

《Chinese badminton head coach Li Yongbo replaced by Xia Xuanze》

BEIJING, April 27 (Xinhua) -- Chinese badminton head coach Li Yongbo will step down from his position after 24 years while former world champion Xia Xuanze and former Olympic titlist Zhang Jun will take charge of singles and doubles respectively, the Table Tennis and Badminton Management Center of the General Administration of Sports of China officially announced here on Thursday.

Li was reassigned along with other coaching staff to an advisory panel with the Chinese Olympic Committee earlier this month, which will serve as the think tank for China's Olympic preparation in the areas of management, training, scientific research and healthcare.

The Chinese national badminton team will reshuffle its coaching crew before the 2017 Sudirman Cup in Australia, the head coach and deputy head coach posts will no longer exist, while Xia Xuanze and Zhang Jun will start to coach singles and doubles respectively. Former deputy head coach Tian Bingyi and Zhong Bo are to become consultants.

Xia, 39, men's singles bronze medalist at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and former men's singles coach for the Chinese team, becomes the coach in both men and women's singles, while Zhang Jun, 40, mixed doubles' gold medalist at both 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Olympic Games and former men's doubles coach in the Chinese team, will be in charge of all doubles categories.

The Chinese national badminton team used to consist of the first team, the second team and the youth team while now it will only include first and second teams, as the youth team will become part of the second team.

The first team, consisting of top level players, will focus on preparing for the Tokyo Olympic Games and promising young players will be cultivated in the second team, which will be coached by Wang Wei, 38, former men's doubles player and assistant to Zhang Jun in men's doubles.

"Xia, Zhang and Wang are...dedicated to the development of the national team. In addition, they were all world top players during their careers and served as coaches in the national team after retirement," said the table tennis center. "After coaching men's singles and doubles for two Olympic cycles, they are familiar with the players in the national team, major opponents and the trend of world badminton development.

"They have the ability to lead the national team complete the mission at the Tokyo Olympic cycle," it said in a statement.

The new appointment means Li Yongbo's coaching days come to an end. Li won a bronze medal in the men's doubles at the 1992 Olympic Games and became a national team coach the following year. Over his 24-year coaching career, Li developed the Chinese team into a world dominating power in badminton, winning 18 Olympic gold medals, 10 Sudirman Cup championships, nine Uber Cups and five Thomas Cup championships.

Li pushed hard for winning the gold medals and sometimes went a little too far which came back to him with a backlash and marred his well-accomplished career.

In women's doubles at the London Olympics, eight female players, including China's former world No.1 Yu Yang and Wang Xiaoli, were disqualified by the BWF for trying to lose deliberately in the final round of the group stage in a bid to secure a favorable draw in the knock-out stage.

After making a clean sweep of Olympic gold medals for the first time in London, Chinese badminton staged lackluster performance at the 2016 Rio Olympics, where they won only two gold medals, the worst result since 2000.

