



Singapore's Shanti Pereira winning the 200m heat 3 in 23.14 seconds on Sunday. Beside her is China's Huang Guifen, who was third in 23.54sec. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

PEREIRA UPBEAT ABOUT 200M GOLD

She is fastest qualifier and 100m silver 'huge confident boost'; her main rivals are two Bahrainis



Kimberly Kwek

HANGZHOU – Sleep was all Shanti Pereira craved after a very exciting 24 hours at the Asian Games track and field competition.

After claiming a silver in the women's 100m on Saturday, the Singaporean sprinter went to bed only at 1am following the victory ceremony and anti-doping tests.

Six hours later, a sleep-deprived Pereira was back on the starting blocks at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium on Sunday morning for the 200m heats.

The fatigue did not show on the track, as the 27-year-old easily earned a spot in the final after winning Heat 3 in 23.14 seconds – also the quickest qualifying time among the 23-strong field.

She said: "I was kind of prepared for that just in case that (anti-dop-

ing test) was to happen. So mentally, I knew I just had to reset no matter what the result was yesterday.

"The wind was good and the weather was really nice also – not too cooling, not too hot. I'm quite surprised with 23.14."

With the semi-finals scrapped owing to withdrawals, quick times were even more important as the top two from each heat and the next two fastest athletes qualified for the final.

Her team had initially kept the information from her to ensure that she had sufficient rest, but Pereira figured it out on Saturday night after realising there were three heats.

She said: "It was a matter of strategising, I knew I had to run a fast time today. Time kind of depends on who I'm running with but more so the big Q – I wanted to get a good qualification for the final.

"So I just hoped to strategise and I had that going into the warm-up and everything."

Just the night before, Pereira had ended the Republic's 49-year wait for an Asiad athletics medal with her silver, adding more prizes to what has been a glittering year.

In May, she won a historic 100m-200m sprint double at the Cambodia SEA Games, before repeating the feat two months later at the Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok.

At August's World Athletics Championships in Budapest, she

became the first Singaporean to reach the semi-finals after clocking 22.57sec in the 200m heats, and meeting the Olympic qualifying mark.

If she crosses the finish line first in Monday's final, she will become Singapore's first athletics winner since Chee Swee Lee's 400m gold in 1974.

But the competition will be fierce. Pereira will come up against Bahrain's Edidiong Ofonime Odiog – she won three golds in 2018 in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay – who was second fastest in the heats in a season-best 23.35sec.

Odiog's personal best of 22.43sec, which she did in June 2022, is 0.14 seconds faster than Pereira's national record of 22.57sec.

Teammate Salwa Eid Naser, the 2019 world champion in the 400m, is also one to watch. She holds the second-fastest time (22.90sec) in Asia in 2023 and her personal best is 22.51sec, although that was clocked three years ago.

Pereira said: "I'm sure it's going to be just as stiff in the finals tomorrow as it was yesterday.

"I'm excited to rest, get some sleep. Just excited overall. Yesterday was a huge confidence boost."

National hurdler Ang Chen Xiang booked his spot in the 110m hurdles final after finishing seventh in the heats in 13.90sec, 0.06 seconds off his national record.

The Asiad debutant said: "I'm happy with my execution. Race-wise I could've been sharper, granted it's an early morning race, so I hope for tomorrow's night race, my mind and body will be ready for this. I'm excited."

Mark Lee matched his personal best of 21.44sec to finish 16th overall in the 200m heats, but did not advance to the final after placing 15th overall in 21.61 in the semi-finals.

Compatriot Goh Chui Ling clocked 4:29.62 to finish 12th in the women's 1,500m, which was won by Bahrain's women's 3,000m steeplechase world champion Winfred Yavi in 4:11.65. Qatar's Mohamad Al-garni bagged the men's 1,500m gold in 3:38.36.

China's Feng Bing, who has a gold and a bronze from the world championships, won the women's discus throw in a Games-record 67.93m, rewriting compatriot Li Yanfeng's 2010 mark of 66.18m.

There was double joy for India as Avinash Sable made history by becoming the first Indian to win the men's 3,000m steeplechase. He did it in a Games-record 8min 19.50sec.

Teammate Tajinderpal Singh Toor then retained his shot put title with a 20.36m throw.

In the last event of the night, China's Lin Yuwei struck gold in the women's 100m hurdles in 12.74sec.

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