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Winter Olympics to feature fast and graceful Asian skaters



EASTERN LIGHTNING. Yu Jing of China, nicknamed "Eastern Lightning," skates in the women's 500-meter race of the World Sprint speed-skating championships in Nagano, central Japan, last month. Jing, along with teammates Hong Zhang and Beixing Wang, will compete for medals at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. The Opening Ceremony for the games takes place Thursday, February 6. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

By Mike Street
Special to The Asian Reporter

The Winter Olympics feature many sports on snow and ice, but few are more popular than the skating events. Speed skaters race in sleek outfits, separated by mere hundredths of a second, with the slightest misstep leading to a foul or a fall. Figure skating features no less drama, despite its slower pace, in a competition that rewards technical excellence more than creativity. At any speed, Asian athletes could dominate the skating events this month in Sochi.

Asian speed-skating strength lies with

the Chinese and South Korean women's teams. The Chinese women feature Yu Jing, who earned the nickname "Eastern Lightning" by winning four gold medals at the Asian Singles Distance Championships and a gold medal at the 2011 Asian Winter Games. At this year's World Sprint speed-skating competition, Jing was the overall women's winner, edging out countrywoman Hong Zhang.

Zhang, a relative newcomer to the sport, nonetheless placed in the top ten at five World Singles Championship events over the past three years. She also finished in the top ten at the Sprint Combination event in each of the past three World

Sprint championships.

Zhang didn't make the Chinese team for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, B.C., while Jing placed 32nd in the 1,000-meter race. But their teammate, Beixing Wang, earned a bronze medal in the 500-meter event. It was Wang's fourth straight Olympics, but just her first medal. She has a good chance to medal again this year after placing second in the 500-meter sprint at the 2013 World Singles Distance Championships.

The woman Wang lost to in Vancouver was South Korea's Sang-hwa Lee, who had a spectacular 2013. She won all seven

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Endangered turtles face new threat

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Chinese rocker quits show over song choice

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