

OLYMPICS

FOCUS ON CONTROLLABLES

Sports psychologist Daniel Gould says S'pore's paddlers are tough enough

LOW LIN FHOONG
linfhoong@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – The names of NBA legends Michael Jordan, Earvin “Magic” Johnson and American Olympic diver Greg Louganis roll off sports psychology specialist Daniel Gould’s (picture) tongue when he talks about the toughest minds in sports.

It may come as a surprise to some but Singapore’s table tennis women – consistently ranked among the top three in the world – are possibly ranked among those A-listers.

Gould, a Professor and Director of the Michigan State University for the Study of Youth Sports, has worked with American skiers, wrestlers and figure skaters.

And the 60-year-old told TODAY: “For top athletes, if they are consistently at the top, they are all mentally tough. When you study Olympic champions, all of them share a lot of

key components like confidence, and perseverance over adversity.”

Silver medallists at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the women’s team of world No 8 Feng Tianwei, Wang Yuegu (11) and Li Jiawei (15) will be aiming to achieve the Singapore Table Tennis Association’s goal of two medals at the London Games.

Success in the women’s singles has proved elusive, with Jing Junhong finishing fourth in Sydney in 2000, followed by Li who was placed fourth in Athens 2004 and Beijing four years later.

But Gould, who delivered a presentation on The Relationship between Happiness and Winning to coaches, officials and administrators at the Singapore Management University yesterday, believes a breakthrough is not impossible.

“If it is a psychological block, you need to work with them to build confidence.

“You want to bring your A game each time (to a major tournament) and, maybe, surprise them with a competitive tournament during practice so they get used to bringing their A game each time.”

“The term choking is overused

sometimes. The funny thing in Olympics is, if you finish third you are a hero, but if you’re fourth you are a has-been, and that is a brutal performance analysis,” said Gould.

“They didn’t choke, they were just not good enough.

“But other times, it’s nerves or anxiety. Instead of being in a pity party ... focus on your performance goal, not the outcome.”

Having worked with American athletes such as 1998 Winter Olympics gold medallist Picabo Street, Gould has this piece of advice for the 22-member Singapore contingent competing at the London Games from July 27 to Aug 12.

“With a month to go to the Games, there is no need to psych themselves up more and the whole thing is to do what they normally do.

“Everybody is going to ask about medals – the trick is not to focus on what you can’t control. A lot of times athletes get caught up with what they can’t control, like their opponent but, instead, they should focus on their performance goals and do things they can control,” he said.

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