



Bigger role for sports education: taking lessons from an unusual coach

Wang Yong

In college, he studied sports education with a special aptitude for basketball. He hoped that one day he could become a capable basketball coach for school children.

His hopes were dashed when he graduated from the Wuhan Sports University in 2010 and went to work at a primary school in the suburbs of Guangzhou in south China's Guangdong Province: The dilapidated school was too poor to afford a basketball court or relevant equipment.

Worse yet, most parents and students at that time believed sports were only secondary in school education — inferior to such major subjects as maths, physics, chemistry and languages.

So, at the very beginning of his career as a sports teacher, he faced a double

whammy: a lack of funds for his favorite basketball education, and an utter disregard for sports itself.

A third blow came soon, when local education authorities in Guangzhou's Huadu District, where the primary school is located, decided in 2012 to promote rope skipping as a main sport on campus. As a result, all local sports teachers would have to pass a rope-skipping test. That was a tall order for the young teacher, who was 1.84 meters in height and heavily built. He was a good basketball player, but not even an eligible candidate for rope skipping.

He failed twice, and barely passed the rope-skipping test with a third trial. In other words, he scored the lowest among local sports teachers. When he finally decided to forget about basketball and focus on jumping rope instead, those who were familiar with

him jeered: "If you can succeed, pigs will climb up trees!"

Seemed like a premature end to his career?

Reshaping students' life

Fast forward to 2015.

The first World Inter-School Rope Skipping Championships held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, saw a group of Chinese teenage students plucking most of the gold medals. Their coach was none other than Lai Xuanzhi, the once-befuddled graduate from the Wuhan Sports University who had surprisingly demonstrated his ability as an able rope-skipping coach despite prevailing doubts.

In only three years — from 2012 to 2015 — Lai redefined himself and reshaped the life of many teenagers who

used to suffer an inferiority complex at school due to their impoverished family background and poor exam grades. The Dubai success reinforced Lai's belief that sports, or sports education for that matter, can change one's fate.

Read the excerpts of a report from Britain's Sky News in 2015:

An 11-year-old boy has smashed the world skipping record — managing 110 skips in 30 seconds.

Cen Xiaolin also broke a second record, with 548 skips in three minutes, at the first World Inter-School Rope Skipping Championships in Dubai...

At that time, Cen was still a student at the Qixing Primary School in Guangzhou, where Lai taught rope skipping. In later media interviews, Lai and his students insisted they had never expected to win gold medals at world championships. During those three