

GAMES THAT LAUNCHED A CAREER

Yong's windsurfing bronze breaks new ground and serves as inspiration to others

Nicole Chia

All it took to change Audrey Yong's life was a bronze medal she won in windsurfing at the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in 2010.

But it was not only the 25-year-old's life that was transformed by her achievement, but it also made an impact on her friend and fellow surfer Ynez Lim.

Last Thursday, she was reminded of this when she contacted Lim on her 22nd birthday.

"She said the bronze medal I won was so inspiring to her as a 12-year-old, and that it started her journey to the YOG," Yong said.

Reflecting on the Games' legacy, she added: "For windsurfing, it created awareness of a sport that was relatively unknown here and I'd like to think that the YOG and its subsequent editions encouraged more of the next generation to try out windsurfing.

"For me, winning in your home country is always extra special because you see your friends and family, especially those who have never seen how windsurfing works in real life, come to support you over the course of the competition."

Lim was among those supporters in 2010, before going on to compete at the next edition of the Games in Nanjing in 2014. She recalled standing in front of the mirror just

months after picking up the sport, telling herself: "You have the possibility of being like Audrey. She's an inspiration and if she can do it, why can't you?"

For a novice athlete like Yong, the YOG bronze medal "launched" her sporting career.

"I had been windsurfing for only two years... to compete in such a big Games and the first one ever (held) was surreal and I still do think about it sometimes," added Yong, who retired from windsurfing in 2017 and is now a final-year student at the Singapore Management University.

Among the memories from 2010 that stand out are a scavenger hunt in the Games Village which allowed athletes to learn more about the cultures of different countries. She also remembers the feeling of "pure bliss" the day after clinching the medal.

"When you do well in sport, it opens up opportunities like sponsorship, and the YOG was a springboard for that. A lot of the opportunities I got, (such as) deferring my studies and travelling for sport, it all started because of the YOG," added Yong.

"I also did the SEA Games, Asian Games and the Olympics and the YOG was really that starting point and I'm very grateful. Getting that bronze really did change my life."

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Audrey Yong went on to compete at the Olympics, Asian Games and SEA Games after winning a bronze in the 2010 Youth Olympics on home soil.
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