



Enjoying the grind

Teen skater
relishes Olympic
journey, despite
last-gasp loss

By **SUN XIAOCHEN** in Paris
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From skating for fun at a square near her home, to riding to stardom in Paris, skateboarding prodigy Cui Chenxi has been an ambassador for her sport, giving skateboarding's rise in China a major boost with her Olympic breakthrough.

Always a fearless, sporty type since she was little, Cui sent an inspirational message to all her peers about the power of passion on Sunday, by riding her beloved skateboard — a pastime she picked just four years ago — all the way to a historic fourth-place finish in women's street final at the Olympic Games in Paris.

Despite narrowly missing out on a podium finish, Cui has enjoyed every bit of her Olympic journey, which came with crashes, slip-ups, scratches and broken teeth, before eventually landing her on the world's highest stage.

"A little bit, just that, no more," Cui, a 14-year-old middle school girl, said of her disappointing defeat at the hands of Brazil's Rayssa Leal at Paris' iconic Place de la Concorde.

"Overall, I feel satisfied with my performance today, and I enjoyed competing in the sport that I love so much all the way to the Olympics," said Cui, who, aged just 13, won the same discipline at last year's Asian Games, making her the country's youngest gold medalist at the continental event.

Boasting two clean executions out of five trick attempts, Cui held off a group of higher-profile opponents, all teenagers, to settle for fourth place with a total of 241.56 points in the street discipline final on Sunday. It marks a major step up in performance for Chinese athletes, with Cui finishing two spots better off than her senior teammate, Zeng Wenhui, at the sport's Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020.

Skateboarding powerhouse Japan still reigned supreme in the event, with world No 1 rider Coco Yoshizawa and No 2 Liz Akama enjoying a one-two finish on the podium after going neck-and-neck in their own Olympic debut.

Brazilian Leal, silver medalist in Tokyo three years ago, came back from behind to claim a bronze by stomping her second successful trick on her last attempt to leapfrog Cui, who had held third place before Leal's final attempt.

Skateboarding street at the Olympics is competed over two sections, where each skater takes two 45-second runs on a course

Cui Chenxi's (top) successful Olympic debut is likely to inspire more youngsters back home to pick up skateboarding. XINHUA / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



in knowing that she's made a good example and helped draw more attention to the sport.

"Of course I'd like to see more young people my age, or even younger, pick up a skateboard, but I want them do it only for fun, not to push too hard for results, or whatever," said Cui, who, at the age of 9, picked skateboarding from among many other sports, including soccer and table tennis, as her favorite.

"The pure joy of landing a hard trick, after trying and failing so many times, is so satisfying that I hope more young skaters can feel it and fall in love with it."

Thanks to the Olympic exposure, skateboarding is gaining traction across China, highlighted by the bustling scenes at Shanghai's dockland park, where parents and their kids joined long queues to sign up for entry-level junior courses during the sport's Olympic qualifier series earlier this year.

The trendy urban sport, which used to be among the least promoted sports activities due to its rebellious nature, has now grown in popularity with Chinese parents, with the soaring businesses of junior training clubs in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, providing proof of the changing perception.

The governing body will, for sure, aim to capitalize on the trend, according to Wei Yong, secretary-general of the Chinese Roller Sports Association.

"Since last year, we've been developing a national reserve team and have organized a winter camp for all talented youngsters aged between 9 and 14 to be identified, promoted and developed at the same time," Wei told China Sports Daily.

"Kids learn and grow together, making future prospects for the 2028 Olympics quite bright," he said.

a few pins and fist-bumped with journalists after the final.

"I executed my first two tricks the way I wanted, but failed to step up a gear when I needed a higher-difficulty move to beat the Brazilian girl's fifth trick.

"I can live with that, though, because I haven't quite yet grasped that difficult trick well enough in training.

"I kind of feel happy for her (Leal) because she's such a good skater who deserved the place on the podium, while I will definitely keep going, perfect my own tricks and get better next time."

Entering the Olympic race as a newcomer, Cui said she got along well with all the girls, Australia's Chloe Covell in particular, and apparently has won over some new fans. On her way to her post-final interview, a young boy approached her from the stands, asking for an autograph and, even more boldly, for her skateboard.

Cui waved to him, gently refused to give up her board, but took pride

featuring stairs, ledges, curbs and handrails in the first phase, before each performing five tricks in the second.

A skater's final score is aggregated from their best run and two most successful tricks, requiring a versatile repertoire imbued with quality, creativity and style to prevail.

Despite getting knocked off the podium, Cui remains upbeat, relishing how far the sport has taken her and the frenemy relationship she has with her teen rivals.

"I am just so happy to be here and to have fun with all the girls as more of a group of friends than opponents," said a jubilant Cui, who greeted spectators, exchanged

Archers miss gold by a whisker

By **LI YINGXUE**
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Amid thunderous cheers from teammates and spectators, South Korea clinched its 10th consecutive Olympic gold in women's team archery, defeating China 5-4 in a gripping final on Sunday in Paris.

However, amidst the celebrations, one Korean stoof wiping away in tears of a different kind. Kwon Yong-hak, coach of the China women's archery team, was visibly emotional as his charges narrowly lost their tense shoot-off.

Despite China finishing just one step away from the title, the South Korean trio had to overcome a stout challenge, after leading in the first two rounds. Chinese archers Yang Xiaolei, Li Jiaman, and An Qixuan managed to close the gap, tying the score at 4-4 and forcing the match to a three-arrow shoot-off. In the decisive round, each athlete from both teams shoots one arrow.

South Korea started strong, with the first arrow just shaving the ring of the target for a 10, while Chinese archer Li shot an eight. Korea's second was a nine, but up stepped 24-year-old Yang, and casually, seemingly with ice in her veins, fired it straight down the middle to hit dead center.

But, after An shot a nine and the final Korean arrow, again, grazed

the 10-point line — so closely it had to be checked with a magnifying glass — China ultimately fell agonizingly short, losing 27-29.

Yang thought that the Koreans were more comprehensive, "but we keep focusing on what we do. We have already proved a lot by taking the match to 4-4 and forcing the shoot-off. So, we already feel good about it."

"Our coach told us to be ourselves. It doesn't matter what score our

opponent shot, and it doesn't matter who the opponent is, we have to really bring our best game and to put up the best score we can," Yang said.

Archers from South Korea have shown unwavering dominance in the event since it was introduced to the Olympics at Seoul 1988. They have now won 18 of 19 gold medals in women's archery since competing as host at that Games.

The only exception was when China's Zhang Juanjuan won the indi-

vidual event at Beijing 2008.

China stands second in the overall medal table for women's team archery, having secured silver medals in 1992, 2004, 2008, and 2012. The runner-up finish in Paris adds another silver to that impressive tally, and marks the closest China has come yet to dethroning its Asian neighbor and clinching gold.

At the Tokyo Olympics, the Chinese women's archery team struggled, losing to Belarus in the round of

16 and missing out on the quarterfinals. However, in the Paris cycle, new coach Kwon joined the team and revitalized it with innovative training methods and strategies, significantly enhancing its performance.

Kwon, a former national archery champion in South Korea, transitioned to coaching after retiring from competition. Since 2006, he has spent his summers in China, coaching the Jiangsu archery team, later working with teams in Xinji-

ang, Shandong and Shanghai. To better communicate with his athletes, Kwon taught himself Chinese.

Before the Paris Olympics, Kwon shared with Beijing Youth Daily: "If I were coaching in South Korea, leading a team to the Olympics would be impossible. I am very grateful for this opportunity and cherish it deeply."

Kwon often reminds his athletes that "overall, the South Korean team is undoubtedly stronger; that's an objective reality. But, it doesn't mean they are invincible. Each time you compete against them, you learn something and become stronger. When the opportunity to win comes, we will seize it."

Under Kwon's guidance, the Chinese women's archery team has made remarkable progress during the current Olympic cycle. It secured victories against South Korea in this year's World Cup events in Shanghai and Yecheon, South Korea.

Among the three team members, only Yang has prior Olympic experience. In June, she clinched the individual gold medal at World Cup event in Antalya, Türkiye.

"The team played hard and showed a tenacious spirit during the competition," Kwon said. "We will not give up. Let's keep pushing forward. Next Olympics, we must strive to defeat them."



Left: Chinese archers compete during the women's team final against South Korea on Sunday in Paris. **Right:** Team China's South Korean coach Kwon Yong-hak, who has played a pivotal role in lifting China's archery to a world-class level, watches on. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

