

Vivian Tan's Olympic summer

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Vivian Tan playing for Australia (Picture courtesy of the ITTF)

As part of the Australian table tennis team that will face GB in a pre-Olympic warm-up match, Vivian 'Zhenhua' Tan, spoke to Steve Kerns ahead of an important year in her career.

Tan started playing table tennis in Shanghai as a six-year-old but after emigrating to Australia in 2003 she didn't resume her career until 2007 after a 10-year break from the sport.

Tan explained: "When I started playing in Shanghai I progressed to the Regional Academy and we used to train for three hours a day.

Whilst in the school holidays we played for six hours, six days a week. I played mainly with the boys and one of them became quite good – Wang Liqin – I think you have all heard of him!"

Her highest ever World ranking is 232nd which she reached in June 2012 and she is delighted that she has qualified for the London Olympic Games via the Oceania Region Olympic Qualifying Tournament.

Tan's team mates: Miao Miao and Jiang Fan Lay have also qualified for the Games and will be heading to London after training in Preston at the Sir Tom Finney Sports Centre.

In Australia the table tennis system is very different to here in the UK.

Tan answered honestly: "It is different in Australia, there are only a limited number of high level players to train with and they are scattered throughout the country.

Table tennis is an amateur sport in Australia and therefore we have to organise our commitments around our work. It is difficult to organise more than two or three sessions a week".

She throws up a frightening statistic: "The furthest distance I have had to travel to a tournament is 2,400 km – from Sydney to Cairns".

In Australia there is no National League set-up and therefore the top players are more inclined to play in local League matches. The country has set up State Associations to promote the sport more extensively.

Tan's club is, in fact, a major sporting organisation with an emphasis on rugby and the table tennis section is part of their organisation. They are understandably delighted that she will be playing in the Olympic Games.

She's not the only Australian player to have links with England. Willam Henzell, nine-times Australian Men's Champion, was also a frequent winner on the British Grand Prix circuit in 2004. Tan reveals Henzell's love for story telling. She laughs: "He can never stop telling everyone about his European table tennis experiences".

Her favourite players turn out to be a throw-back to the 1990s – the incomparable Jan-Ove Waldner, the 1996 Olympic Mens Singles Champion and the current Chinese Mens Coach – Lui Guoliang and the virtually unbeatable Deng Yaping.

It is her hope to follow in their footsteps when she competes at London 2012.

If you would like to see Vivian Tan in action and couldn't get tickets to the Olympics there are still spaces available for the GB vs Aus match in Preston. You can [find ticket details here](#).

Steve Kerns

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