

Swimmers' big splash

Ting Wen and Tao Li cash queens, local athletes shine in SEA Games honours' list

LOW LIN FHOONG

linfhoong@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE — Five swimmers and a shooter collected the biggest monetary reward at last night's Multi-Million Dollar Awards Programme (Map) Presentation dinner at Fairmont Singapore, for their exploits at last December's SEA Games in Vientiane, Laos.

And, in a possible sign that sport in the country is making significant progress, all six of the top earners are not graduates of the country's Foreign Sports Talent scheme.

Sponsored by the Tote Board and Singapore Pools, the Map Awards disbursed a total of \$455,000 to SEA Games gold medalists and record breakers, with guest-of-honour, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) president, presenting the "red packets" to the athletes.

The two golden girls were Quah Ting Wen and Tao Li, who received \$40,000 each, after both swimmers plundered five gold medals at the 2009 SEA Games, breaking a total of eight SEA Games records.

Members of the sports fraternity whom MediaCorp spoke to agreed that the Republic's Foreign Sports Talent scheme had served the country well. The scheme was introduced in 1993 to help raise the nation's standard and competitiveness in the international sporting arena, and improve the level of local athletes.

The challenge now is to mould the local-born athletes into world-beaters, and DPM Teo said yesterday that support systems were available to athletes through the Singapore Sports School and the Singapore Sports Council.

"It's a combination of many things — we need good sports administrators



WEE TECK HIAN

I've seen the swimmers overseas in Australia and United States, and the bio-technology and sports science there is more advanced. If we are to improve the standard and become world-class, we will need that.

Swim star Ting Wen (right, with Tao Li) has high hopes for this year's Asian Games

in the sports associations, good coaches, good sports science, but above all, we need athletes who are prepared to commit the time and energy to do this if they have the talent," said DPM Teo.

"We're trying to make it easier for them to combine studies and sports as the Singapore Sports School. I'm glad to see that many of them are in the Sports School and this is the objective for setting up the school."

Topping the money list was the 23-strong swimming contingent, who collected \$200,000 in all from 14 gold medals and 12 SEA Games records. Shooting and table tennis received \$75,000 and \$80,000,

respectively, with six golds each. Team Singapore's 192 athletes — the smallest contingent for the Games — in 19 sports returned from Vientiane with 33 gold, 30 silver and 35 bronze medals, finishing in sixth spot among the 11 South-east Asian countries.

The Republic will host the Youth Olympic Games from Aug 14 to Aug 26, and it will be quickly followed by the Commonwealth Games in Delhi (Oct 3-14), and the Guangzhou Asian Games (Nov 12-27).

It will be a big challenge for the country's athletes, and DPM Teo said: "The Asian Games and Commonwealth Games are a step up in terms of standard from the SEA

TOP MONEY EARNERS

- 1 Quah Ting Wen** (swimming), age 17 — \$40,000 (women's 100m freestyle, 200m freestyle, 4x200m freestyle, 4x100m freestyle, 4x100m medley, 5 SEA Games records); **Tao Li** (swimming), 20 — \$40,000 (women's 100m & 200m backstroke, 100m & 200m butterfly, 4x100m medley, 4 SEA Games records)
- 3 Amanda Lim** (swimming), 17 — \$25,000 (women's 50m freestyle, 4x100m & 4x100m freestyle, 3 SEA Games records); **Lynette Lim** (swimming), 17 — \$25,000 (women's 800m freestyle, 4x100m & 4x100m freestyle, 3 SEA Games records)
- 5 Zach Ong** (swimming), 19 — \$20,000 (men's 200m backstroke, 4x100m & 4x200m freestyle, 2 SEA Games records)
- 6 Zhang Jin** (shooting), 21 — \$15,000 (men's 10m air rifle individual, team)
- 7 Feng Tianwei** (table tennis), 23 — \$13,000 (women's singles, team); **Gao Ning** (table tennis), 27 — \$13,000 (men's singles, men's team)
- 9 Wang Yuegu** (table tennis), 29 — \$10,500 (mixed doubles, women's team); **Yu Mengyu** (table tennis), 20 — \$10,500 (women's doubles, team); **Sun Beibei** (table tennis), 26 — \$10,500 (women's doubles, team)

** \$10,000 is awarded for first individual gold, followed by \$5,000 each for the second and third gold medal. An additional \$5,000 is given out to any athlete who breaks the SEA Games record.*

Games ... every year the competition becomes stiffer and we want to put on Singapore colours and represent Singapore and do the nation proud. We have to keep improving and maintain standards."

Singapore Swimming Association president Jeffrey Leow believes teenagers like Amanda, Lynette and Ting Wen will be at their best in four to eight years' time.

"The best swimmers in the world peak in their mid-20s. What they need now is to grow faster and stronger in the next four to eight years," he said. "They have the right level of competition and good coaching. We're on the right track.

"Ting Wen has done tremendously over the last four years and we expect her to do more over the next four years."