

Swimmer proves her coach right

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Liu Qiuping knew that a swimmer she discovered four years ago would one day be an Olympic champion.

Liu Zige won China's first gold medal in the swimming competition yesterday, and also set a new world record for the 200 m butterfly.

Her time of 2 minutes and 4.18 seconds was more than a second faster than Australian Jessicah Schipper's previous record.

"I was thrilled to witness the feat," Liu Qiuping, who is the deputy secretary of the Shanghai Swimming Association and a coach, said.

She recognized Liu Zige's potential in 2004.

"The moment I saw Liu, I told her 'you are awesome'," Liu Qiuping said.

She said Liu Zige was then only 15 years old, but already 1.76 m tall, an ideal physique for a swimmer.

At the time, Liu Qiuping and other officials of the Shanghai sports bureau were looking for talented swimmers across the country.

They visited a private swimming club in Shenyang and spotted a framed picture of Liu Zige together with an Australian coach.

They were told Liu Zige had spent two months in Australia on a training course and had impressed the coach.

Liu Qiuping said she would like to meet the girl and watch her swim.

"Liu Zige was very good. She swam like a fish," Liu Qiuping said.

The recruiting team selected seven swimmers, Liu Zige being the only girl.

"She doesn't talk much, but smiles often," Chen Xiao, supervisor of Liu Zige's training school, said.

"She takes her swimming very seriously. I have never heard her complain about the hard

routine," Chen said.

In September, she won gold in the 200 m butterfly event at the National Swimming Championships. This was her stepping-stone to the Beijing Olympics.

At the time, her world ranking was 21. She shot up to No 8 in April when she won the same event at this year's National Championships.

"It has taken much effort and dedication, but Liu Zige has achieved the ultimate success," Jin Wei, who has been coaching her for the past eight years, said.

"Source: China Daily"