



Taekwondo national captain Jason Tan, bronze medallist in 2009 and 2011, and poomsae exponent Chelsea Sim, silver medallist in 2013, will both be battling for gold on home ground. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Disciplined and focused Sim in gold hunt

By **LOW JAY SEN**

CHELSEA Sim's taekwondo career centres on one word – balance.

It defined her last SEA Games campaign in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, where she earned a silver after losing the women's poomsae final to the hosts' Yamin K. Khine in controversial fashion.

She recalled: "The routine in the final required a lot of balance. I thought I executed the routine well, while my rival wobbled quite a lot, but she still won the gold."

Rewind a year back to 2012, and her balancing of her sporting ambition and academic progress was called into question. The then-Meridian Junior College student was told by the principal that her grades had suffered owing to dividing time between studying

and training for the 2013 Games.

"She suggested that I consider repeating a year of school, so I could focus on the Games that year and my exams the next," the 19-year-old said.

However, with the encouragement of her family and form teacher Christopher Chen, she opted for a double assault on the Games and A levels in the same year.

With renewed focus and determination, she managed two distinctions and earned a place at the Singapore Management University, while earning a Games silver.

"Some people told me it's impossible to balance studies with sports at a high level. I wanted to prove them wrong," she said. "There are sacrifices to be made, but if you have a good sense of discipline and keep focused on a goal in mind, it's definitely possible."

This time around, winning gold continues to drive Sim on, especially after she finished her examinations earlier this month.

With little distraction, she now trains twice a day: two hours in the afternoon, working with video analysis independently, then another two-hour session under national coach Wong Liang Ming.

She can take heart in some strong recent performances, which include a gold at the 2014 Commonwealth championships and a bronze at the 2015 US Open.

Wong, a four-time SEA Games champion, praised her young charge, saying: "We call Chelsea our 'chilli padi'. She's small in size but extremely dynamic and explosive in her technique."

"She has always been focused and conscientious in training, and that will stand her in good stead."

She also tipped captain Jason Tan to put up a strong showing in the kyorugi Under-58kg class.

Said the 52-year-old coach: "He's quiet and unassuming but always gets things done without having to be told. He always knows exactly what we expect of him, both as a taekwondo exponent and as our captain."

Tan, 23, had won two bronzes at the 2009 and 2011 Games. He then became the first Singaporean to win an international meet, the Korean Open in 2012. He suffered a shock exit in the quarter-finals at the 2013 SEA Games, but has since rebounded with a bronze in March's Asean championships.

"The home ground will definitely put pressure on us to perform, but we can turn it into motivation to spur us on to do well," he said.

Team-mate Ng Ming Wei, who

reached the US Open quarter-finals in January, is another athlete highlighted by Wong.

However, Singapore's rivals have also improved since the last Games, with the likes of Thailand's Panipak Wongpattanakit winning at last week's biennial World Championships.

One key advantage for other countries is having full-time exponents. For example, Myanmar's Yamin has been training full-time for the past two years, said Wong.

Despite the prospect of facing such well-equipped opposition, Tan insists the team's focus is on their own performances.

"The most important thing is that we focus on improving ourselves to perform at our best on match day and do Singapore proud," he said.

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Taekwondo

GOLD MEDALS ON OFFER: 14

Thailand's newly crowned world champion and Youth Olympics gold medallist Panipak Wongpattanakit will be a star attraction.

Singapore's poomsae exponent Chelsea Sim will have to be at her best to go for gold this time against the likes of Filipino 2014 junior world champion Rinna Babanto and defending champion Yamin K. Khine from Myanmar.

WATCH OUT FOR: Jason Tan

A kyorugi exponent and the national captain. The 23-year-old was the first Singaporean to win an international event, the Korean Open in 2012. He also has two bronzes in the kyorugi from the 2009 and 2011 Games, and took another bronze at the 2015 Asean championships.

TEAM SINGAPORE

Men

- Ng Ming Wei (kyorugi under-54kg)
- Jason Tan (kyorugi U-58kg)
- Vincent Lim (kyorugi U-63kg)
- Kang Rui Jie (men's individual poomsae, mixed pair poomsae)

Women

- Chew Xin Wei (kyorugi U-46kg)
- Nur Fadzlyn Zahruddin (kyorugi U-49kg)
- Kua Ee Feng (kyorugi U-53kg)
- Chelsea Sim (women's individual poomsae, mixed pair poomsae)

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POCKET DYNAMO

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– Wong Liang Ming, four-time SEA Games champion and national taekwondo coach, on Chelsea Sim's determination

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