

SPORT



Nur Marina Chan, seen competing in the 4x100m medley relay, beat the Asiad qualifying time (25.72sec) in the 50m free yesterday with 25.66sec, behind Amanda Lim who matched her SEA Games record (25.41sec). ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

A HIGH AFTER A 4-YEAR LOW

Chan qualifies for 50m free at Asiad after lean spell; Pang also meets 'A' mark for 200m IM

Shamir Osman

The race was over and, having waded across to the side of the competition pool at the OCBC Aquatic Centre, Nur Marina Chan pushed herself up and out of the water.

The beaming smile she wore as she emerged lit up the entire venue. Chan clocked 25.66sec in the

50m freestyle at the Liberty Insurance 49th Singapore National Age Group Swimming Championships (Snag) yesterday, ending her time in swimming's wilderness.

Even though the 21-year-old finished second, she earned the right to represent Singapore at the Aug 18-Sept 2 Asian Games in Indonesia by beating the qualifying mark of 25.72.

Chan could not wipe that smile off her face, even as she walked aimlessly around the pool deck with her hands on her head.

"The main reason I showed such a reaction was that it has been four years since I hit personal-best times. Last year, I didn't even make the SEA Games team," she said of her unbridled joy.

"This week has been a roller-coaster of emotions. After so many years of trying, when I hit the wall (at the end of the 50m free) and I saw the time, I thought, 'Oh my God'.

"It was joy – I still had to double check the numbers – but it was joy."

The winner of the 50m free race was Amanda Lim, who also had to overcome struggles of her own.

Food poisoning and a fever blighted the 25-year-old, whose time of 25.41 matched her SEA Games record set when she won her fifth consecutive gold medal in the event at the biennial Games in Kuala Lumpur last year.

"I want to go faster, but this week has just been bad for me," Lim said of her ailments.

"In a 50m race, everything has to

come together – I cannot make a mistake – and to do the exact same time as I did last year, it is pretty impressive."

Pang Sheng Jun's 2min 2.12sec in the men's 200m individual medley also met the "A" qualifying time of 2:02.80, meaning he will join Chan and Lim at the Asiad, subject to official approval.

The trio acknowledged that more work will be needed before the Indonesia Games, but Chan wanted to take a moment to appreciate her milestone.

"Stephan (Widmer, technical di-

rector of the Singapore Swimming Association) came in last year and he's been a massive help to me," she said, while also extending her gratitude to her supportive parents.

"He's highlighted the things that I'm not good at, and we've worked hard on so many things, and I think I've improved on my weaknesses."

"Right now I just want to soak up this feeling and take it all in."

"We've had to train hard to get here, and results like these are the motivation that really keeps you going and helps you to train harder."

The meet came to a close last night, with Ephraim Tan and Ashley Lim named the Most Valuable Swimmers among the 13-14 year-olds.

Zachary Ian Tan and Gan Ching Hwee were picked as the best of the 15-17 year-olds.

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