium?

I was thrilled and excited after my competition. It was my third World Championships and finally I arrived at the top of the

world. I performed below par in my first Worlds in Kazan 2015 and two years ago I was the third behind Thomas Daley and

You scored four perfect marks overall, had the highest cumulated DD in the field, 21.9, and scored the highest points ever, 114.80 for your last dive How did you do that?

It was a record-high in my career. My last dive 109B (forward 4-1/2 somersault, pike) is the most difficult one among all the

divers with a DD of 4.1. It was the most unstable dive in my routine but I had to use this as my lethal weapon. Because my

team-mate Yang Hao is good at stability with lower difficulty (20.6), I needed to challenge him through high difficulty. We

lost the platform title four times in the last nine editions at the World Championships, including the last time in Budapest

where Thomas Daley came first. Therefore both Yang and I set a goal, to clinch the title for China. During the final I

managed to fully clear my head, I did not care about the others' performances and scores, only kept my technical details in

mind. I thought that was the ideal mental situation for me. And also, the competition atmosphere was breath-taking. That



At these three editions, you jumped from 10th in Kazan 2015 to 3rd in Budapest 2017 and this time the champion. What did you change, where did you improve?

I had to say I was lucky to get qualified for three straight Worlds. But I realised later that I was not good enough and not

ready to win when I competed in 2015 and 2017 because I was not mature and as strong as I am now. I could feel my

improvement each time after I learned something from my previous failures. I used to think too much and was worried all

the time. I learned how to control my nerves and eagerness through the previous failures.

Is there anything special that happened which made you better and stronger?

I was depressed and disappointed after I finished with a bronze in 2017. Two months later I beat a group of big names and

won the 10m event at our Chinese National Games. It was not easy to win our national competition because there were

many excellent divers. I tried to cheer myself up and persuaded myself: 'You are not bad'. However, I suffered a right-heel

After a long time of waiting and thinking about myself, I thought I was more patient and motivated than ever. I topped the qualification race for the World Cup and the Gwangju Worlds though I was not fully recovered and that boosted my confidence.

“My high DD was a double-edged sword”

How did you get the individual spot for Gwangju, was it difficult?

There were two-leg qualification meets as trials for the individual events, in January and February, while the other one was

our national championships in April. I won the titles in the men’s 10m twice in a row, so I secured one spot in the team

while four divers were tied for the second place, including Rio Olympic champion Chen Aisen, three-times world champion

was Yang Hao, the bigger winner last year. But it was very difficult to get through the national trials.

Did you expect to win the 10m title?

Yes, I did. I could not sleep well for more than one month because I was very nervous and anxious. I dreamed about the

competition thousands of times. I really wanted to perform a perfect series of dives rather than to hear 'you were one step

shy of the best'. I should give the thumbs up to myself. And I had a sound sleep after I won the gold medal.

It seemed you were under great pressure. Were you afraid of failure? Where did the nerves and pressure come from?

First of all, my high DD was a double-edged sword which could destroy me or help me, but I did not have a real experience

to perform them perfectly at the right time and right place. I had some bad memories as I finished 10th in Kazan 2015. It

was probably the worst result ever for a Chinese diver. It was a blow to me, after that I lost my confidence and momentum

efforts during training. I qualified for the 2017 Worlds, which boosted my confidence.

So your biggest setback was the Kazan Worlds. How did you overcome those difficulties?

The disappointment in Kazan destroyed my confidence and hopes. I was depressed and hit rock bottom, both mentally and

physically. Just like dominoes, I continued to underperform in our national trials and had no chance of competing in Rio. I

had doubts in myself, whether to continue diving or quit the sport. Those were very difficult times, but also a learning

process for me. I began to be more rational and thoughtful about my diving career.

“We are getting stronger after the fierce competition”

And now it was the first time you won two gold medals at the World Championships. Let’s talk about the mixed team event.

The mixed team event was introduced in the Worlds in 2015. Unfortunately, my team-mates had not won this event till now.

best as I could on the platform, while in fact I was not good at springboard. We performed very well and I thought that was

a good start and a rehearsal for me to prepare for the 10m since the platform was the last event of the diving competition. I

needed to compete in some events earlier to switch myself into competition mode.

After winning the world title what will you do next?

I will try to work harder and keep the momentum as I have never won before. The psychology of being a world champion is

bound to fluctuate, but every step towards Tokyo needs to be taken with caution.

What is your goal for the 2020 Olympic Games?

To avoid injury is the most important thing. I have been troubled with injuries these last years. I hope I can prepare for the

Olympic Games with no injury. Then, I need to work harder on detailed techniques. I also need to qualify through our

medal from Gwangju I was just one step ahead of the others, but there are at least three or four more qualification meets to go.

Talking about the competition within the national team and national championships, could you list your opponents?

Chen Aisen won both the individual and synchro titles in Rio. Though he was a little bit off his best form recently, he is still

competitive. Both Yang Hao and Lian Junjie are young divers with beautiful techniques, but their DD is lower than mine.

Three-times world champion Qiu Bo has both difficulty and technique. They are all strong rivals in the team. So we compete

with each other in every training session and every meet. We are getting stronger after the fierce competition.

“I sing songs for myself”

When and how did you start to train in diving?

I started gymnastics at four because I was too thin and too short. I was a picky eater when I was young. So my mother

brought me to train gymnastics, later I entered the provincial gymnastics team. Later I was selected by a diving coach. I was

of medium height and weight and had some sporting talent – I used to train gymnastics in tears but I was still there. My

gymnastics coach said I was good at acrobatic exercise, while later my diving coach said I was bound to be a diver. Though

sometimes I cried during the training, I never stopped when I was young.

How do you spend your spare time?

I like singing. I sing songs for myself, to my parents and my team-mates.

What is your motto in life?

Make winning a habit.
