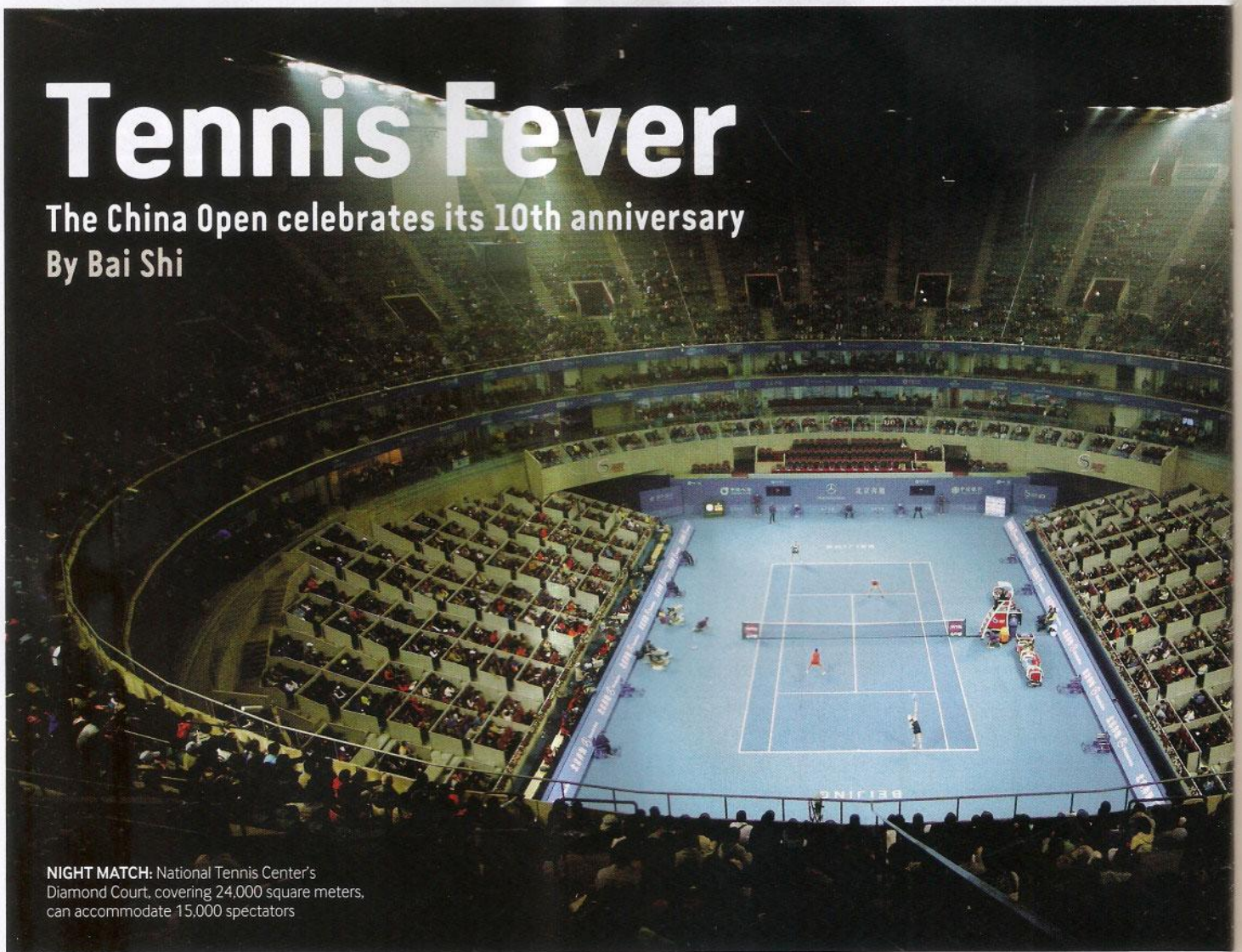


Tennis Fever

The China Open celebrates its 10th anniversary
By Bai Shi



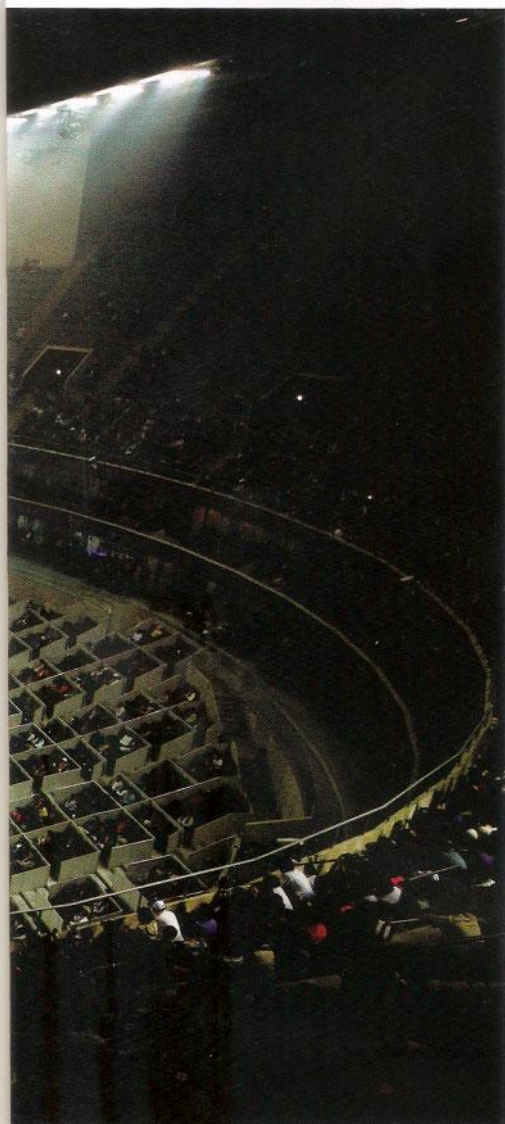
NIGHT MATCH: National Tennis Center's Diamond Court, covering 24,000 square meters, can accommodate 15,000 spectators

(Left to right)
WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS: Fans doing a Mexican wave during the men's singles final on October 6

FOCUS: Novak Djokovic hits the ball during a men's singles game on October 3. The Serbian won 19 games consecutively at the event

THE WINNER GOES TO: Serena Williams holds her second China Open trophy at the victory ceremony on October 6. The Grand Slam winner first claimed the title in 2004, the first year of the event





US. tennis player Serena Williams beat Serbian Jelena Jankovic 6-2, 6-2 to win her 10th Women's Tennis Association (WTA) title of the year, and the 56th of her career, at the China Open on October 6.

Palming the 10-year-old tournament's first women's singles title in 2004, Williams now stands at the top of WTA rankings, while the China Open has grown significantly in its global influence.

The tournament, first launched as a Tier II spectacle, is currently a combined ATP (Association of Tennis Professional)-WTA initiative, and has become the biggest such meeting on the Asian leg of the WTA calendar and one of 11 ATP World Tour 500 events. The meeting was upgraded to Premier status in 2009.

Despite its initial low-profile, many famous tennis players have participated and won at the China Open, including four-time champion Novak Djokovic, current ATP No. 1 player Rafael Nadal, Svetlana Kuznetsova and Williams.

The tournament appeals to world class contestants due to its generous prize money, high points and sound management, said Zhang Junhui, Director of the China Open.

"Audience and atmosphere are equally important to stars such as Djokovic, who participates here almost every year. He feels at home and really enjoys the experience of playing in China," Zhang said.

On October 6, Djokovic won his fourth China Open crown with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Nadal.

Audience numbers and media coverage at the tournament have been increasing year by year, attracting more than 300,000 people at this year's events, taking up 2,450 hours of TV time, and spanning 157 countries.

"The China Open is expected to generate record revenues this year," Zhang said. "After five years of effort, the tournament has earned 135 million yuan (\$22.05 million) already."

However, success has been hard won. During the early years, most tickets were handed out for free, he recalled.

In 2006, it became the first tournament outside the United States to implement Hawkeye electronic line calling. Following the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the event was staged in the Olympic Park's China National Tennis Center, which expanded across 11 courts and featured a new 15,000-seat stadium with a retractable roof.

"Today, ticket sales have increased over 25 million yuan (\$4.08 million)," Zhang said.

Change came thanks to the outstanding achievements of Chinese tennis players in recent years, Zhang noted. In particular, Li Na won the first women's singles championship at the French Open in 2011, the first Chinese to do so, inspiring countless of her fellow countrymen and women.

Nevertheless, the China Open has a long way to go, compared to Grand Slams such as Wimbledon and the French, U.S. and Australian Opens. ■

(All photos by Jiang Xiaoying. To see more, please scan below)



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