SWEAT AND TEARS TO ONG’S BRONZE

Singapore’s first Hangzhou medallist had health issues, missed pet event

Kimberly Kwek

Hangzhou - Kimberly Ong did not have many expectations going into the Asian Games, but she surprised herself on Monday as she clinched bronze in the women’s changquan for Singapore’s first medal in Hangzhou.

Given that the wushu exponent had suffered a health scare at the start of 2023, not competing in her pet daoshu and gunshu combined event and was unable to train as much as she would have liked owing to her studies, the Asian Games did not want to put too much pressure on herself.

And the 20-year-old handled her maiden appearance at the quadrennial Games well, scoring 9.736 points to finish third at the Nanshan Guoli Sports Centre, behind gold medallist Li Yi (9.786) from Macau and Hong Kong’s Liu Xiaoxu (9.756).

In the case of a tie in points, the athlete who executes a routine of higher difficulty will rank higher.

Singapore’s other representative Zoe Tan was fourth with 9.753 points.

Ong, a two-time SEA Games gold medallist, said: “Just now I was in a bit of disbelief, but it’s quite in a little. I was completely not expecting a medal at all.

“My competitors were quite strong, so coming in I didn’t want to put pressure on myself so I told myself to focus on my performance and do my best.”

In the men’s taijiquan and taijijian all-around on Monday, Singapore’s Chan Jun Kai and Tay Yu Xuan finished 10th and 11th respectively.

Ong’s medal is Singapore’s seventh in wushu at the Asian Games. Their last medal was in 2018, when Tan Yan Ni also clinched bronze in the women’s changquan.

The omission of the daoshu and gunshu event here saw Ong switch to the changquan, which she admits is not her strong suit.

Her last medal in the event came at the 2019 Asian junior championships and she finished eighth and 10th in changquan at the previous two SEA Games.

But that did not deter Ong, who trained diligently, practising and analysing her moves in front of the mirror to see how she could improve.

She said: “It’s a testament to my hard work over the past few months.

“I’m more comfortable competing in daoshu and gunshu and because of these Asian Games I’ve learnt to like changquan a bit more.”

It was not easy for the National University of Singapore law undergraduate, who has her examinations next week, as she was able to train only once a day instead of twice like some of her other teammates because of school.

At the beginning of 2023, she also had to undergo surgery to remove a benign cyst from her stomach, an ordeal that she says has made her more optimistic.

In 2019, she had considered quitting after suffering a meniscus tear in her right knee that kept her out of wushu for six months, resulting in a dip in motivation.

But it was during the pandemic when she was unable to train that Ong realised that she had unfilled dreams in the sport.

She said: “When I’d gotten over the tough times, I realised there were so many ways to challenge myself in training and I wanted to try to make the most of it.”

She did just that and has enjoyed a good run of results in recent years.

With an Asian bronze medal added to her collection, Ong has her sights on competing at the world championships in November in Texas and the 2029 SEA Games in Singapore — hopefully, delivering a few more surprises.

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KIMBERLY ONG, wushu exponent, on clinching the bronze medal for the women’s changquan.