



Zheng Haohao etched her name into Olympic history on Tuesday, becoming not just the youngest athlete to compete in Paris, but the youngest to ever represent China at a Summer Games. REUTERS / AFP



SKATEBOARDING

A SKATE FUTURE AHEAD OF HER

At age 11, Zheng Haohao has already made history, but she's just ramping up

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Dropping in with ease and grace, Zheng Haohao seemed as relaxed as when she skates at a park near her home; smoothly working through her lines to pull off a few glides and spins across the bowl, before fist-bumping with other skaters at the end of her run.

It all seemed to be business as usual on Tuesday afternoon, like just another day of skating for Zheng — if it were not for the rousing cheers from a capacity audience and the five Olympic rings adorning the bowl at the iconic Place de la Concorde in the heart of Paris.

She was just living her dream, and, in doing so, the Chinese prodigy has etched her name into Olympic history in the French capital.

At just 11 years and 360 days old when she took her first run on Tuesday, Zheng became the Paris Games' youngest competitor across all sports, and the youngest to ever represent China at the Olympics since the country's debut in 1984.

To put it into perspective, Zheng has just completed her primary school studies and is now making her Olympic debut, enjoying perhaps the coolest graduation trip among all her classmates, and, for sure, the best birthday party ever, as she turns 12 on Aug 11 — the day of the closing ceremony.

And as for the result? She doesn't seem too bothered about it, nor the massive amount of attention that has come flooding her way.

"I just relaxed, chilled out and tried to put on my best performance and, most importantly, enjoy the experience," Zheng, wearing a white helmet with cartoon graffiti, said in a calm tone after her qualification round.

"Skateboarding at the Olympic

Games isn't much different from skateboarding in my neighborhood. There are just more spectators.

"I'm not too nervous, because being nervous isn't helpful. It can lead to mistakes. I try to stay relaxed and think about the fun I'm going to have in this competition."

Before Zheng, the youngest athlete to represent the Chinese delegation at the Olympics was teen swimmer Nian Yun, who competed in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay at 13 years and 287 days old at the 1996 Games in Atlanta, in the United States.

The park discipline of skateboarding involves athletes skating across a hollowed-out concrete bowl and performing a variety of tricks using

different elements, such as ramps, quarter-pipes and bumps, to accumulate as high a score as possible in each 45-second run.

As passionate about skating as any of her senior counterparts, it was Zheng's lack of strength and speed at such a tender age that cost her in both routine execution and quality. She completed only her first run of the three attempts each athlete is allowed in the qualification round, ranking 18th among all 22 entries with a first-attempt score of 63.19 points.

She missed the top-8 cut for the final, as expected, but has gained a lot more than just an opportunity to take three more runs.

"I made new friends that I

wouldn't have met in classrooms, exchanged a few pins and learned some new tricks from all the other older girls competing here," Zheng said of her Paris adventure.

Only the start

As most young girls of her age, Zheng's extra-curricular activities were more traditional, such as learning piano and painting, but nothing seemed to capture her imagination quite as much as the skateboard and hel-

met her mother bought her for her seventh birthday.

Since she tried skating for the first time, Zheng, who always climbed rocks when she was little, has done little else with her free time, her mom recalled.

Two years into her part-time skateboard training, Zheng had already made it to the 2021 National Games, which is when she realized that she could skate on a higher stage as the sport made its Olympic

debut in Tokyo.

Zheng's talent and passion drove her to her first gold medal win in an official competition — a women's B group bowl event at the provincial games in her native Guangdong in August 2022 — paving the way for her to be drafted into the national program for Paris 2024.

Her meteoric rise, following two impressive Olympic Qualifier Series events in Shanghai and Budapest earlier this year, propelled Zheng to 26th in the Olympic rankings, helping her eventually qualify for the top-22 Paris roster, after higher-ranked girls from Japan, Brazil and the United States missed out due to their respective NOCs' full-quota status.

Peeling back all the buzz around her age, you'll find just a typical skater having fun on a skateboard, said Zheng's coach Danny Wainwright, a professional skater from Bristol, England.

"There's no difference. She does it for fun. She loves it. She skates because she wants to skate and she enjoys it," Wainwright told China Daily from the sideline of Tuesday's Olympic run.

Given her huge potential physically and technically, Wainwright predicts only great things for Zheng, as long as she keeps riding for fun and in the right direction.

"When I started working with her, she needed guidance. She had some bad habits and she didn't know how to plan for runs," said Wainwright, who started working with Zheng before an Olympic qualifier in Dubai in March.

"You should know the approach, how to put the run together, how to design a run, making the most of the 45 seconds you have in the park. I enjoy working with her on stuff like that and (competing at the Olympics) obviously helps," Wainwright said.



DIVING

Quan doesn't make a splash, scoring perfect 10s to take gold

Quan Hongchan of China not only won her second gold medal in diving at the Paris Olympics on Tuesday, she did it with a perfect score of 10 on her first of five dives.

The dive was a forward 3-and-a-half somersaults, hardly making a ripple and setting off wild cheers from the fans as the seven judges all registered scores of 10.

"I believe scoring 10 is unbelievable," Quan said through an interpreter. "The feeling was super."

The 17-year-old, a three-time world champion, said she had scored 10 three times before — including twice while winning gold in Tokyo.

China's Chen Yuxi took silver, a repeat of the duo's finish three years ago in Japan. Kim Mi-rae of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea won bronze, adding to the silver medal she claimed earlier in

women's 10-meter synchronized, which was the country's first medal ever in Olympic diving.

Quan scored 425.60 points on five dives, compared with 420.70 for Chen and 372.10 for Kim. Caeli McKay of Canada was fourth with 364.50 points.

The two Chinese women teamed up earlier to win gold in the 10m synchronized.

Kim began crying after her final dive, and it was unclear if she was celebrating or feeling disappointed.

"When I realized this was the bronze medal, when I realized I wasn't able to do better, I felt sad," Kim said through an interpreter. "That's why I teared up. The medal is going to be significant for the nation. It's going to be a very small corner of a page in the history of the country."

She added: "Although it's a bronze, I am very happy to be able to bring a medal back home."

China is aiming for an unprecedented sweep of the eight diving golds. The Chinese so far have won five, after winning the four synchronized competitions in the opening week of the Games.

Quan, who stands at just 150 centimeters, was asked if she would return for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"The future should be thought about in the future," she said. "I should live in the present."

Quan and Chen had big leads over the field after the preliminary round on Monday, but those scores do not carry over to the final. It didn't matter. They piled up the same margin on Tuesday.

Quan was asked most of the ques-

tions, but Chen waited her turn to make a point — also through an interpreter.

"We fight for our country, we never fight for ourselves," she said. "If she (Quan) wins gold, or I do, it is only for China. As long as the gold is won by China, it doesn't really matter."

Chinese divers Wang Zongyuan and Xie Siyi topped the preliminary round of the men's 3m springboard on Tuesday. Wang scored 530.65 and Xie recorded 509.60.

Jack Laugher of Britain was third (468.30) and countryman Jordan Christopher Houlden was fourth (448.20).

The top 18 advanced to Wednesday's semifinals. The final is on Thursday.



From left: Chinese pair, silver medalist Chen Yuxi and winner Quan Hongchan, celebrate with bronze medalist Kim Mi-rae of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the end of the Paris 2024 Olympics women's 10m platform diving final on Tuesday. AP

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