



Team Singapore divers Timothy Lee (left) and twin Mark (right) with their elder brother Nicholas. The twins account for three of Singapore's four diving medals at the SEA Games. ST PHOTOS: NEO XIAOBIN

SEA GAMES

MOTIVATION FROM REJECTION

2011 Games snub spurred Singapore divers on to long-awaited medal haul

By CHUA SIANG YEE

TWO years ago, they were deemed not good enough to represent Singapore at the 2011 SEA Games.

Yesterday, divers Timothy Lee and Myra Lee, together with Timothy's twin Mark, returned from Myanmar with their heads held high, after punching well above their weight to clinch four medals at the recently-concluded SEA Games.

It was a remarkable turnaround for the six-member contingent, all of whom picked up the sport only in 2009, when Singapore Diving launched its "Learn to Dive" programme.

Myra, 19, who sealed a bronze in the synchronised 3m springboard with partner Fong Kay Yian, said: "It was upsetting when we first found out we could not go to the SEA Games (in 2011).

"But you don't give up after

one setback.

"We worked extra hard after that, and we kept telling ourselves we had to make it."

Galvanised by that rejection, the national team kept plugging away, training six days a week for at least 30 hours.

The fruit of their labour started to pay off last year, when they bagged three silvers and three bronzes at the inaugural South-east Asia Swimming Championships.

Then, in August, Myra, Kay Yian, Timothy, Mark, Arizir Fong, and Kimberly Chan got the news they were all waiting for.

"Damien (Ler, team manager), added us in a text message group with the title 'You all made it to the SEA GAMES'," recalled Myra, a Singapore Management University social sciences undergraduate. "I was so happy, and it was sweet reward for all our hard work."

The team stepped up training,

and embarked on a gruelling five-week training trip in Guangzhou last month.

Timothy, 19, who won a silver and a bronze in the synchronised platform and springboard respectively, said: "The training in Guangzhou was intense. My body ached for days on end, but it was worth it. There were no distractions, and we could focus solely on diving."

Their haul of four medals – two silvers and two bronzes – stunned everyone, including them-

selves. The last four-medal return was in 1973, long before anyone in the current squad – with an average age of 18.7 years – was born.

Mark, whose silver in the 3m springboard last Thursday was the Republic's first SEA Games diving medal since 1985, said: "I was packing up and getting ready to leave after my dive, until I was stopped by the officials.

"I didn't know I was second, and when I saw the scoreboard, I thought there was an error! I think I did well because I didn't

give myself any pressure. I just wanted to score a personal best."

Myra added: "Our target was for everyone to achieve their personal bests. The number of medals was a complete surprise."

Looking forward, the immediate target for the divers is to bridge the gap with Causeway rivals Malaysia.

That will not be easy. Malaysia are second only to China in Asian diving. Last year, they had eight representatives at the London Olympics, and won a bronze medal in the women's 10m platform.

They also swept all the gold medals on show in Myanmar.

But, for the Singaporeans who plunge from 10m platforms into cold water six days a week, this is just another leap – of faith.

Said Timothy, 19: "It will take a long time but, hopefully, we can catch up. At the very least, we hope to give the Malaysians a run for their money in 2015."

Mark added: "The silver medal has given me more belief. I'm confident we can do well again in 2015."

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DIVERS' BOOT CAMP
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– Singapore diver Timothy Lee, who won a silver and bronze in the synchronised platform and springboard respectively, on the team's five-day training trip to Guangzhou last month

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