



**MEDAL MANIA MANAGED.** Winner Katinka Hosszu of Hungary, second right, second place Kathleen Baker of the United States, right, and joint third place, Fu Yuanhui of China, left, and Kylie Masse of Canada, are seen during the medal ceremony after the final of the women's 100-meter backstroke at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

## In China, a forgiving public embraces fewer gold medals

By Didi Tang  
The Associated Press

In a country long focused on bringing home as many Olympic gold medals as possible, this year's haul isn't what China expected.

When China's 416-athlete delegation set off for Rio, state sports officials were banking on 30 to 36 gold medals. As the games ended, it had won just 26, for the worst showing since Atlanta in 1996.

China's total was a far cry from the country's 51-gold performance in Beijing that topped the gold medal chart.

But so what?

The once-feverish obsession with the gold tally has slowly subsided among the Chinese public, which showed more interest this year in lavishing adoration on athletes with personalities, such as bronze medallist Fu Yuanhui, rather than counting medals.

"Finally, the public desire for golds has returned to normal," said Lu Yuanzhen, a professor of sports at South China Normal University, who has long argued that a mature nation should have a more relaxed attitude toward wins and losses in athletic competitions.

"The ordinary Chinese people have become more indifferent to the medal counts. Now they understand Olympic golds bear little impact on their real lives," Lu told The Associated Press.

For decades, the communist state has rallied national unity and pride on the country's athletic performances on the world stage, especially in the Olympics. The entire country was moved to tears when Xu Haifeng, a pistol shooter, won the first gold Olympic medal for Communist China in Los Angeles in 1984. It was considered a sign that China finally was able to claim a place among world powers, a huge boost to national pride.

The fever only grew as Beijing sought better Olympic performances and the ultimate goal of hosting the games. The Olympics was a national obsession, and gold medallists were household names and rewarded generously.

China's gold medal tally climbed to 28 in Sydney, 32 in Athens, and 51 in Beijing. In London, Chinese athletes still took away 38 gold medals and were second only to U.S. Olympians.

But following the climax in Beijing, public obsession with Olympic golds began to fade, and voices of criticism grew louder against the state-run sports system credited with the country's stellar Olympic performances.

Critics argue the brutal system has sacrificed vast numbers of rank-and-file athletes, encouraged dishonesty — such as doping, age alteration, and game rigging — in the name of national honor, and distanced sports from the public.

When this year's games began in Rio,

state media lamented the lack of golds on the opening day, but Chinese sports fans stayed nonchalant. They were more interested in chasing athletes oozing with personality.

The most telling example was Fu, a female swimmer who overnight became a social-media sweetheart for claiming she had used "primeval force" in a semifinal. She eventually won a bronze. Shaped by the social media instead of the state parlance, Fu's vernacular resonated with ordinary Chinese people, who were already bored with empty talks.

Ning Zetao, another swimmer, came home empty-handed from Rio but still grabbed headlines because of his undiminished popularity back in China. And Chinese social media was full of encouraging words when swimmer Sun Yang failed to qualify for the 1,500-meter free style final, a sharp contrast to the days when the Chinese public hurled hurtful words at athletes failing to clinch the gold.

The swimmers received a welcome from thousands of fans at a Beijing airport. Fu was scared. Ning's appearance caused congestion, and besieged by fans seeking photographs and autographs, he could barely move.

As recently as 2008, the public booed hurdler Liu Xiang when he could not get off the starting line in Beijing because of injuries.

"The public has gone to another extreme — tolerance of non-champions and even adoration of them," wrote Li Ruiyi, a veteran Chinese sports writer in a commentary on the news site ifeng.com.

Under the most pressure are Chinese gymnasts, who came home with two bronzes this year, the worst performance ever in 32 years.

It is also the first time that Team China, a longtime powerhouse in gymnastics, did not win a single gold since China returned to the Olympics in 1984. For the past several years, China's gymnastics officials have worried that the state system is running out of steam because the national team has a dwindling pool from which to recruit top talent, a consequence of isolating young talent in the state system.

Even if there is more acceptance that every year won't bring a haul of gold, there is still a sense of alarm, and many don't like that China finished behind the United States and Great Britain in the race for golds.

There are also whispers that Japan, the upcoming host of the 2020 Summer Olympics Games, could pose a threat to China. That prospect is likely to rekindle the country's nationalistic sentiments, because of long-time animosity toward the neighboring country that invaded China and shamed the Middle Kingdom in the early 20th century.

## Olympic flag arrives in Tokyo, host of next Summer Games

TOKYO (AP) — The Olympic flag has arrived in Tokyo, host of the next Summer Games.

Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike held the flag aloft as she disembarked from an All Nippon Airways plane and walked down a stairway to the tarmac at Tokyo's Haneda airport.

Koike received the flag at the closing ceremonies of the Rio Games from Rio mayor Eduardo Paes and International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach.

Preparations are underway for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Construction of the main stadium is slated to start toward the end of this year. Japan's capital also hosted the Olympics in 1964.

Koike is a newly elected governor of Tokyo who has pledged to examine the spiralling costs to avoid saddling taxpayers with debt and building white elephants.

## World's first self-driving taxis debut in Singapore

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scan for obstacles and detect changes in traffic lights.

The testing timeframe is open-ended, said nuTonomy CEO Karl Iagnemma. Eventually, riders may start paying for the service, and more pickup and dropoff points will be added. NuTonomy also is working on testing similar taxi services in other Asian cities, the U.S., and Europe, but wouldn't say when.

"I don't expect there to be a time where we say, 'We've learned enough,'" Iagnemma said.

Doug Parker, nuTonomy's chief operating officer, said autonomous taxis could ultimately reduce the number of cars on Singapore's roads from 900,000 to 300,000.

"When you are able to take that many cars off the road, it creates a lot of possibilities. You can create smaller roads, you can create much smaller car parks," Parker said. "I think it will change how people interact with the city going forward."

NuTonomy, a 50-person company with offices in Massachusetts and Singapore, was formed in 2013 by Iagnemma and Emilio Frazzoli, Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers who were studying robotics and developing autonomous vehicles for the Defense Department. Earlier this year, the company was the first to win approval from Singapore's government to test self-driving cars in one-north. NuTonomy announced a research partnership with Singapore's Land Transport Authority earlier in August.

Singapore is ideal because it has good weather, great infrastructure, and drivers who tend to obey traffic rules, Iagnemma says. As a land-locked island, the city of 5.4 million people is seeking creative ways to grow its economy, so it's been supportive of autonomous vehicle research.

Auto supplier Delphi Corp., which also is working on autonomous vehicle software,



**RETURN TO TOKYO.** Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike waves the Olympic flag upon arrival at Haneda international airport in Tokyo. The Olympic flag has arrived in Tokyo, host of the next Summer Games. Preparations are underway for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. Construction of the main stadium is slated to start toward the end of this year. Japan's capital also hosted the Olympics in 1964. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

was recently selected to test autonomous vehicles on the island and plans to start next year.

"We face constraints in land and manpower. We want to take advantage of self-driving technology to overcome such constraints," said Pang Kin Keong, Singapore's permanent secretary for transport and the chairman of its committee on autonomous driving.

Olivia Seow, 25, who works in startup partnerships in one-north and is one of the riders nuTonomy selected, took a test ride of less than a mile. She said she was nervous when she got into the car, and then surprised as she watched the steering wheel turn by itself.

"It felt like there was a ghost or something," she said.

But she quickly relaxed. The ride was smooth and controlled, she said, and she was relieved to see that the car recognized even small obstacles such as birds and motorcycles parked in the distance.

"I couldn't see them with my human eye, but the car could, so I knew that I could trust the car," said Seow, who hopes to use the time freed up during her commute for other things, thanks to the technology, or use the service to help her father get around town as he grows older.

An Associated Press reporter taking a ride saw the safety driver step on the brakes once, when a car was obstructing the test car's lane and another vehicle, which had appeared to be parked, suddenly began moving in the oncoming lane.

Iagnemma said the company is confident its software can make good decisions. The company hopes its head start in autonomous driving will eventually lead to partnerships with automakers, tech companies, logistics companies, and others.

"What we're finding is the number of interested parties is really overwhelming," he said.

Durbin reported from Detroit.



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