

PING-PONG'S LOSS IS TRACK'S GAIN

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Liang Wei, an accidental athlete, is Singapore's best bet in girls' 100m



Sprinter Liang Wei training for a shot at Asian Youth Games glory. The Sports School student had initially wanted to become a table tennis player. ST PHOTO: ALBERT SIM



BY LEONARD LIM

THE first time she stepped into the Singapore Sports School, Liang Wei was clutching a small bat, and harbouring dreams of being picked for its table tennis team.

The sport was her first love and, having represented Fuchun Primary for several years in the Schools National competition, she was quietly confident of her chances of making the squad.

Thinking there was time to spare that afternoon in August 2005, she joined a friend for an hour at the Sports School's running track, where athletics trials were also going on.

But, by the time she got to the indoor hall, the table tennis trials were long over. Her hopes dashed, the 12-year-old was a wreck for days, until she received a phone call.

"It was the Sports School's athletics academy asking me to go for a second trial," Liang Wei, who is now 16, recalled. "My heart jumped, I never expected it."

She impressed the selectors again, was invited for a third trial and then an interview, before being offered a place.

Since joining the Sports School in 2006, she has won gold medals in the Schools National 100m in the C (2007) and B (2009) Divisions.

And tomorrow, on the opening day of the Asian Youth Games track and field competition, the accidental athlete will line up on the 100m start line at the Bishan Stadium as Singapore's fastest girl in her age group.

It will be her biggest competition but, true to her spunky nature, she remains unfazed. The target is to go under her personal best of 12.50 seconds, set in March at a Singapore Athletic Association All-Comers Meet.

Since 2007, the Secondary 4 student has held the national Under-15 record in the blue-riband event, having bettered by

Those who have seen her develop point to her slightly rebellious nature as a key reason for her success.

"She's very gutsy and has a strong competitive fire," said Jenny Lim, the Sports School's track and field academy general manager.

However, her defiant streak has landed her in trouble - she was once sent home by teachers after arriving in school with purple-highlighted hair.

But her father Jin Wen pointed out that she has since matured.

AYG athletics

Singapore team

Boys:

- Syafiq Poh Shahabiddin (triple jump, long jump)
- Edwin Tay (400m hurdles)
- Sean Lim (pole vault)
- Shahrir Mohd Anuar (100m)
- Jared Lim (400m)

- Zachary Ryan Deveraj (800m, 1,500m)

Girls:

- Ranjitha Raja (800m, 1,500m)
- Inez Leong (100m hurdles, 400m hurdles)
- Liang Wei (100m)
- Nuraishireen Mohd Rahim (triple jump)
- Melissa Wu (long jump, high jump)
- Clara Poon (400m)

ing, with two rest days.

According to Acuna, to get faster, she needs to keep her head down and quicken her arm swing.

Weekends are usually free, and Liang Wei spends them shopping or watching horror or thriller movies - the last one she caught was *Angels and Demons*.

She still keeps that table tennis bat from four years ago, and plays the sport recreationally.

But it is sprinting, and a particular Usain Bolt, that have captured her heart.

