

# Analysis of the Phenomenon of Retired Athletes Transitioning to Sports Commentary

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**Abstract:** *The transition of retired athletes to become sports commentators has become a common phenomenon in China's sports industry. This paper will analyze the advantages and disadvantages of athletes' transition to become sports commentators by citing successful cases of transition, and analyze the opportunities brought by new media technology and the development of event broadcasting technology for athletes' transition, in order to provide reference for more retired athletes' career choices after retirement.*

**Keywords:** *retired athletes; sports commentary; opportunities*

## 1. Introduction

As the economy continues to develop and people's living standards continue to improve, sports are becoming an increasingly indispensable part of people's lives. And when many viewers watch sports events, sports commentary has become an integral part of their viewing experience. China's sports commentary industry has gone through decades of development since 1951. In addition to professional sports commentators, there are many outstanding athletes who have become commentators after retiring from the sport, and their years of experience in the sport has given them advantages that professional commentators cannot match in terms of professional knowledge and understanding of sports laws, but they also have certain shortcomings due to their non-professional origins. So far, there have been many successful cases of retired athletes transforming into commentators in China.

## 2. Transformation success stories

### 2.1. Zhou Yafei

Zhou Yafei was once a famous swimmer in China, and won the reputation of "Queen of Asian Discs" for her exquisite butterfly swimming skills. Since she started to be the guest commentator of CCTV since the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, she has slowly become the "most beautiful commentator" of CCTV's swimming program. Due to her standard Mandarin, magnetic voice and years of experience as an excellent swimmer, her commentary is both professional and quickly accepted by the public. Over the years, she has commented on many competitions in swimming events and has gradually developed her own style: professional and emotional, with a strong influence. So far in her commentary career, she has witnessed many "historical moments" of the Chinese swimming team, and her passionate shouts together with the athletes' achievements have constituted fond memories in the hearts of many swimming fans. For example, in the London 2012 Olympic women's 200m medley final, China's Ye Shiwen won the title, and Zhou Yafei said in the commentary "Ye Shiwen made history and opened a door! This door is the history of Chinese sons and daughters who can win multiple gold medals in one Olympic competition. This golden moment should really be remembered." Many swimming fans are still talking about it to this day.

### 2.2. Li Ying

Li Ying was a member of the Chinese women's volleyball team. During her time as an athlete, she won many good results with the team in both domestic and international competitions. After retiring, she was introduced by a chance to become a commentator for volleyball matches by CCTV commentators. At first, she was only a commentator and co-host. Later, she was able to commentate the whole game independently without the guidance of the commentator. As a commentator, her language is simple and

direct, calm and objective, and she is able to get to the point and convey information to the audience in a concise manner. Due to her background as a libero, she was a well-rounded and detailed player during her athletic days, which later made her commentary very detailed and able to explain the players' performance from the athletes' technical point of view. For example, when evaluating the offensive performance of China's volleyball player Zhu Ting, she mentioned that "Zhu Ting's feet adjust quickly, her stepping point is accurate, and the swing rate of her small arm is very fast, which makes her spikes very sharp and landing point tricky, making the opponent defensive." It also provides technical analysis for many viewers who are not involved in volleyball, so that they can receive more comprehensive information about the game.

### **2.3. Wang Meng**

In the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, the Chinese delegation has achieved many successes. In addition to the wonderful performance of the athletes, the "crossover commentary" of Wang Meng, a famous Chinese short track speed skater, also attracted much attention. In the commentary, she is very familiar with the athletes' professional experience, athletic status and technical characteristics; in the process of the competition, she is passionate, and her shouting is as exciting as being in the scene; when the results of the competition are controversial, she can even make a judgment before the judges on the scene, and answer the doubts for the audience in time. In the commentary process, she also burst out "my eyes are the ruler" such as the golden words, hot all the way up, but also attracted more viewers to pay attention to the short track speed skating competition.

## **3. Analysis of the advantages of athletes transforming into sports commentators**

### **3.1. Solid professional knowledge and innovative interpretation perspective**

For most professional commentators, they do not have professional sports background, and their mastery of competition information relies more on pre-game information collection and collation, data analysis, mastering "static information" [1] such as information about athletes, rules of sports, performance of participating athletes, historical development of the sport, etc., but for "dynamic information" such as technical and tactical. The "dynamic information" such as technical and tactical characteristics, the growth cycle of athletes, the training methods of the sport, and the laws of sport cannot be grasped. The sport itself is random, from the beginning to the end of the game, dynamic changes are happening every moment, which cannot be predicted by the commentators. For professional athletes, they have a deep experience of the dynamic changes in the field during their long sports career, and can make the first time to receive and judge. For the game, athletes can interpret the game from a more professional perspective, but also to meet the growing demand of professional spectators to watch the game.

In addition to their professionalism, athletes are able to add timely information to the game. They can make use of their contacts accumulated during their athletic days, and by virtue of their familiarity with teammates, opponents and coaches, they can grasp the "inside information" that is of great interest to the audience in the first place. For example, the aforementioned Zhou Yafei, before commentating on the game, she can talk with the coaches and teammates of the national team she used to be familiar with, so as to understand the status of the players, team layout, and coaching arrangements, which on the one hand can meet the needs of the audience and make them feel novel; on the other hand, it can also provide theoretical support for her commentary and enrich the content of her commentary. [1]

In addition, due to their status as athletes, they are not only "spectators" but also a special "participant" when commentating on a game. They can analyze the athletes' psychological state and technical level of play with their own sports experience. For example, when Hu Jia was commentating on the men's three-meter board competition between Qin Kai and Luo Yutong, he found that Luo Yutong had shot his face three times on camera, so he explained, "Just now Qin Kai looked at Luo Yutong, but he didn't respond, which means he was very nervous at this time." This kind of commentary seems vivid and detailed, and can also enrich the audience's viewing experience.

### **3.2. The language is simple and straightforward, infectious, and can cause emotional resonance with the audience**

Most of the athletes have not received professional training in audible language expression, and most

of them are simple and straightforward, so they are used to talking plainly and directly, which makes the audience feel friendly and at the same time can receive the message they want to convey very directly. At the same time, athletes have strong patriotic feelings, and when commenting on national team-related games, they often share the same desire to win for the country as the athletes on the field, and when our athletes are gaining good results, they will drive the audience's national pride and make the audience feel emotional resonance.

For example, Wang Meng's commentary at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics was impressive. A native of the northeast, she is brash, direct and has a natural sense of humor, often making the audience laugh. The most "out of the loop" or mixed team relay race, in more than two minutes of game time, Wang Meng almost jumped to finish the game, the game atmosphere to the climax. Even before the end of the race with 4 laps left, Wang Meng confidently announced: "China's first gold was born!" At the final sprint moment, China's Wu Dajing and Italy's Pietro Segale crossed the finish line with a very small gap, and while the whole world was still anxiously waiting for the result, Wang Meng announced with dominance: "Win! Win! No need to watch the replay! My eyes are the ruler!" Of course, the result was just as she said, and the Chinese team took the first gold in the Winter Olympics.

### **3.3. Star effect**

Athletes are highly visible and influential, and sports stars have a wider social influence because of their outstanding achievements in the field of sports. Therefore, as long as athletes appear in the screen, they will attract viewers, sports fans and gain more attention. When athletes change their identity and become commentators, viewers will first be curious and want to find out more about them; moreover, they will trust the athletes' professionalism because of their sports performance in their career and satisfy their demand of "learning professional sports knowledge" when listening to commentaries. Therefore, it is obvious that the audience is more interested in the athletes' commentary than the professional commentators' commentary.

It can be said that it is the sport that makes an athlete, and when an athlete is involved in the program again as a commentator, the wide attention he attracts will promote the spread and popularity of the program and push it forward.

At the same time, the "star effect"[2] of athletes also brings a series of economic benefits. The audience will pay attention to an athlete's commentary because of his or her admiration, which will lead to higher ticket sales, higher ratings for the broadcast of the event, and higher popularity of the program, while also attracting more capital injection, which will lead to economic development.

In summary, the "star effect" generated by athletes' commentary will attract more attention and bring economic income to the event, so event broadcasters and event organizers are very willing to invite athletes to serve as commentators.

## **4. Analysis of the disadvantages of athletes transforming into sports commentators**

### **4.1. Poor language skills**

The commentary is one of the audio language expressions, so the commentator needs to master certain audio language expression skills, including but not limited to accent, stopping, rhythm, tone, sense of object, etc. Different forms of expression should be adjusted according to different occasions and different audiences. Different forms of expression should be adjusted according to different occasions and different audiences, and also have different requirements for the speaker, but they all require profound language skills for protection. Athletes often make small mistakes when expressing themselves because they have not received professional training, lack skills and are inexperienced. For example, in the 2016 Rio Olympics, China Central Radio and Television invited Feng Kun, the captain of the "golden generation" of Chinese women's volleyball team, to be the guest commentator. In the process of commentary, she often stuttered, repeated her expressions and shouted the wrong names of the athletes, and her expressions were slightly restrained and not very fluent. Athletes have rich professional knowledge, but often due to the lack of skills, they are unable to fully express their ideas, resulting in barriers to the audience's understanding, and their needs are not fully met.

#### ***4.2. Difficult to be objective in position and slightly weak in emotional control***

Hong Gang, a famous sports commentator in China, once said that he values the nature of "journalist" as a sports commentator and pays more attention to fairness and full dissemination of news information. He will not comment on whether the referee is right or wrong, but will only explain the rules and uphold the authority of the referee, in his own words, "sports commentary should not turn itself into a referee. Athletes have a stronger sense of national identity than ordinary spectators due to their previous sports experience. When commenting on games with Chinese athletes, athletes often forget their identity as commentators and find it difficult to remain calm and objective, so that their commentary may sometimes mislead the audience and cause a certain degree of negative impact, or even lead to controversy.

#### ***4.3. Insufficient experience in commentary and poor control of rhythm***

In the author's opinion, in today's highly developed event broadcasting technology, viewers can get a lot of detailed information by themselves while watching the game, and the viewers' own sports cognition is also improving. Therefore, in the process of watching the game, sports commentary is only a "supporting role" to assist them in watching the game and enriching the viewing experience, while the sports event itself is the "main character". As a commentator, you have to express yourself at the right time according to the process of the game, and you have to know how to "leave white space" for the audience to interpret. When commenting, athletes often do not clearly understand when to describe the game, when to add off-field information, and when to summarize the stage. Therefore, they often cannot do without the guidance and assistance of professional commentators. Athletes are inexperienced in commentary, and only through continuous learning can they master the art of it.

### **5. Opportunity for athletes to transform into sports commentators**

#### ***5.1. Technology development and increasing platforms***

With the continuous development of modern event broadcasting technology, viewers can watch exciting events through multiple channels and platforms. The increase in viewing channels also requires more sports commentary to fill the gaps. At the same time, as sports become part of more and more people's lives, the market for sports events continues to expand, and major programs are expanding their sports events. In addition to traditional competitions such as the World Championships, World Cup and Olympic Games, commercial events, domestic events and local events for major sports are also on the rise. This undoubtedly brings a "spring" for sports commentary. If retired athletes can play to their strengths, they are sure to stand out in the competition and become popular candidates for major organizers and broadcasters.

#### ***5.2. Viewers' viewing needs personalized, broadcasters enhance competitiveness through innovation***

As the leader of China's sports television, CCTV sports channel has been constantly experimenting and innovating in the training and shaping of commentators. In the 1990s, CCTV proposed a "troika" style of commentary, i.e. a host, a tactical theorist and an intelligence expert, all in one; in 2004, during the coverage of the Athens Olympic Games, CCTV sent world champions to commentate live in seven sports, including diving. In the London Olympics in 2012, China launched a powerful "super commentary team", sending nearly 50 people to commentate on site, of which 16 commentators are retired athletes. [3]

After entering the new media era, more and more viewers choose to watch the games on mobile devices. Take the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as an example, CCTV new media matrix such as CCTV.com, CCTV video and CCTV video are near the water, MIGU video emerged and won the only right to live broadcast Olympic events except CCTV; on-demand and short video power eventually went to Tencent and Racer. Many event broadcasting platforms showed their talents, and the choice of commentators became one of the key elements of their competition. Among them, MIGU video is the most eye-catching, opening several channels for commentary during the broadcast, and even inviting college student commentators from Beijing Sports University in addition to the Olympic champion commentary, which is a multi-pronged approach to win.

From the viewpoint of the audience, a significant portion of the audience has been a loyal fan of a certain sport for many years, and knows a lot about the rules, development, and athletes of the sport. For

them, the professionalism of the event commentary is very important, and the athletes' commentary can best meet their needs. For those who don't know the sport or don't know much about it, "athlete commentary" can satisfy their curiosity and attract them to watch the race.

In summary, whether it is the event organizers, broadcasters or viewers, their demand for sports commentary is showing a trend of diversification and personalization, and the demand is rising. This undoubtedly provides a good opportunity for athletes to transform into sports event commentators.

## 6. Conclusions

Athletes who have been fighting for their country for years often carry physical injuries and illnesses after retirement, and because they have been engaged in sports training for a long time, there are not many opportunities for cultural learning, which makes them face many difficulties in choosing their career after retirement. The study of retired athletes' transition to sports commentary is of great practical significance to solve the problem of retired athletes' re-employment and to develop China's sports commentary career. We also hope that the study of this paper can provide direction for more retired athletes who are facing confusion and achieve a more wonderful life.

## References

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