

PEREIRA, QUAH GET TOKYO NOD

Sprinter, swimmer receive universality places to swell S'pore Olympic squad to 23

Sazali Abdul Aziz

The Team Singapore contingent bound for the Tokyo Olympics has swelled to 23 after sprinter Veronica Shanti Pereira and swimmer Quah Ting Wen both received a rubber stamp of their places yesterday.

They will compete at the July 23-Aug 8 Games on universality places, previously known as wild cards, issued by the world bodies of their respective sports.

Their inclusion makes this the most diverse Singapore contingent at an Olympics, with the 23 athletes contesting some 11 sports. Five years ago, the 25-strong Singapore team featured in only seven sports.

While Quah, 28, has swum in two previous editions, Beijing 2008 and Rio 2016, Singapore's fastest woman Pereira will be making her bow on sport's grandest stage.

The 24-year-old, who holds the national records in the women's 100m and 200m, will race in the latter event in Tokyo, where she will be the Republic's sole representative in track and field.

World Athletics' Olympic qualification system states that National



Her coach Luis Cunha hopes sprinter Veronica Shanti Pereira will be inspired by the experience of competing in an Olympics. She will be Singapore's sole track and field representative in Tokyo. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Olympic Committees with no male or female qualified athlete or relay team will be allowed to enter their best ranked male or female athlete in one event, with the exception of the 10,000m, 3,000m steeplechase and combined events such as the decathlon.

She had set the 200m record (23.60 seconds) at the 2015 SEA Games, when she clinched the Republic's first sprint gold at the regional biennial meet in 42 years.

Pereira, who completed her studies at Singapore Management University in April, told The Straits Times she was thrilled.

"It's something that I was working and training towards, but I still cannot really believe it," she said.

"I didn't get to go in 2016, so I held on to my expectations a bit this time round.

"But when I started doing things like collecting my Team Singapore attire (for Tokyo), things got more real."

She had been the front runner for the women's universality place in 2016, but marathoner Neo Jie Shi qualified for the Rio Games on merit after finishing among the top 10 women at the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon in 2015. Instead, sprinter Timothee Yap went as the male universality representative, and raced in the 100m.

Pereira said she has not set herself a target in Tokyo, given the Olympics will be her first high-level race in the 200m since the 2019 SEA Games, when she won a bronze in 23.77sec.

Instead, she is keen to simply continue the progress she has made under coach Luis Cunha, whom she started working with in January last year.

"I'm not thinking about (expectations) that much... Last year, we almost did not get to compete at all, so I'm just focusing on training and hoping to perform, whatever race it is," said Pereira.

Cunha, 56, is a former Olympian who represented Portugal at the 1988, 1992 and 1996 Games in various sprint events.

He was certain she would gain from rubbing shoulders with the world's top athletes.

"I hope she can benefit from the experience of being an Olympian, and this can be in a lot of ways," said Cunha.

"The idea is not just to perform well (with higher-quality competition), but also benefit from being in the environment of an Olympic Games."

Multiple SEA Games gold medalist Quah also said that earning a ticket to the Olympics amid the pandemic was a victory in itself.

She will compete in the 50m and 100m freestyle. She had qualified by virtue of being the highest ranked athlete based on the Fina points table at the end of last month, the Singapore Swimming Association announced yesterday.

Quah said she and her training mates had been trying to qualify for the Olympics since the start of 2019, a physically and mentally taxing effort given how the pandemic made their training "so stretched out and so inconsistent".

She added: "I'm really proud of how everyone pushed through and handled it as best they could."

"To have so many people have really fast 'B' cuts and all be on the edge of making the team and not qualifying is hard, and I'm disappointed that there won't be more people going."

"That was the goal after Rio, to have more of us be there together. Whatever it is, I am proud to be able to wear the flag and represent my country in Japan and will do my best to make everyone proud."

Quah, who finished 34th in the 100m fly in Rio and swam in the 100m free (35th) and 400m individual medley (25th) at the 2008 Beijing edition, will be among four Singaporean swimmers in Tokyo.

The others are her younger brother, Zheng Wen, 24, Olympic champion Joseph Schooling, 26, and open-water specialist Chantal Liew, 22.

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SINGAPORE TOKYO 2020 CONTINGENT

ATHLETICS

Veronica Shanti Pereira (women's 200m)

BADMINTON

Loh Kean Yew (men's singles)
 Yeo Jia Min (women's singles)

DIVING

Freida Lim (women's 10m platform)
 Jonathan Chan (men's 10m platform)

EQUESTRIAN

Caroline Chew (individual dressage)

FENCING

Amita Berthier (women's foil)
 Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman (women's epee)

GYMNASTICS

Tan Sze En (women's individual all-around)

ROWING

Joan Poh (women's single sculls)

SAILING

Amanda Ng (women's RS:X)
 Kimberly Lim & Cecilia Low (women's 49er FX)
 Ryan Lo (men's laser)

SHOOTING

Adele Tan (women's 10m air rifle)

SWIMMING

Chantal Liew (women's 10km open water)
 Joseph Schooling (men's 100m fly, 100m free)
 Quah Ting Wen (women's 50m & 100m free)
 Quah Zheng Wen (men's 100m & 200m fly, 100m backstroke)

TABLE TENNIS

Clarence Chew (men's singles)
 Feng Tianwei (women's singles & team)
 Lin Ye (women's team)
 Yu Mengyu (women's singles & team)