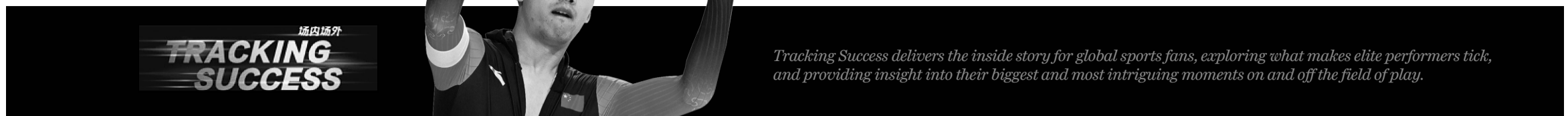


SPORTS



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SPEEDING TOWARD OLYMPIC GREATNESS

Skater Gao Tingyu is hoping that his impressive haul in Harbin is a catalyst for success at Milano-Cortina 2026

By LI YINGXUE
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In 2007, at just 10 years old, Gao Tingyu first stepped onto the Speed Skating Oval at the Heilongjiang Ice Training Center in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province. He was immediately impressed by the indoor international-standard 400-meter track.

Prior to this, Gao had only ever trained on outdoor rinks in his hometown of Yichun, where tracks were typically only 100 to 200 meters long. In winter, they would skate on a track etched into a coal slag-covered field that had frozen over.

Over the years, the Harbin ice rink became pivotal for Gao's training, and a regular competition venue. As Gao watched the rink undergo continuous upgrades, he also enjoyed his rise to Olympic champion status.

Now, after returning to the venue for the Asian Winter Games, Gao expressed a renewed appreciation for the facility. "The improvements to the venue, including temperature, humidity, and ice quality, are remarkable," he said. "It's been transformed into a world-class facility."

Competing in front of a home crowd, Gao won three gold medals at this year's Asian Winter Games, further boosting his experience and confidence ahead of next year's Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics.

At the opening ceremony of the Asian Winter Games, Gao proudly led the Chinese delegation as its flag bearer. The following day, he claimed the gold in the men's 100m speed skating, finishing the first day of competition on a high.

Two days later, Gao successfully defended his men's 500m title, before teaming up with his fellow skaters to win gold in the men's team sprint.

However, after his men's 500m victory, Gao was seen vomiting. The sight quickly went viral on Weibo, with fans expressing concern over the image of him clutching a trash bin.

"The pressure was immense, especially mentally," Gao admitted. "I might have pushed too hard, the intensity was overwhelming."

In the men's 500m race, Gao faced off against Japanese speed skater Wataru Morishige, who had claimed bronze in the event at the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Morishige posted an impressive time of 34.97 seconds in the 11th group, piling further pressure on Gao.

"Seeing his time, my heart skipped a beat, but when I stood

on the starting line, I was confident I wouldn't lose to him," Gao recalled. With a time of 34.95 seconds, Gao triumphed by the slimmest of margins.

Later, in the men's team sprint, Gao partnered with Ning Zhongyan and Lian Ziwen to secure gold. As the trio stepped onto the podium, the crowd erupted in applause.

"I'm not sure if this will be my last Asian Winter Games. I don't want it to be, but I didn't want to leave with any regrets," Gao said, his eyes misting with emotion.

At the previous Asian Winter Games, the Chinese speed skating team secured just one gold medal — Gao's victory in the men's 500m. This year, however, the team brought home an impressive 11 golds.

With intense, back-to-back races, Gao's performance was a standout among Team China's speedsters in Harbin.

Having experienced this journey firsthand, Gao attributes the team's remarkable progress to scientific training methods. "In the past, I was on my own, but now I have a strong support system. My key word for this year's Games is effort. With everyone working together, Chinese speed skating will continue to improve," he said.

One of Gao's coaches, Liu Guanghui, emphasized that the Asian Winter Games tested the team's preparation, and this year's performance reached an ideal level.

"I'm extremely proud of Gao's performance," Liu remarked.

Liu's brother, Liu Guangbin, is also part of Gao's coaching team. Together, the brothers have supported Gao for 13 years.

"Seeing him standing on the top step of the podium, the greatest feeling is that all these years of hard work have paid off," Liu Guanghui told Xinhua News Agency.

"As coaches, we provide direction and support, but the real effort comes from the athletes. Gao has faced numerous injuries over the past two years, but he has continued to train relentlessly. His perseverance is truly inspiring."

"Our ultimate goal is the Winter Olympics. With a long preparation period ahead, we're fully committed to giving our best."

Gao joined the Chinese national speed skating team in 2016 and gained recognition at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, winning the bronze in the men's 500m — a first medal for China in

the event. Despite setbacks, including a back injury and a dip in form during the Beijing Olympics cycle, Gao made a strong comeback.

In 2022, he served as the flag bearer for China and broke the Olympic record in the men's 500m, winning China's first-ever Olympic gold in the event.

The Asian Winter Games were an intense challenge, but Gao found the joy of competing outweighed the struggle.

Almost immediately after the final race, he and his teammates jetted off to Europe to compete on the ISU World Tour circuit, with an eye on achieving even greater success at next year's Olympics.



Factfile

Name: Gao Tingyu
Age: 27
Height: 181 centimeters
Birthplace: Yichun, Heilongjiang province
Sport: Speed skating
Achievements:
2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games: Gold in 100m, 500m, and team sprint;
2022 Beijing Winter Olympics: 500m gold
2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics: 500m bronze
2017 Sapporo Asian Winter Games: 500m gold



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With intense, back-to-back races, Gao Tingyu's gold medal winning performances were a standout among Team China's speedsters at the Asian Winter Games in Harbin. AGENCIES

By LI YINGXUE
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Olympian helps young skaters figure out their future

When the Asian Winter Games were last held in Heilongjiang provincial capital of Harbin in 1996, Han Cong — then just a toddler — had no idea that his hometown would again host the event, and that he would figure so prominently in that encore.

Though the 32-year-old, Beijing Winter Olympics gold medalist was still felt. Han served as a guardian of the national flag during the opening ceremony, watched the Chinese team competing at short-track speed skating events, and participated in a range of activities promoting sportsmanship.

Reflecting on his journey, Han shared at Harbin Ice and Snow World: "From the ice rinks of my hometown to Olympic arenas, my love for the sport has always driven me to face challenges, embrace adversity and chase my dreams."

Though he's no stranger to the spotlight, Han admitted that being a flag guardian at this year's Asian

Winter Games in his hometown was a special honor. "It's a moment I will never forget," he said. "It's such a proud feeling to see my hometown hosting an event of this magnitude."

Watching the athletes from the stands, Han revealed, was an experience he found more nerve-wracking than competing himself. "Watching Lin Xiaojun fight for the gold, my heart was racing with him," Han recalled. "The difference between being an athlete and a spectator is profound."

As an athlete, Han once focused solely on winning the gold. "I always carried the mission of bringing home the medal," he said. "But now, as a spectator, my hope is that each athlete can perform at their best and achieve the success they deserve."

After claiming gold at Beijing 2022, Han announced a year later that, due to injuries and physical limitations, he would not return to the ice competitively, and would with-



draw from all events in the 2026 Winter Olympics cycle. In the same year, he took on a new role at Tsinghua University, where he now teaches ice skating and figure skating.

Drawing on his years of experience

Factfile

Name: Han Cong
Age: 32
Height: 170 centimeters
Birthplace: Harbin, Heilongjiang province
Sport: Figure skating, pairs
Achievements:
2022 Beijing Winter Olympics: Gold
World Figure Skating Championships in 2017 and 2019: Gold
2014 Four Continents Figure Skating Championships: Gold



Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

it's a different experience, a transformation," he explained.

With his career shift, Han has focused more on promoting the development of winter sports. "Whether I'm involved with international organizations or teaching, my focus is on advancing and popularizing winter sports. It's not just a promise — it's about taking concrete steps to make it happen," he said.

Han has seen remarkable progress in winter sports development in the past two years, particularly in Northeast China and across the country. "I'm seeing more children, accompanied by their parents, coming to experience the joy of ice and snow. The resources available

are improving, with better facilities, quality ice rinks and optimal conditions, like lighting and temperature," he said.

He also pointed out that many universities and high schools now have ice rinks, offering students the chance to enjoy ice skating.

"I've asked my students how they feel about skating, and they tell me it's unlike anything on land. They experience the thrill of speed, even if they're not skating fast. But the joy they get from being on the ice is immense," Han said.

"Winter sports require intense focus, while also improving balance and foot control, which benefits overall fitness. Not only does it help with weight loss, but it also strengthens the body," he added.

For Han, skating brings a sense of rejuvenation, regardless of age. "The ice rink and snow fields have a refreshing effect. When you're enjoying yourself, dopamine is released, and you start to feel like you're still capable of performing in sports. It makes you feel young — not just in mind, but physically as well," he said.