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WIN OR LOSE, SACRIFICE PAYS

Be it gold, bronze or fourth, sailors weather tough conditions and results are a validation



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In Jakarta

After a hot pursuit under an unfriendly sun, the Singapore boats returned to shore yesterday at the National Training Centre and brought with them two Asian Games medals and tales of honesty, friendship and sacrifice.

Ryan Lo, 21, won bronze in the Laser Standard and later was a picture of charming calm. He hosed himself off, cleaned his boat, folded his sail and arranged everything neatly on his craft. There is no rest for the dedicated.

Then an understated athlete said he was only "satisfied" and it was a worthy admission from a man who was "hoping to win gold". He was aiming for a quota place for the 2020 Olympics but it went to the

second-placed sailor.

Lo confessed he led many races but won only three and while his face showed little emotion his hurt was plain. The larger the ambition, the greater the disappointment. Still a 13-year-old boy who had won bronze at the 2010 Asian Games had now repeated the feat as a man. He was not just a consistent sailor but an improved one.

He has been working on his boat-handling technique and the only place to test it is in serious competition.

In "tough conditions" he had done well, but then so had the 470 duo of Cheryl Teo and Yukie Yokoyama who finished second yesterday but could not change their final position of fourth.

The Singaporeans lodged a protest after the 470 race, claiming an infringement by the third-placed Malaysians, but inconclusive video evidence meant that the protest was not upheld.

Lo has deferred his studies till 2020 and sails full-time, as do Kimberly Lim and Cecilia Low who won gold in the 49erFX class. You might see it as sacrifice but athletes don't always use that word. Said Lim: "It's not really a sacrifice, it's a choice."

To hear them speak joyously of sailing is to know they made the right one.

Yet to be extraordinary in sport is to give up so much of the ordinary life. Like birthdays and butter, parties and studies, sleep and savings. Lim misses "time with family" for she is based in Portugal and over time, day after day, year after year, it must feel like an ache.

Some partnerships are purely professional but this seems to have its roots in friendship. Lim says she's learnt "openness" from Low, and Low says she likes Lim's "good-natured" manner. They do not look alike and yet are tanned twins who occasionally provide the same answer to questions. They took this telepathy to the water where they won all 15 races.

Amazing? First they shrugged, then Lim admitted "it showed our dominance". Their coach Fernando Kuo said 15 straight was a "little bit unusual" and described them as "sensitive to the boat" and "very talented".

Yet 15 out of 15 has to be marvelous for sailing has a complexity few other sports can match. This is not swimming with just its clock and rival, for it also includes an altering wind, a changing sea, a pulling current and the tides. And with no one to applaud versatility but ships in the distance.

For all the sacrifices athletes



Singapore's 49erFX women's gold medalists Kimberly Lim (left) and Cecilia Low, and Laser Standard bronze medalist Ryan Lo, with their rewards after the end of the sailing competition in Jakarta yesterday. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

make, for all that they renounce, they need some validation. Proof that it is all worthwhile. They all got it. Lo, Lim, Low and even Teo and Yokoyama.

They had taken a year off from their studies and even though they

came fourth Teo said "it paid off". Earlier, like overworked jugglers, they were managing too many things but now they had time for the simple things: gym and rest.

Sailors need muscle and Teo put on 10kg, which involved lifting

weights and many portions of spaghetti and chicken.

Very impressive but what is being sacrificed here?

"Your looks," she laughed.

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