

SEA Games 2017

LO KEEPS S'PORE FLAG FLYING HIGH

He and team-mate Lee ensure traditional powerhouse finish with four sailing gold medals

May Chen

Going by the standings at the end of each day at the National Sailing Centre in Langkawi, one could have easily been fooled into assuming Laser Standard sailor Ryan Lo was cruising to gold.

After all, through five days of racing, the 20-year-old never ceded the lead at the top of the table to his rivals, among them older and more seasoned sailors. Thailand's Keerati Bualong, three points behind, took the silver while Malaysian Khairulnizam Mohd Afendy was third, a further three points behind. Both are two-time Olympians.

But more often than not, Lo would return to shore exhausted and lost for words, with nothing more to say of his duels out at sea other than the fact that they had been "intense".

Even after securing gold yesterday – his first individual title at the biennial Games, adding to the team gold won last week – that was still the only way he could describe a successful SEA Games campaign.

"It was just a few points between me and the Malaysian, even the medal race was neck and neck. I couldn't take it easy," he told *The Straits Times*.

"It's just really satisfying and I'm grateful that our hard work as a team has showed and paid off."

Training has taken a backseat while he undergoes national service, and it was not until the Ministry of Defence allowed him to take half a day of leave every day in the three months leading up to the Games that he was able to train more on water.

Coached by two-time Olympian Colin Cheng as he prepared for the Games, Lo wanted as much to win the title Cheng had won in 2015 as he wanted to show that he belonged among Singapore's top Laser sailors.

Lo, whose half-siblings Jun Hao and Man Yi were also national sailors, said: "I just focused on what I can control, what I can prepare to the best of my abilities."



He will compete at the Laser Standard World Championships in Croatia in a fortnight, and has also set his sights on next year's Asian Games.

He said: "This is a big stepping stone for me."

"I haven't competed in more than a year and this result really gives me the confidence that I'm on the right track."

Team-mate Jillian Lee, 21, also enjoyed a wire-to-wire victory, earning Singapore's other sailing gold of the day in the Laser Radial.

She crossed the finish line first six times in eight races and Nur Shazrin Mohamad Latif of Malaysia and Thai Kanapan Pachatikapanya settled for silver and bronze respectively.

It was a win that soothes the

heartbreak of coming in second in the team event.

"The individual event took place almost immediately after (the team event)," said the National University of Singapore accountancy undergraduate. "I had to try to motivate myself, keep myself determined and not let it affect me."

Bernie Chin, 18, was second in the men's Laser Radial while 13-year-old Radiance Koh – the youngest medallist in the Singapore contingent – and 14-year-old Max Victor Teo finished with bronzes in the Optimist events.

The Republic had won at least one Optimist title at the Games since 1997. Singapore also did not win a gold in either of the double-handed 420 events, a class it

has traditionally been strong in.

Still, a final haul of four golds, three silvers and five bronzes remains a creditable result given the relative youth of the team. The team in Langkawi have an average of 17 years – younger than the squad of 2015 that averaged 21 years. That team won 10 golds, seven silvers and one bronze on home ground.

Said Singapore Sailing Federation president Ben Tan: "Winning at the world stage is our goal – we have the Asian Games 12 months from now and we're already one year into the 2020 Olympic cycle. These Games are a barometer to assess if our bigger plans are on track."

maychen@sph.com.sg



Above: Singapore's Ryan Lo celebrating his Laser Standard gold medal. It was his first SEA Games individual title from two appearances at the biennial event.

Left: Jillian Lee rejoicing after winning the Laser Radial gold. She led from start to finish. PHOTOS: SPORT SINGAPORE