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# Golden moment may be stolen from Chen

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Through no fault of her own, Escondido resident Yueling Chen, who won the 10-kilometer walk gold medal for China in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, is smack in the middle of a giant controversy.

Chen, a naturalized citizen since April and a North County resident since 1994, recently had a dream come true when she earned a spot on the United States Olympic Track and Field team in the 20-kilometer walk at the Olympic Trials in Sacramento.

Earning a trip to Sydney represents a tremendous comeback for the 5-foot-1, 100-pound Chen.

Hold the phone.

She may not be able to compete.

Despite being a citizen, despite living in the United States for more than six years, Chen does not have all the rights of a U.S. citizen.

That's because her former country, the People's Republic of China, has refused to grant her a waiver to compete for her new country.

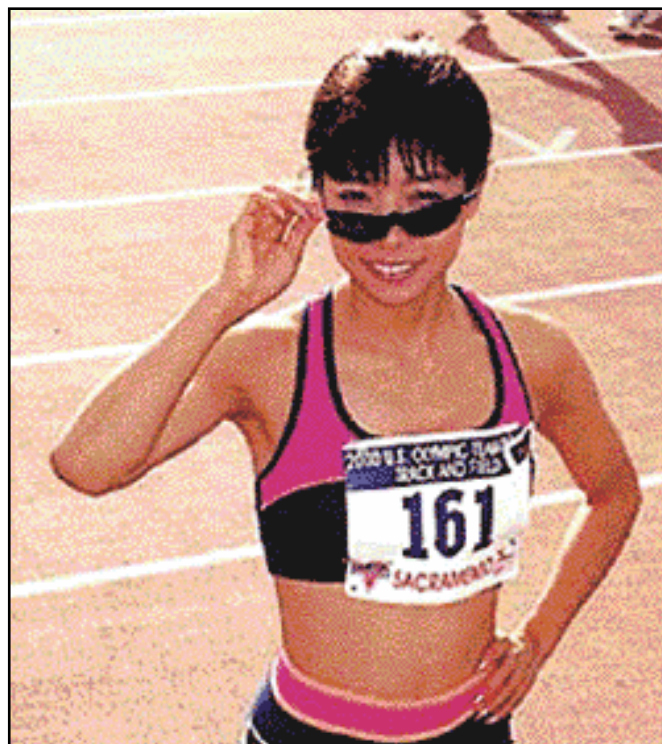
The Secretary General of the Chinese Athletics Association said that Chen's case falls under Olympic Rule 46 and that, "It should be strictly observed."

That's absurd.

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Rule 46 prohibits athletes from selling their services to the highest bidder.

**Escondido resident Yueling Chen may not be able to compete for U.S. Olympic track team after all.**

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Chen's case is different.

She retired with the blessing of the Chinese federation. She was suffering knee and back problems and had been part of the Chinese sports program for more than a decade.

In China, one doesn't just decide to retire. She had to go through an extensive check to get the Chinese Athletics Association's approval.

"I needed to get a lot of papers stamped," said Chen on Wednesday. " They told me, 'You have done your best for China, now you can do anything you want.' "

She took them up on that.

With the help of her manager, Derek Boosey, a former Olympic triple jumper for Great Britain, Chen looked to the USA.

She spent a year at Brigham Young University, then moved to Escondido where she began taking courses in English and business at Palomar College.

She bought a house near the Castle Creek Golf Course because the hilly area reminds her of her childhood home in the province of Manchuria.

Chen, who chooses her words carefully, admitted, "I don't want to deal in politics."

"There is no way she would spend seven years to become a citizen just so she could go to the Olympics," said Boosey. "I understand the rule was made to stop athletes from changing countries for reasons not in the spirit of the Olympic Games. However, Yueling did not even train for six years. Her whole objective in coming back is because she loves the Olympic spirit."

Boosey, who acts as Chen's spokesman, said that the only way Chen could be reinstated is if the IOC's Executive Committee stepped in.

Unfortunately for Chen, the time frame to solve this problem is shrinking. The USOC has 20 days to submit the athletic entry forms to the Sydney Olympic Organizing Committee.

If she is not on the team Chen thinks it will be a disappointment not only for her, but for many in China.

"One hundred percent of the Chinese newspapers (that she read) are very proud that I represent the

United States," she said.

Chen is one of the most popular athletes to ever come out of a country that has a population of 1.3 billion. She was recently in China along with Arnold Schwarzenegger to raise money for Special Olympics.

And members of the Chinese Olympic team sent her congratulatory telegrams when they heard she made the USA squad.

It is not as though Chen would be a threat to medal, either. The top three race walkers in the world are from China and Chen's best time is a full seven minutes behind the leader. In practical terms, she would need to make up three quarters of a mile in the race that covers more than 12 miles just to be a contender.

That's not likely.

That's what makes this decision so curious.

If she is not able to compete, Chen has one request: "I still would like to march in with the team," she said. "I want to be involved."

I'll tell you who should get involved ---- Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, Vice President Al Gore and George W. Bush. They should apply pressure at the highest level.

After all, Yueling Chen is one American who is not being treated fairly.

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