

Catching on in America

Promoting the skill and competitiveness of badminton

Badminton is played by an estimated 220 million people around the world and is the second most popular participatory sport in the world, just behind soccer. Invented in the 18th century, it's considered the fastest "racket" sport in the world.

Yet, despite its popularity in Asia and Europe, it still has not caught on in the United States.

Jacky Liu and Gary Geng, the founders of the New Jersey Badminton Club (NJBC) in Montville, which, according to its owners, is the most professional badminton club in New Jersey, are looking to change all that.

"The stereotype in America is that badminton is just a fun backyard game," said Liu, who is the executive coach and CFO of NJBC. "It is a very competitive sport in Asia."

A former China National Badminton Team player, Liu has more than 15 years of playing and coaching experience. After retiring from the team in 2008, he immigrated to the United States. Although his ambition was to pursue a career as a professional athlete representing the U.S. in the Olympics, he was drawn to the world of finance and Wall Street following the financial crisis. With a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California, San Diego, he is now a qualitative finance analyst at Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

He said the effort it took for him to complete his academic studies and create a successful career in investment banking is an element in his badminton coaching, helping him develop solid fundamentals for the players' skills, mindsets and explain the deeper strategic concepts of the sport.

NJBC co-founder and CEO Geng comes from a similar background in finance and believes that once Americans see competitive badminton it will grow in popularity.

"Professional badminton is still not well-known by people in the United States, more people will get interested in how competitive and intense it is once they get familiar," Geng said.

Geng graduated from Tongji University in China and earned a master's degree in quantitative finance at Fordham University. He has been working in the investment banking industry for years, gaining rich experience in process management and automation. A badminton player since high school, his passion for the sport brought him and Liu together to found New Jersey Badminton Club.

It's always been the pair's goal to change the perception about badminton in the United States and grow interest in the game as a professional sport.

A Background in Excellence

With their combined business skills and desire to promote badminton in America, founding New Jersey Badminton Club in 2019 was a sound play for the two friends.

"It's always been our dream to build a home and community center so that more players can enjoy the sport here," Geng said. "And since badminton is popular globally, we want to promote it in the U.S. to cultivate interest and awareness of the game as a competitive sport."

New Jersey Badminton Club is a 14,000-square-foot, indoor training facility that includes seven professional courts, a Pro Shop, a conference room, an observation deck and a rest area. The club offers group and one-on-one skill training for both adult and youth players at the beginner, intermediate and elite levels.



Gary Geng, left, and Jacky Liu, founded the New Jersey Badminton Club (NJBC) in Montville as a way to promote a sport they love.

"Each year, we have selections for the U.S. team trials in badminton," Liu said. "Those kids are sent to play in world-level tournaments like World Championship and the Olympics." There are many major tournaments for badminton in the U.S. throughout the year, including the U.S. Open, U.S. Junior National Championships and Pan Am Junior Championships.

In addition to executive coach Liu, the team of five coaches at NJBC includes head coach Rangga Rianto, who is ranked 64 in the world; and head coach Ke Xiao, who served as elite coach of Chengdu Sports Bureau and head coach of Chengdu Youth Badminton Team.

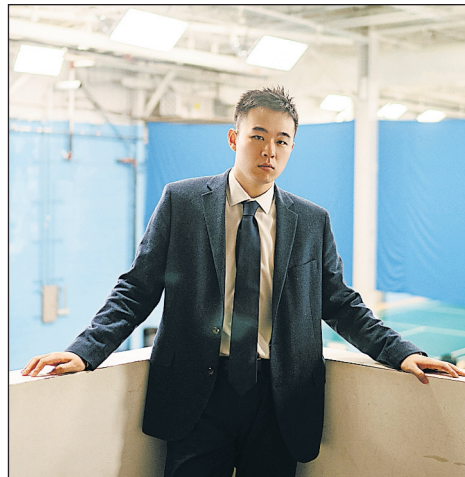
The Future of Badminton

One way Geng and Liu work to generate interest in the sport is by giving demonstration games at local high schools.

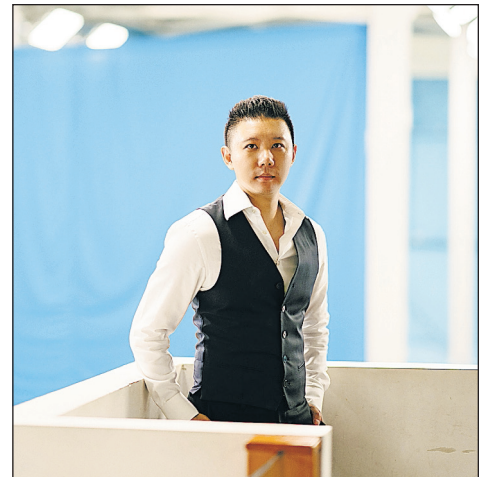
"Every time we do a demo class, 100 to 200 students are watching what is essentially a professional game, so they can get a better idea of how competitive and professional the sport can be," Geng said.

Additionally, Liu and Geng have a long-term goal of connecting China and the U.S. in "badminton diplomacy" — similar to "ping-pong diplomacy" in 1971 — to promote the relationship between the two biggest economies in the world.

In the future, a China-U.S. vision fund will be set up targeting badminton promotion between the U.S. and China.



Gary Geng's dream passion for badminton lead him to co-found the New Jersey Badminton Club.



Jacky Liu has more than 15 years of playing and coaching experience.

The idea is to improve the relationship between citizens in the two countries. The fund will focus on education, sports, communication and entertainment. More events will be held with the help and support from Embassy and Consulates in China and U.S. and local government to boost cultural communication.

"The college team and youth training system shall be developed for badminton, similar to basketball and other popular U.S. sports," Geng said, "There are a lot of people who play the sport seriously and we hope to make more people aware of badminton in New Jersey and beyond."

New Jersey Badminton Club is located at 2 Changebridge Road, Montville; 201-898-0382. For more information, visit www.njbadminton.com.