

# A sporting chance

BY WU YANG



I remember the moment that heralded a new Beijing. On 13 July 2001 – the day of the announcement that Beijing had been chosen to host the 2008 Olympic Games – I was a senior high school student from southwestern China.

That day millions of Chinese citizens flooded city streets and village squares across the country, singing, dancing, laughing and crying tears of joy.

I had heard that our capital suffered from severe sandstorms, perpetually congested traffic and massive air pollution. But when I started living here two years ago, I was pleasantly surprised. For the slogan ‘New Beijing, Great Olympics’ is becoming a reality.

A new Beijing is indeed emerging, blending 3,000-year-old cultural traditions with modern technology and environmentally friendly innovations. Greening and beautification projects are being carried out all around the city: recently Chinese leaders joined with more than 2 million people (including me) to plant trees in Beijing’s Olympic Forest Park. Over the past two decades, millions of ordinary citizens have planted billions of trees across the country. Some 7,400 hectares of green belt now encircle Beijing, shielding us from sandstorms like a present-day version of the Great Wall that protected citizens from invading armies so long ago. And inside the city, green zones and corridors provide peaceful, natural oases.

Beijing’s commitment to ‘Delivering a Green Olympics and Building an Ecological City’ has led to dramatic improvements. The installation of central heating networks has led residents to stop burning coal in their homes and convert coal-fuelled boilers to run on cleaner forms of energy. Municipal regulations have reduced the amount of soot, vehicle exhaust, dust and industrial pollution in the air. And public transportation is gaining popularity now that buses running on natural gas and a refurbished subway system connect every part of the city.

Enthusiasm for ‘Sports for Sustainable Development’ is running high. Beijing is aiming to run a zero-net emissions Green Olympics – as Salt Lake City did in 2002 – by incorporating green building and urban planning principles and accepting carbon credit ‘donations’ from companies to offset the city’s greenhouse gas emissions. We believe that a clean environment, sustainable development and healthy living through sport go hand in hand.

Across China, university students like myself have formed ‘Green Families’ devoted to environmental protection for public welfare – my chapter at Beijing Jiaotong University has over 200 members. We organize lectures, screen educational films and facilitate the intercollegiate exchange of information and technology. Recently we staged a used battery recycling campaign on campus, which was featured on the Beijing People’s Broadcasting Corporation News Channel.

Like many others in my city, I am excited about the Olympic Games coming in 2008. Beijing is a vibrant community of millions of friendly people who appreciate nature and love meeting visitors from around the world. We believe that the 2008 Games will both enhance harmony between different cultures, and strengthen the relationship between man and nature.

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