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Illinois Wesleyan Student to Volunteer at Olympics

Aug. 1, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— As a 12-year-old boy, Juntian Wei watched the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, proud of the first Olympics to be held in China and falling in love with basketball in general and idolizing Kobe Bryant in particular.

As a young adult, Wei will not realize his dream to participate in the Olympics as a basketball player, but come Aug. 5, he'll come as close as he can. The Illinois Wesleyan University chemistry major will depart as a volunteer for the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, the first South American city to host the Olympic Games.

A native of Liuzhou, a city in the Chinese autonomous region of Guangxi, Wei was watching the news with his grandparents nearly two years ago when he saw a story about the need for volunteers at Rio 2016. "I was thinking that it was my dream to participate in the Olympics since I was a child and now there is a chance, so why not give it a shot?" he recalled.

Some 50,000 volunteers are expected to assist with the Olympic games and will pay their own travel and lodging expenses to be a part of the games. Rio 2016 has been plagued by controversies – from health and safety concerns surrounding pollution, sanitation and the Zika virus – to corruption and instability in the Brazilian government. Wei said, however, the games themselves transcend controversy.

"The Olympic Games is not just about Brazil," he said. "It is about the whole world. The Brazilians need to hold a great Olympic Games and the whole world is watching. This is an experience that is going to be very influential throughout my lifetime. I can't give up just because I am afraid of the bad aspects."

Wei said he is tentatively assigned as a training site team member for the equestrian events, set for Aug. 7-19. "Even though I didn't make it to the Olympics as an athlete, I don't want to give up the chance," said Wei. He plans to return to Bloomington on Aug. 23 just in time to start his sophomore year at Illinois Wesleyan.

Rio 2016

