

SPORTING LEGENDS: LI NING

SPORT: GYMNASTICS

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1981 - 1988

Li Ning born September 8, 1963 in Liuzhou is a famous Chinese gymnast and entrepreneur. Li began training at age eight. At both the '81 and '83 world championships, he placed sixth all-around; in '83, he also placed second on vault, and third on floor exercise and rings.

A small mistake on parallel bars may have cost Li the all-around gold at the '84 Olympics (he ended in third place), but he dominated the event finals there. He placed first on floor exercise, pommel horse (tie) and rings (tie), and second (tie) on vault.

Li is most famous for winning 6 medals at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, including 3 gold medals (in floor exercise, pommel horse, and rings), 2 silver medals, and a bronze medal. In 1982, he won six of the seven medals awarded at the Sixth World Cup Gymnastic Competition, earning him the title "Prince of gymnastics".

After winning six gold medals (including the all-around) at the 1982 World Cup, Li Ning played a key role in helping the Chinese men win their first world team title a year later.



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On December 16, 1988, Li Ning, China's "prince of gymnastics" announced his retirement from competitive sports. Gymnastics is one of China's stronger sports. To date, Chinese gymnasts have won 37 gold medals at major world tournaments. However, the sport does not enjoy the widespread popularity the aforementioned statistic would indicate. In the former Soviet Union there were nine gymnastics schools and in the United States there are over a hundred gymnastics clubs. China lags far behind.

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Li Ning's awesome strength always served him well on the Pommel Horse.

On March 10, 1991, Li Ning's 28th birthday, a gymnastics school opened with 30 young children as its first batch of trainees. It was the first of its kind in China and bore the name of its founder.

Since 1990, when the national gymnastics team first donned "LI-NING" sportswear, the national shooting, swimming and diving teams have also chosen to wear "LI-NING" clothing at international competitions.

He was also highly recognisable at the opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, where he ran around the stadium with the Olympic Torch whilst suspended mid-air via high tension wires. It was a tremendous spectacle, and one which Li Ning truly deserved.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

L.A. 64 was the very first Olympic Games I ever watched on television. Whilst I was most inspired by the swimming events, I also remember being totally mesmerised by the incredible display of gymnastics on as well.

A big part of this was the performance of Li Ning, who was the undoubted star of the show. Whilst the USA team took the Men's Team Gold, it was Li Ning who really stood out.

Chinese men are not usually famed for their muscularity, yet Li Ning's physique was extraordinary. He possessed mesomorphic qualities in every sense of the word, and his pound-for-pound strength had to be seen to be believed.

He achieved Sporting Legend status at those Olympics alone, but he was also incredibly consistent throughout his entire career.



It takes arms and shoulders to perform on the rings - and Li Ning had them!