

# Teenager skates into the NHL history books

First Chinese born player to be picked in draft goes in sixth round to the New York Islanders, **Lei Lei** reports.

**S**ong Andong has made sporting history by becoming the first Chinese-born ice hockey player to be selected in the draft for the National Hockey League in the United States.

The New York Islanders, which is owned by Shanghai-born businessman Charles Wang, picked the 18-year-old in the sixth round on June 27.

"I'm really honoured to be the first, although it will bring a lot of pressure from people back home," he said, adding that the pressure was good because it will "motivate me to be a better player and make them (his parents) proud."

Song, who was born in Beijing, has captained the China national team for the past two years. Yu Tiande, the team leader, said: "It's a great boost and will give our young players hope, so long as they work hard. The selection means a lot for ice hockey in China, which is dominated by Westerners."

Song started to play ice hockey at age 6 after doctors told his parents he should breathe cool air to ease a throat problem. At 10, he moved with his family to Toronto, Canada, and at 15 was enrolled at Lawrenceville School in New Jersey.

Etienne Bilodeau, the coach at Lawrenceville, said the teenager took up a major role after arriving at the school. This season, Song was named captain.

"Given the composition of our team this year, in a lot of ways he can relate to how many minutes Duncan Keith (of the Chicago Blackhawks) logged during the



Song Andong wears his New York Islanders jersey after being selected in the sixth round of the National Hockey League amateur draft in Sunrise, Florida, June 27.

BRUCE BENNETT / AFP

(Stanley Cup) playoff," he said. "He was pretty much on a similar ratio minute-wise for our squad. He was our go-to guy at the blue line.

"His game is steady. He has good edge work, handles the puck well, and really is very well-positioned all the time in the context of anticipating and knowing how to support the offence, and knowing

how to take care of his end and to be very reliable on both sides of the puck."

Song has played defence and as a forward, but said that he prefers defence, as his favourite player is former Detroit Red Wings defenceman Nicklas Lidström.

Since he will graduate this year, next season the teenager will play

at Phillips Academy, a prep school in Andover, Massachusetts.

"Song is a very good young player, whether you consider his fighting spirit or characteristics," Mr Yu said. "We will continue to involve him in the national team, as long as his schedule does not clash with ours."

He said that, like Song, about 50

Chinese youngsters have moved to play ice hockey and study in North America, but most have ended up focusing more on their academic studies and eventually gave up the sport. Song was the very best of them, he said.

"Song's path can be copied, but the precondition is that the child should be enthusiastic toward the



ALAN DIAZ / AP

Song Andong shakes hands with team executives after being chosen 172nd overall by the New York Islanders on June 27.

sport and should be talented."

Getting picked in the draft was only the first step for Song, Mr Yu added. "Physical condition is the key factor for a hockey player, and compared with Western players, Asian ones are not that strong. If Song wants to go further in the NHL, he has to do more physical training. His speed and flexibility, combined with a strong body, will help him."

As Beijing bids for the 2022 Winter Olympics, promoting winter sports such as ice hockey has become a major task for the country.

Song said he had noticed the sport has been growing rapidly back in China: "When I started playing, there weren't a lot of people. There wasn't much support for the game. Last year, when I went back, it had been eight years

since I had seen Chinese hockey. It was tremendous how far it's grown.

"I'm sure they will keep trying to catch up to Europe and North America and Russia. There's still a gap, but I'm sure that if we focus on hockey we can catch up."

Mr Yu said he expected Song to be the "Yao Ming of NHL," referring to the Chinese basketball star who played centre for the Houston Rockets.

"Even if our team can't qualify for the Olympic Games, bringing on one Chinese NHL star, like Yao Ming in the NBA, is a success," the China team official added. "With this kind of celebrity appeal, I hope more parents will be encouraged to let their children play the sport."

Xinhua News Agency contributed to this story.

# Budding golfer, 7, is having a ball while competing

By LIU ZHIHUA

At only 7 years of age, Zhu He already has a collection of golf trophies, has played on courses in China and the United States and has hit a hole-in-one.

Since teeing off in his first youth tournament in 2012, the Beijing primary school student has regularly been the youngest player at regional, national and international competitions.

"He just enjoys playing. He doesn't care about winning or losing," said his father, Zhu Zhizhen, who recalled that his son had remained perfectly calm after hitting his first hole-in-one last year during a warm-up for the US Kids Golf World Championship in North Carolina.

"I'm not anxious about whether he will go on to be a pro. I just

want to make sure he can enjoy the game," added the surgeon, who despite his busy schedule said he makes time to accompany his son on the course as often as possible.

Zhu He is the latest in a line of young Chinese golfers who have drawn attention at home and abroad.

Guan Tianlang, 16, and 19-year-old Li Haotong have both been tipped as future stars after impressing at international tournaments. Guan, from the southern city of Guangzhou, became the youngest player ever to make the cut at a major when he competed in the 2013 Masters, while Li, number 135 in the world, is China's highest-ranked player.

Dr Zhu said he had suspected his son would be a good golfer because he and his wife had discovered they would be parents



Zhu He, a 7-year-old boy from Beijing, has been taking part in junior golf games held in the United States since 2013.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

after completing a round of 18 holes.

He first placed a plastic toy club in his son's hands at just 11 months old and started to teach him how to play when he turned 1. Using toys and household items, he turned the family's living room into a miniature course.

During the Chinese New Year holidays, Dr Zhu said he would also hang red envelopes containing money — a traditional gift — along the makeshift course. If Zhu He could hit them with a golf ball, he was allowed to keep the money.

The young player made his debut on a full-size course when he was 3 and a year later was completing games of nine holes. At the time, junior golf contests were rare in China, and Dr Zhu said even today there were fewer than 10 widely recognised events.

In 2013, Zhu He went to play in the United States and won his first trophy. His father said the trip also marked the first time his son had cried after posting a disappointing score.

"Ultimately, we play for fun. I just want him to learn how to be a better person through playing golf," he said, adding that he believes golf teaches discipline and instils a strong work ethic.

Dr Zhu has been sharing his son's progress on social media, including on Sina Weibo, a Twitter-like website where he had almost 2,000 followers, and instant messenger app WeChat.

"Apart from golf, I like football, basketball and swimming. But I don't have much time for sport because I need to study," said Zhu He. "I want to study hard because I need brains to play golf better."

# A traditional art form takes off as economic lifeline for Chinese town

By RIAZAT BUTT

Kites of every color, size and shape surround Sun Yuemei. Her workshop hums gently with the sound of industry as sewing machinists piece together kites at lightning speed. The period between May and October is quiet for her business and for the 86 other workshops like hers that are dotted around the community of Wangjia Zhuangzi in Weifang, a city in the eastern coastal province of Shandong.

"At peak season this workshop makes 10,000 kites a day. One worker can make between 400 and 600 kites a day," said Sun. The 39-year-old, who runs the Dashan Kite Factory, was a machinist for two years before starting her own business.

"I didn't go to university,

everything I learned comes from firsthand experience. At the beginning I was very nervous because I started from nothing and I didn't know how to communicate with customers."

Her rise, from shop floor to self-employment, has proved lucrative. Last year, her factory had sales of 1.5 million yuan (about \$241,500). Sales for the first six months of this year totaled 2 million yuan.

"The reason for my success? It's the quality of my products. I am also very humble."

Most of her kites are for domestic use, with only about 20 per cent destined for export.

The 87 workshops, covering an area of a few square kilometers, make 80 million kites a year between them. About 2,200 of the 4,600 people who live in

Wangjia Zhuangzi are in the kite business.

There is more to kitemaking in Weifang than the industrialized process seen in Wangjia Zhuangzi. The tradition stretches further back than a *longtou wugong* (a dragon-headed centipede kite) — more than 2,000 years. A philosopher named Mo Di, who lived on Mount Lu near Weifang, is said to have spent three years making a flying wooden bird. He later passed his knowledge and skills on to his pupil Lu Ban, who used a lighter material and kept his creation in the air for three days.

Families of the Yang Clan in Yangjiabu, a small town in Weifang, started to make kites in the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Villagers transferred the techniques of



Left: A team from India presents its "rolling dragon" kite at this year's international kite festival in Weifang in April. Right: A traditional centipede kite adorned with a dragon's head at this year's international kite festival in Weifang.



PHOTOS BY JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

making woodblock pictures to kitemaking. By the Qianlong reign (1736-1795) of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), kitemaking had become an important industry in Weifang.

To preserve and promote this aspect of the city's cultural heritage and identity, Weifang has an annual international kite festival that launched in 1984 and attracts thousands of people from around the world as well as a kite museum of 8,000 square meters.

China has four other kite cities: Beijing, Tianjin and Nantong in Jiangsu province. Swallow-shaped kites are popular in Beijing while whistle kites are associated with Nantong. In China, kites were used for communication, military purposes and measuring distances.