

Jeremy Wilson talks: Rest of Asia

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2004 Olympic Gold medallist Seung Min Ryu, world number 4 Tianwei Feng and world number 7 Jun Mizutani, pictures courtesy of ITTF

Aside from China, the most successful Olympic nation in table tennis has been South Korea, who have won three gold, two silver and 12 bronze medals since 1988.

Indeed, the first men's singles final was an all-Korean match as Yoo Nam Kyu triumphed against Kim Ki Taek. Ryu Seung Min was a winner of the men's singles as recently as 2004 in Athens. The other South Korean gold medal was won by Yang Young and Hyun Jung Hwa in the women's doubles event in Seoul in 1988.

Aside from South Korea, Sweden and China, no other country has won an Olympic gold medal in table-tennis, but North Korea have won three medals. Players from Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong and Singapore have also made it onto an Olympic rostrum.

It is the rest of Asia rather than Europe, which is again likely to be pushing China the hardest at the London Olympics. South Korea have eight male players in the world's top 50, with Joo Sy Hyuk (ranked 10) and Seung Min Ryo, the Olympic champion in 2004 and still ranked 15th in the world, likely to challenge most strongly. With Germany and Japan, South Korea and Japan should also provide a stern challenge to China in the team event. Other notable Asian players include Japan's Jun Mizutani and Seiya Kishikawa, who are ranked number seven and 17 in the world respectively, Chi-Yuan Chuang from Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong's Peng Tang. There is also great Asian strength from outside China in the women's events. Japan have three of the top 11 players in Ai Fukuhara, Sayaka Hirano and Kasumi Ishikawa. Singapore also have three players in the world's top 20, including the world number four Tianwei Feng.

Singapore beat South Korea to the silver medal in the women's team championships at the Beijing Olympics.

However, the dominance of China in women's table tennis is underlined by the fact that the Korean players, Pak Yung Sun and Hyun Jung-Hwa, are the only non-Chinese world champions in the women's singles events over the last 40 years.

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