

Marketplace

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Hype could be hurdle for Liu Xiang

It's hard to go anywhere in Beijing without seeing the face of hurdler Liu Xiang on billboards, which some fear could eventually lead to the risk of overexposure. But Jamila Trindle reports that might not matter to fans.

TEXT OF STORY

SCOTT JAGOW:



A passenger naps on a train in Beijing as the car passes a billboard depicting hurdler Liu Xiang. (Frederic J. Brown/AFP/Getty Images)

So far, the focus of the Olympics has been on swimming. But tomorrow, it'll turn to Track and Field. China has a great chance for gold with hurdler Liu Xiang. He's kind of a superstar in China, and he's giving advertisers . . . The Wheaties. Jamila Trindle has more.

JAMILA TRINDLE:

Liu Xiang will be wearing the uniform of the Chinese Olympic team in the 110-meter hurdles in a few weeks. But in his TV commercials and billboards he represents everything from milk to shipping companies -- not to mention Nike, Coke and Visa.

GREG PAULL: In China, you know, celebrities still sell.

Chinese consumers associate Liu with 20 different brands, says Greg Paull, who runs market research firm R3.

PAULL:

Unlike perhaps in other markets, connection with a celebrity can make a huge difference on brand impact.

Paull has been tracking the use of celebrities in Chinese advertising, and he says it doesn't much matter whether the rest of the world knows Liu Xiang or not.

PAULL: Eight of the top 10 stars are still local. You know,

apart from Beckham and Kobe, Kobe Bryant, everybody else is a local star in China, so being locally relevant really matters. And Yao Ming and Liu Xiang are by far the most dominant two stars.

Around Beijing, it's hard to go anywhere without seeing Liu's face. In the Beijing Subway, people immediately recognize him on billboards.

All that recognition could eventually mean overexposure, and Paull says overly high expectations.

PAULL:

The danger for him is he comes second, so he's got to win and he's got to win big. So there's going to be more pressure on him than any other athlete for this Olympics.

Some sponsors are even promising bonuses if he wins Gold. The only ones watching him more carefully

may be his fans, like Hou Ting Guan.

HOU TING GUAN (VOICE OF INTERPRETER): I think he can get the gold. Two of his rivals are injured and won't be able to compete in this year's Olympics.

But Hou says even if Liu doesn't win, he'll still support him.

In Beijing, I'm Jamila Trindle for Marketplace.

COMMENTS

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By EL EL
From Northern, CA, 08/14/2008

As an Asian-American, I totally stand behind to support Liu Xiang, to be the next superstar, global star, medal winner.

Asian and White are unrepresented in the track and field. So, I really want to see he takes the glory from them. I think we can do it, if we put our mind and physical into it.

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