



Some players use stools to play volleyball in an exhibition match in the city of Wenchang in Hainan.



We Hainanese like rural games where we can find a seat anywhere and watch for free... Wenchang has a population of 500,000, and there are more than 6,000 volleyball courts. Almost every village has a court and everyone knows how to play.

**Chen Guan**

Member of Jinshan Town village team

understands volleyball well, and the enthusiastic atmosphere reminds me of the Olympic Games," he said. "I would like to see this level of passion for the game spread across China."

Slowly, it is.

In Hunan Province, the city of Changde has become the first to initiate a community volleyball league, with 32 teams competing.

In Guizhou Province, the capital city of Guiyang hosted a volleyball league in April and has invited volleyball amateurs from across China to participate in an invitational tournament next month.

Such country sports dovetail nicely with China's national fitness campaign and its rural revitalization strategy. In

addition to volleyball, basketball and football also feature in local sports programs.

By the end of June, online views of football matches in one Guizhou town reached more than 20 billion, according to Xinhua news agency.

This rural "super league" even drew the attention of football legend Michael Owen, who recorded a video expressing his support for such events.

"I'm sure you're gonna get better and better," Owen told the teams.

The central government will "vigorously develop rural sports," according to a statement from the General Administration of Sport of China, an office of the China Central Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture and

Rural Affairs.

It said rural sports not only promote local health and enrich rural culture, but also help rural reconstruction, empower agricultural development and stimulate rural tourism.

However, hurdles remain. Sports facilities are insufficient, local management skills rudimentary and some safety risks unaddressed.

Last year, one netizen posted a message to the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development expressing the hope that more funds will be allocated to less developed rural regions for sports facilities.

"These sports are very important to the health of our next generations, and I hope our nation will pay attention to that," the message said.



Players compete in a rural volleyball match in Danzhou, Hainan Province.



Twenty township men's teams from different areas of Hainan compete in a nine-a-side volleyball tournament.



Some areas, such as Danzhou in Hainan, add zest to rural games with a squad of cheerleaders.