

Written by Lisa Wang

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The Chinese national gymnastics team's celebrations for Sunday's Chinese New Year included a national talent gala, reunions with family members and a rare training break.

Although the team is in the midst of its winter training period—typically the busiest time each year during which new skills are invented, routines are re-choreographed, and young talents are groomed for international competition—the gymnasts are enjoying a break in celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year, which began Sunday. The gymnasts are given one to one-and-a-half days off, in addition to the usual Sunday break. (They normally train six days a week throughout the year, getting only Sundays off as their day of rest and just half a day break on Jan. 1.)

The Chinese gymnasts also enjoyed planning and performing in the annual Chinese New Year Gala, an elaborate talent show where artistic and rhythmic gymnasts put together skits, song and dance. The show is frequently broadcasted on national television, and over the years has been attended by a number of celebrities from the Chinese entertainment industry.

This year's gala, held Feb. 16, featured 2006 World Championships triple gold medalist **Cheng Fei** and 2006 men's world all-around champion **Yang Wei** as the masters of ceremonies. Former national team member **Sang Lan**, who was paralyzed during a vault accident at the 1998 Goodwill Games, also made a special guest appearance on stage.

Since gymnasts hail from all over the country, only those from Beijing (such as 2004 Olympic all-around bronze medalist **Zhang Nan** and 2004 Olympic pommel horse champion **Teng Haibin**) returned home for a Chinese New Year celebration with their family. Some gymnasts have parents who travel to Beijing for the special occasion. For many gymnasts whose hometown is farther away, the New Year's Eve dinner is often spent at the home of their coaches, who take in their pupils alongside their own family members for the special meal. **Cheng He Ning** and **Zhou Zhuoru** ushered in the New Year at the home of **Lu Shanzhen**, the head coach of the women's team.

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The Lunar New Year celebration brought Yang's parents and sister from Hubei to Beijing, a rare family gathering for the gymnast who has been training in Beijing for more than 10 years. Yang, second all-around at the 2000 Olympics and 2003 Worlds, reflected on realizing his dream of winning the world all-around title last fall.

"Realistically, I know my achievements in 2006 are hard to surpass; they do epitomize a type of pinnacle for me," Yang said. "But my goals for the next two years are to take things one step at a time. Of course the 2008 Beijing Olympics is the ultimate goal, for me as it is for my teammates, but right now I'm focusing on the 2007 Worlds and this year's training. I don't like to overthink the next step too much, or to predict precisely which titles I ought to win in the future."

Aside from training, Yang is also working towards his post-graduate degree in sports management through a series of online courses geared to professional athletes.

In other training news, Cheng is beginning to work on a new vault, and **Li Ya** is stabilizing her 7.5 Start Value routine on uneven bars and possibly working more skills to boost the Start Value.

### International Gymnast Magazine Related Features

He Ning center poster (January/February 2007)

Chinese women's and men's teams on cover, Yang Wei center poster, 2006 World Championships special issue (December 2006)

Zhou Zhuoru center poster, "Quick Chat: Cheng Fei" (May 2006)

"Lucky Charm" - Cheng cover story (January 2005)

"The Spirit Moves Her" - Sang interview (January 1999)