

# SU RACES TO THE TOP

China's sprint superstar sets his sights on another stellar season

By SHI FUTIAN

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After a glorious past 12 months, Team China's athletics aces are looking forward to yet more medals and records in 2019.

August's Asian Games yielded 12 gold, 12 silver and nine bronze medals for the country's track and field stars, with a winter training stint which began in Beijing in October signaling their intent to begin the new year where they left off in 2018.

Leading the charge will be the nation's fastest man, Su Bingtian.

It is hard to believe that Su had very briefly retired, becoming an associate professor at Jinan University, before he twice equaled the 100-meter Asian record of 9.91 seconds and clocked 9.92 to take the Asian Games title in Jakarta.

"For me, 2018 was also a sensational season that was full of surprises. It was perfect," said the 29-year-old at his training base in Beijing last month.

"I went to my first race on January 23, and that day, to be honest, I was truly anxious and felt uncertain about myself.

"Before I went out, I did a test run and I just managed 6.66 over 60m. When people asked me what my plan was, I could only answer that I would try my best to get close to 6.65. It was embarrassing."

Su was soon celebrating, though, claiming the overall 60m title on the IAAF World Indoor Tour and refreshing the 60m Asian record by clocking 6.42 in Birmingham in March.

His original intention was to use the 60m races as a warm-up for the 100m.

"I was under pressure because it was me who picked all the indoor tournaments, and I had a very full schedule," said Su.

"All of those great performances were unexpected. When I ran 6.47 in Karlsruhe, Germany, on February 3, I wanted to withdraw from the next competition as it was starting just three days later.

"Then I decided to give it a shot. I felt great, so I pushed myself for the final. That's how I ran 6.43 to set a new Asian record in Dusseldorf. So, sometimes, if there's an opportunity, we should fight hard to seize it."

Su maintained that momentum in the 100m, tying the Asian mark of 9.91 with a tailwind of 0.2m/s in Madrid, Spain, in June and matching that time later in the month at a Diamond League meet in Paris, France. He also clocked a wind-assisted 9.90 at the circuit's third stop in Eugene,



China's Su Bingtian is the Asian 100m record holder and hopes to lower the mark by breaking the 9.90-second barrier. XINHUA

Oregon, in the United States, in May.

"Initially, I didn't expect to reach 9.91, and my expectation was to at least be better than 9.99," said Su who became the first Asia-born sprinter to break the 10-second barrier in 2015 in Eugene, before repeating the feat at that year's world championships in Beijing.

"More importantly, almost all of my great performances were achieved when I competed with the world's best sprinters, which gave me huge confidence."

Next on his agenda is breaking 9.90 and keeping competitive until the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Time is of the essence for Su, however, who turns 30 in August and admitted he got a shock when he realized that some of his national teammates are 10 years younger than him.

"I don't think that I have the absolute strength to break 9.90, so to achieve that I must be in peak condition and have an ideal wind speed and temperature.

"Over the next one to two years, breaking 9.90 is my goal. I believe it can be done, based on my experience — after I ran 10.10 three or four times, I then went on to break the 10-second barrier. Now I've run 9.91 and 9.92 many times, so I'm close to that goal."

Helping Su toward his target is American coach Randy Huntington, who guided US long jumper Mike Powell to the current world record of 8.95 meters in 1991.

"Technique, physical training, speed ... we re-engineered him from the bottom up," said Huntington last year.

"We tore him apart and put him back together again. All I do is give him the opportunity through my eyes and abilities, and he absorbed it incredibly quickly."

Su has absolute trust in his tutor's methods.

"I've done massive amounts of training ahead of major international competitions before, but sometimes it can be too intensive

and my body can't handle it," said Su.

"Now the training model has changed a lot. It can also be intensive, but I always get a proper recovery, so I'm always energetic.

"If I have any ideas on how to improve the training, I let my coach know and we tailor it.

"From the very beginning, I've just wanted to learn from Randy. I'm also a teacher and I want to pass the knowledge to the next generation when I retire."

One of the biggest sacrifices Su made last season was spending less time with his family.

He even missed the birth of his son — he was unfortunately in an airplane after pulling out of a July meet to rush to be by his wife's side.

"Finally, I will get to spend the Spring Festival with my family this year, thanks to my coach who is really thoughtful," said Su.

"I'm worried about my son as he has a fever these days.

"My priority every day after I fin-

## Factfile



### Su Bingtian

Born: Aug 29, 1989

Age: 29

Height: 1.73 m (5-foot-8)

Weight: 70 kg (154 lb)

Sport: Track

Personal bests:

60 meters — 6.42 seconds, 2018 (Asian record)

100 meters — 9.91 seconds, 2018 (Asian record)

2018 Highlights (100m):

9.90, +2.4 m/s, IAAF Diamond League, Eugene, Oregon, USA

9.91, +0.2 m/s, IAAF Meeting Madrid, Spain

9.91, +0.8 m/s, IAAF Diamond League, Paris, France

9.92, +0.8 m/s, Asian Games, Jakarta, Indonesia

ish my training is to go back to my room and have a video chat with my wife and son."

He admitted his absences hurt even more after the little guy made strange noises when his dad tried to hold him.

However, the thought of his son proudly watching his glory bid at Tokyo 2020 is keeping Su going.

"He's still too little to even recognize his father, but two years down the line things should be different.

"Now I have to focus on my career. Hopefully he can be at the Tokyo Games.

"He will be two years old then and that will be my last Olympics. I want my son to remember his father on the Olympic track."



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