

Saddling up on a high



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SINGAPORE — With 15 years of experience as an equestrienne, winning a SEA Games gold medal on home soil is that one accolade that would mean the most to Natalie Tan.

But ahead of the SEA Games equestrian competition which starts tomorrow at the Singapore Turf Club Riding Centre in Kranji, the Singaporean admits to feeling the heat, particularly as she has had only five months to form a chemistry with team-mate Caroline Chew's horse Romaniero.

Tan's dressage team partner Chew had offered to let her use her horse — which originates from Britain — as her own horse was too small and young for a major competition like the SEA Games.

However, the law student at the National University of Singapore is determined not to let her teammate down and let slip what could possibly be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to win a SEA Games title.

"I try not to think about it (pressure) too much. We have to keep up with the standard Janine has set," said Tan, 22, who won a bronze in the team dressage with team-mates Predrag Marjanovic, Catherine Oh and Chew at the 2013 SEA Games in Myanmar.

"I always allow myself five minutes before the competition to get in the zone and let the nerves centralise after."

Although she may not have had a plethora of overseas competition experience, her many years in the sport can help her team for a team gold.

"I want to get as close to the team medal as possible because I have put in a lot of effort. We want to walk out of the competition with something, we don't want to go back empty handed," said Tan.

"The weather is too hot in Singapore from where he (Romaniero) is from. But he is a great partner to have and he takes up the ante a little bit because I can tell that he is quite competitive."

The SEA Games equestrian competition will feature 38 competitors with the Malaysians — they topped the 2013 SEA Games equestrian competition with three golds — across four events in individual jumping, individual dressage, team jumping and the team dressage.

Despite the pressure and expectation on the team to improve on their performance from the 2013 SEA Games where they also won a gold (individual jumping) through Janine Khoo, Tan believes the morale of the national side going into the SEA Games is high.

"We are in familiar setting and that takes the nerves back a little bit," she said. "We will definitely try to win the gold but we are a young team and the other teams are professional riders who've had longer time with their horses when I have had five months."