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SPORT



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SEASON'S HEROICS C10

YANG AMONG 37 WHO MAKE KL GAMES CUT

Back after day-long delay over pole vault luggage

Nicholas De Silva

They clinch spots upon appeal via NSAs, with karatekas getting nod for 1st outing since 2011

Wang Meng Meng

She had not been feeling well after being stranded at the Hong Kong International Airport for almost 24 hours after her flight could not check in her competition poles.

But upon arrival back home yesterday, national pole vaulter Rachel Yang received a piece of good news after her ordeal: She has been chosen after an appeal to represent the Republic in the Aug 19-30 Kuala Lumpur SEA Games.

She is among 37 athletes representing 10 sports who were successful in their appeals put forward by their respective national sports associations, in a list released by Singapore National Olympic Council

(SNOC) yesterday.

Yang was confident she would earn her ticket to KL, after she cleared the 3.60m qualifying height at a meet in Bishan Stadium last month, before smashing the national record with a 3.91m leap at the Thailand Open earlier this month.

"Normally, if you meet the qualifying mark you should be in," she said. "I just hope to better the medal count at the Games."

The 35-year-old mother of a four-year-old son won a silver after a 3.90m effort at the last edition hosted on home soil in 2015 - which was the Republic's first SEA Games medal in women's pole vault.

Besides Yang, other athletes who made the list include the men's and

women's 4x100m sprint teams, the women's squash team, judoka Benjamin Fong and muay thai exponent Lee De Jun.

In April, the SNOC released a list of 840 athletes from 34 sports that had been approved to compete in the Kuala Lumpur Games, although that number is expected to be whittled down when athletes have to be entered by name for their events.

Among the athletes selected were SEA Games debutants from sports like cricket, ice hockey and ice skating.

Athletes who had yet to meet the qualifying mark - set at the bronze-medal finish of the last Games - had until mid-June to meet the criteria.

For the first time since the 2011 Games in Indonesia, Singapore will be sending karatekas, with Daryl Thong, Sherman Quah and Lydia Chee earning the nod.

The sport had been left out of the

2015 SEA Games on home soil, and SNOC vice-president Tan Eng Liang had criticised the in-fighting amid the fraternity then.

Yesterday, a delighted Singapore Karate-Do Federation president David Thong said: "We are elated that our appeal is successful and we are thankful to the SNOC and Sport Singapore for letting our athletes show that they can deliver."

"Their selection is also proof that our athlete-centric policies are bearing fruit. For example, we conduct open selections that are transparent, regardless of which clubs the athletes represent. This will be the future way for us and we will tighten our processes even more."

Despite the latest athlete additions, three sports - sepak takraw, volleyball and weightlifting - will not be contested by Singapore sportsmen.

The setback was a blow for Singapore Sepak Takraw Federation

(Perses) secretary general Borhan Saini, who lamented: "This news will be devastating for the sepak takraw players who have been training very hard for the past 18 months for the SEA Games and also the 2018 Asian Games."

In the 2015 SEA Games, the Singapore team chalked up a silver and seven bronzes in their campaign.

But Perses is not giving up and hopes the SNOC will relent.

Borhan said: "Perses will now focus in preparing the team to qualify for the Indonesia Asian Games which is scheduled to take place in August 2018."

"We are also considering sending another appeal to SNOC for them to reconsider on their earlier decisions. We shall discuss this internally within Perses before end of this week. We hope our appeal will be considered favourably."

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National pole vaulter Rachel Yang will be representing Singapore at the Kuala Lumpur SEA Games from Aug 19-30. She holds the national record of 3.91m in her event. ST FILE PHOTO

After being stranded for more than 24 hours at Hong Kong International Airport, national pole vaulter Rachel Yang finally touched down at Changi Airport with her husband-coach David Yeo yesterday.

Having clinched gold at the Hong Kong Inter-City Athletics Championships on Sunday with a leap of 3.70m, the 35-year-old Yang was looking forward to returning home the next day.

However, counter staff refused to check in her competition equipment of about 10 five-metre poles, preventing them from boarding their Singapore Airlines flight, scheduled to depart at 12.30pm on Monday.

The couple were informed that storage space was unavailable as a prior arrangement had not been made for the equipment.

This came as a surprise to them, as there were no such issues when they flew to Hong Kong on the same carrier for the meet.

The flights were booked by Singapore Athletics (SA) via the eServ central booking system used by national sports associations.

When contacted, SA general manager Jaime Cheong said: "We already did due diligence. We are investigating how this happened."

Initial efforts to find an alternative flight home which could accommodate their equipment were unsuccessful.

As officials from Sport Singapore, eServ and SIA worked to resolve the matter, the couple retired to the airport hotel as Yang was feeling unwell.

Shortly before midnight, an eServ representative notified them that they would be returning home on a 12.30pm flight the next day.

Yang is relieved to be back home and has put the incident behind her.

"My focus is on competitions and improving my performance. I will leave this matter for the authorities to handle. My husband and I hope that (SA) pay more attention towards future trips."

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LOOKING AHEAD

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RACHEL YANG, who was stranded in Hong Kong for 24 hours.

Ho says neutral trio likely to conduct WhatsApp inquiry

Nicole Chia

The board of inquiry (BOI) that will be convened to investigate a WhatsApp conversation involving top Singapore Athletics (SA) officials is likely to comprise three neutral individuals, including one with knowledge of legal matters, said SA president Ho Mun Cheong yesterday.

Leaked photos of the conversa-

tion in question had showed SA vice-president (training and selection) Govindasamy Balasekaran apparently instructing SA staff to collect evidence, such that Ho would have to take disciplinary action against local coaches Margaret Oh (sprint) and David Yeo (pole vault).

Ho had proposed forming an independent BOI to investigate the matter, and told The Straits Times after SA's annual general meeting (AGM)

at the Singapore Sports Hub Black Box that he is seeking "respected members in the sports fraternity" to be on the panel.

"We'll start looking (for such individuals) after this AGM," said Ho, adding he will consult some of SA's affiliates and officials from other national sports associations before approaching any possible candidate.

Yesterday's AGM came on the back of a stormy week, with revela-

tions of SA's management committee divided and publicly feuding less than two months before the SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur.

Yet it was a muted affair as 12 of SA's 20 affiliates were voted into the management committee.

While Ho made no direct reference to the negativity that has plagued the association in his opening address, he called for differences to be put aside so that the fo-

cus could be directed at the Aug 19-30 SEA Games.

"(This is) to ensure that the coaches and athletes focus on their training," he added. "If things still cannot be resolved after the SEA Games, then we will consider what the next step should be. In the meantime, let us all concentrate on the SEA Games and leave our differences aside."

The "next step", should SA offi-

cial fail to reconcile their differences after the SEA Games, would be to call for an extraordinary general meeting (EOGM) to elect new leaders, said Ho.

He said: "If the conflict cannot be resolved, it's better to call for an EOGM and have fresh elections to let our affiliates choose a new team."

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