



The open-top bus parade, from Singapore Sports Hub through the Marina Bay area, Chinatown, Orchard Road and Bugis, was held to recognise the athletes' achievements and for Singaporeans to celebrate their success. ST PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI

Sports heroes lauded with open-top bus parade through town



CHEERED BY APPRECIATION SHOWN

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SWIMMER YIP PIN XIU, on Singaporeans' support for national athletes.

(From left) Badminton world champion Loh Kean Yew, Tokyo Paralympics double gold medal swimmer Yip Pin Xiu, world champion bowler Shayna Ng and top pool player Aloysius Yapp before yesterday's bus parade.

Singaporeans show support for 4 champions during two-hour procession despite rain, Covid-19

Sazali Abdul Aziz

The scorching sun, and then a light drizzle, did little to dampen the spirits of four local athletes, who were feted for achievements in their respective sports this year with a celebratory parade aboard an open-top bus yesterday.

They are badminton world champion Loh Kean Yew, 24, double Tokyo Paralympics gold medal swimmer Yip Pin Xiu, 29, bowling world champion Shayna Ng, 32, and pool player Aloysius Yapp, 25, the first Singaporean to be ranked world No. 1 in his sport.

Before he boarded, Loh said he was thrilled when he learnt about the planned celebratory parade. "I'm quite surprised and very honoured. This is my first time going on a bus tour without a roof on," he said, wearing a broad smile.

The badminton star, who returned last Tuesday from Spain, where he claimed the Republic's first world title, laughed when asked how life has changed for him. He said: "I haven't had much time thinking about life! I've just been meeting friends... and replying to messages. A lot (of messages)."

The two-hour procession, from the Singapore Sports Hub through the Marina Bay area, Chinatown, Orchard Road and Bugis, was arranged by the Singapore Sport Institute (SSI), in collaboration with the respective national sports associations, to recognise the athletes' achievements and for Singaporeans to celebrate their success.

Due to the Covid-19 situation, however, organisers opted not to share specific locations and route details so as to avoid congregation, only stating that the parade would take place in the city area.

As a result, there were fewer who thronged the streets compared with the turnout when Olympic swimming champion Joseph Schooling went on a similar open-top bus parade upon his return from the Rio Games in 2016.

Grey clouds and a brief light drizzle that started about 10 minutes into the journey threatened to make it a gloomy one but the athletes remained cheery as they donned ponchos and used their phones to chronicle their experience on the trip.

All four re-posted Instagram stories from Singaporeans who had seen them and tagged them in videos. Loh later wrote on social media: "Rain or shine, thank you

all for being here for us. Thank you, Singapore!"

Yip, who had been a part of a homecoming parade for Singapore's Rio Paralympians in 2016 - she had also won two golds then - said the parade was a fun experience. "Even in places where there were not many people (on the streets) there were cars honking at us, waving from their windows and sunroof. It was very cute."

Indonesia-born Singaporean Imelda Muslim Ghazali, 47, waited in Orchard Road from 1pm with a friend just to get photos of Loh. She said: "Since he beat (Japan's then-world No. 1 Kento) Momota (in November), I've been following his journey. He has the whole package and I believe he is just going to get better and better."

Ng applauded the SSI for working so swiftly to pull off organising the parade. She said: "I was really heartened to see all the kids wav-

ing at us, in particular... The atmosphere was really good."

Yapp said the reception the athletes received gave him a boost.

"It's quite a surreal feeling. It's something I've never really felt before because I've mainly competed overseas," he said. "Seeing so many Singaporeans appreciating what we do really makes me want to work even harder."

Yip suggested organising a parade at the end of every year to celebrate national athletes' achievements. She said: "Some may think Singaporeans don't really care about sport but some people were shouting our names, saying 'we're so proud of you', giving us heart shape (gestures), congratulating us. It was very heart-warming."

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