

These wins for non-Olympic sports

Any top-level achievement can be recognised, says sports chief Teo, as bowling and wushu shine on the night

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WITH the women's table tennis team winning silver and Tao Li becoming the first swimmer to make a final in the women's 100m butterfly, Singapore enjoyed its best outing at the Olympics in Beijing last year.

Speaking on Friday at the annual Singapore Sports Awards Night at Orchard Hotel, guest-of-honour Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean described the success as a feat that "stirred the soul of Singapore".

However, the top individual honours at the awards ceremony went to athletes from non-Olympic sports.

Bowlers Jasmine Yeong-Nathan and Jazreel Tan bagged the Sportswoman of the Year and Sportsgirl of the Year awards, respectively, while wushu exponent Yong Yi Xiang took home the Sportsboy of the Year trophy – there was no recipient for Sportsman of the Year.

Teo, the Minister for Defence and Singapore National Olympic Council president, saw no cause for concern, though.

"There is a very good mix of sports, Olympic as well as non-Olympic sports, and we do need to recognise in the sporting arena that there is more than just the multi-sport events," he said.

"The Olympics, Asian and Commonwealth Games are held once every four years, and the SEA Games once in two years. There are many other important sporting events where athletes excel, and we try to recognise all of them."

Yeong-Nathan, 20, became the first



Yeong-Nathan (centre, with fellow bowler Tan and wushu's Yong Yi Xiang) says the effort put in by athletes in non-Olympic events should still be recognised. DON WONG

Singaporean to win the AMF Bowling World Cup in Hermosillo, Mexico last year.

Tan, 19, bowled her way to four medals at last year's Commonwealth Championship and also won the Malaysian Open title.

Yeong-Nathan insisted the effort put in for bowling was just the same as for any Olympic sport.

"Even though bowling is not an Olympic sport, I feel it doesn't diminish what we do," she said.

"No matter how big or small an event may be, we still go all out to win it. The effort put in is no less than athletes from Olympic sports."

National triple-jump record holder

Stefan Tseng, 19, felt the winners sent out a message to under-performing sports, regardless of their Olympic or non-Olympic status, to buck up.

"Athletics here has had a low profile in recent years, and perhaps this is a sign for us to raise our bar and try to be contenders for next year's awards," he said.

But national swimming team head coach, Ang Peng Siong, said: "The selectors have their reasons for how the awards are given out, although it would have been nice to see an athlete from an Olympic sport win a top title."

After all, the Olympics is the pinnacle of sport for many, and the competition is unlike others."