

FENCER LEE GETS SEA GAMES BOOST

PHILIP GOH
philipgoh@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – Her team-mates and coach urged her from the sidelines and over at the team hotel, other team-mates surprised patrons at the restaurant with their loud cheering as they watched her gold medal bout via live streaming.

On Monday (yesterday morning, Singapore time) at the sportscotland National Centre Inverclyde in Largs, Scotland, Singapore fencer Ann Lee Huimin fought tooth and nail with Katherine Kempe from Wales before eventually losing 15-12 in the final of the women's individual sabre at the Commonwealth Fencing Championships.

But for the 23-year-old, winning the silver medal was not as important as how she fenced on her way there. "This is one of the best fencing I've done in my career, not just the result, but the quality of fencing," said Lee, who was part of the bronze medal-winning women's sabre team at the 2007 SEA Games.

"After missing out on qualifying for the Asian Games this year, (the sabre team) have been working really hard and gearing our efforts towards the SEA Games next June." Four years ago in Guangzhou, Lee missed out on becoming Singapore's first fencing medallist at the Asiad, enjoying a stirring run to the quarter-final before losing to the eventual winner Kim Hye-lim of South Korea.

On Monday, Lee won four of her five pool matches to be ranked eighth in the field of 37 fencers for the direct elimination bouts. Negotiating her way past opponents from Australia and England, Lee ousted top seed Bhavani Sundhararaman of India 15-11 in the quarter-finals, then overturned an 8-11 deficit to beat Scotland's Jennifer Sancroft 15-11 in the semis.

But the wily Kempe, who fences in the World Cup Grand Prix, proved a tough nut to crack.

"The gold medal was within my grasp but I let it slip with a few points missed and unfortunate errors," said Lee, who graduated in April with a bachelor's degree from the Singapore Management University and is in full-time training as a spex Scholar.

She credits Hungarian coach Andras Decsi, who joined Fencing Singapore in 2012, for her progress. "He's always there to give me the support to improve my fencing and is a very important factor in my fencing career. I was really glad to get the silver yesterday because it showed the improvement I've had under his guidance," said Lee, who is in action tomorrow in the women's team sabre with team-mates Lau Ywen and Sharmaine Cheung.

Singapore's 27-strong squad in Scotland are competing across all three disciplines.