**'Lively, Fun and Witty', Chubby Mascot Is Star at Beijing 2022**

CHINA DAILY

2022-02-08 ZHANG YANGFEI

A chubby panda wearing an ice shell, the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics mascot Bing Dwen Dwen has become the breakout star of the Games, winning the hearts of athletes, politicians, the media and sports fans across the globe.

Bing Dwen Dwen soft toys have become so popular that President Xi Jinping has offered Prince of Monaco Albert II a pair of the mascots as gifts.

On Saturday, the prince received a figurine of Bing Dwen Dwen at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, and asked if he could have a second one because he has twins, according to a China Central Television report.

Xi said Prince Albert II should not only take a pair of the mascots back to his children, but also the wish they "develop interests in winter sports and become a master of winter sports like you".

In the Olympic Village, athletes and staff are scrambling to post photos and videos with the panda and buy merchandise. Outside the closed Olympic loop, mascot merchandise like keychains and dolls are already out of stock at licensed online retailers and many physical shops.

"Every time we restocked, we sold out in half an hour. The demand completely exceeds supply," said Liu Hao, one of the workers at the souvenir shop in the Zhangjiakou Mountain Media Center. Liu added that Bing Dwen Dwen is particularly popular with foreign visitors.

Huang Jingran, who works at Zhangjiakou's Genting Ski Resort, started waiting in line at 8:15am in front of the official store on Saturday, 45 minutes before doors opened.

"I thought I could buy everything later, but I didn't expect the merchandise to be so popular, so I waited in line before the shop opened, hoping to get some as soon as they became available," she said.

The cute panda has won the hearts of millions around the world since the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics kicked off on Friday. The Brazilian team posted a picture on Twitter showing two athletes tightly hugging Bing Dwen Dwen pillows in their room even before they'd unpacked their luggage. Brazilian freestyle skier Sabrina Cass and Dutch Skeleton racer Kimberley Bos both posted photos with the mascot on social media.

On her vlog, Czech ice dancer Natalie Taschlerova also showed the gifts and souvenirs she'd received after moving into the Olympic Village. At the end of the video, she wished her followers a good night, writing "the first night with my panda" as the shot showed a Bing Dwen Dwen pillow to one side. Taschlerova told Global Times that she "almost cried" when she saw the mascot.

A Japanese video report also went viral after the reporter Gido Tsujioka, showed six Bing Dwen Dwen badges pinned to his press card, earning himself the nickname of "Gido Dwen Dwen" for his affection for the mascot.

Christophe Dubi, Olympic Games executive director at the International Olympic Committee, said that the panda was a lively, fun and witty mascot, full of positive energy. "I have to add it to my collection and it's for children all over the world," he added.

**Public popularity**

Outside the closed-loop for Olympic athletes and officials, mascot merchandise such as keychains and dolls are out of stock at officially licensed online retailers and bricks-and-mortar shops.

Fu Yuchen, 27, from Chengdu, Sichuan province, said she wanted to buy a Bing Dwen Dwen product from an official online retailer but she was too late. She said a reseller was offering a set of Bing Dwen Dwen blind boxes for over 2,000 yuan ($315), almost three times the official price of around 700 yuan.

People also reportedly waited for lengthy periods in front of the Olympic flagship store in Beijing on Saturday. More than 280 customers were lined up outside the store by 7:50 am even though it opened at 9:30 am, one customer said.

Bing Dwen Dwen has also been top of the trending topics on Sina Weibo. As of Monday, the topic "Bing Dwen Dwen" had garnered more than 2.5 billion views and 700,000 comments. Other topics including "Bing Dwen Dwen emojis", "Winter Olympic top favorite Bing Dwen Dwen", "How cute is Bing Dwen Dwen" and "How to own a Bing Dwen Dwen", have also been popular.

Zhao Weidong, spokesman for the Beijing Winter Olympics organizing committee, said at a news conference on Sunday that the supply shortage of Bing Dwen Dwen was partly due to the Chinese New Year slowing production and the sudden burst in demand.

"We're coordinating with relevant departments to increase the supply of Bing Dwen Dwen," he said, adding that it also reflected the great attention the Beijing Winter Olympics are attracting.

Bing Dwen Dwen was named as the official Games mascot in September 2019, standing out from 6,000 candidates.

Cao Xue, the chief designer, said the inspiration came from a traditional Beijing snack Tanghulu－candied hawthorn fruits. To make the panda look more adorable, the design team used the image of a panda cub.

Li Yi, 28 from Xi'an, Shaanxi province, said Bing Dwen Dwen's design fits perfectly young people's aesthetic preferences. "It looks cute, soft, silky and a bit clumsy. It has the sweetness of Tanghulu and also the cuteness of the roly-poly panda. Who doesn't want to have one?" she said.

Beijing resident Yu Xi, was one of the lucky ones to get a small Bing Dwen Dwen doll. She said that initially she only knew there were two mascots for the Winter Olympics and Paralympics, but that she hadn't had any particular feeling toward them.

As the Games approached, she began to see them all over the place, including in many GIF images. One, in which Bing Dwen Dwen shakes snow of its shell, particularly touched her

"Then I heard people saying that Bing Dwen Dwen is a candied panda. Who could say no to a panda? Let alone a candied one?" Yu said.

The 25-year-old said she was happy to have Bing Dwen Dwen as the Winter Olympics mascot. "On the one hand, the ice shell references the Winter Games, and on the other, the panda is a symbol of China, friendly and cute. I give the design 10 out of 10!" she said.