

'Air quality not an issue during 2008 Olympics'

Air quality will not be a concern for the US delegation during the Beijing Olympic Games, according to Steven M. Roush, chief of sport performance in the US Olympic Committee (USOC).

'I anticipate improvement in Beijing's air quality next year, and we will continue to monitor it, so the air condition is not a concern for the US team,' said Roush, who is leading the US Goodwill Tour group in commemorating the one-year-out date of the Beijing Olympics.

'I witnessed China's handling of traffic during the Sino-Africa summit, so I am confident of the Chinese government's capability of dealing with air and traffic issues. It won't be a problem for us,' Roush said here Thursday.

The six US Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls in the Tour echoed Roush's view.

Gao Jun, three-time table tennis Olympian (1992, 2000, 2004), said Beijing's air quality won't bother her.

'Air quality is not a problem in Beijing at all. Air pollution is a commonplace in most of the big cities worldwide, and Beijing is determined to get it better step by step, so there is no need to worry about that,' said Gao, who won a doubles silver medal for China at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and also turned out for the US in the 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Games.

Gao has booked her spot for her fourth Olympics next year after winning the women's singles event in the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro last month.

Howard Bach, a badminton player in the Tour, said air quality is out of his consideration during the Beijing Olympic Games.

'I live in Los Angeles, and it's not very good there. I also spend a lot of time in Colorado Springs, where I enjoy very clean air. For us athletes, we travel around the world, so I won't be too concerned about it. It's the same for everybody and we are competing in the same air,' said Bach.

Bach and his partner Tony Gunawan won the doubles title at the 2005 World Championships, the first world badminton title won by US athletes.

Among the Tour, there are also Lindsay Pian (archer), Donny Popovich (cyclist), Iris Zimmerman (fencer) and Erin Popovich (Paralympic swimmer).

Pian is ranked third in the US. Her father, Robert, is a first generation Chinese-American and both her grandparents are from the Tianjin municipality.

Popovich, in her first Paralympic Games in 2000, won six medals - three gold and three silver - and set four world records in the process. She put together what may have been the most impressive performance of any athlete at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece, where she competed in seven events and returned home with seven gold medals.

Popovich was born with achondroplasia, a genetic bone growth disorder that is evident at birth.

Robinson turned pro in 2002 and has since become the top BMX cyclist in the world. His latest victory was the 2006 National Bicycle League (NBL) pro title.

Zimmerman competed at the 2000 Sydney Games, finishing fourth in the team foil event and 11th in individual foil. She had all but hung up her sword until the IOC brought back the women's team foil event for 2008 after its absence in 2004.

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