

WORK NEVER STOPS FOR TEAM SINGAPORE

SEA Games champions have turned their attention to doing well at next year's Asian Games

Lester Wong

It was a night that saw Singapore's top athletes rewarded for a job well done at August's SEA Games. For some however, the work has already begun with eyes cast ahead to next year's Asian Games.

A total of \$670,000 was given out to the Republic's gold medalists from the Kuala Lumpur Games under the Multi-Million Dollar Award Programme (MAP) at Orchard Hotel yesterday. The sum reflected the country's record-breaking performance in Malaysia. The 57 titles bagged easily bettered the previous best away haul of 43 secured at the 2007 Korat Games.

Swimmers Joseph Schooling and Quah Zheng Wen were joint top

earners, pocketing \$31,250 for the three individual golds and three team golds each won. Neither attended the award presentation as they are based in the United States where they train and study.

Quah's sisters and fellow swimmers Ting Wen and Jing Wen (\$26,250 each), and paddler Feng Tianwei (\$20,500) completed the top five prize money earners. Only Ting Wen was present yesterday.

But the star quintet are not the only athletes looking to make their mark at the Asiad.

Singapore's best tally was eight golds from the 2006 Asiad in Doha.

Swimmer Teong Tzen Wei, who won the 50m free on his SEA Games debut in 22.55 seconds and narrowly missed breaking Schooling's Games and national record (22.47sec), is targeting a podium finish in Indonesia.

"My timing is already under the top six (from the previous Asian Games) and I'm trying to lower it more," said the 20-year-old. "I finish my National Service in Novem-

ber and the Games are in August so it's just nice. I have nearly one year just to train and focus."

For 470 sailors Yuki Yokoyama and Cheryl Teo, their SEA Games victory was a step in the right direction. In June, the pair decided to defer their studies for a year to concentrate on their main goal of qualifying for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Success on the continental stage, where Singapore have won 10 sailing golds from the past three Asiads, will be their next litmus test.

"Now is the time that we're beginning to ramp up our training, actually. We're sailing five times a week so it's quite intense," said Yokoyama. "Our focus right now is on the Asian Games and we'll think about what's next after."

The MAP is a cash incentive scheme by the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) and sponsored by the Tote Board Group (the Tote Board, Singapore Pools and the Singapore Turf Club).

Athletes get \$10,000 for each individual gold (payouts capped at

three and \$5,000 for both second and third golds). A team event gold is worth \$15,000 while a team sport gold is worth \$30,000.

Singapore had 303 SEA Games debutants in its 560-strong contingent. Collectively, the team set 15 Games records, 13 national records and achieved 27 personal bests.

SNOC president and Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin presented personalised congratulatory cards to each of the 101 gold medalists. He was joined by Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

He said: "Behind every record, medal, score and athlete, there is a tribe of family, friends and strangers who support and cheer our athletes and officials on."

"Many thanks to all of you... (and also to) the team managers, coaches, training partners, administrators and officials - your work has contributed to the success of our team."

lesterw@sph.com.sg

TOP MAP AWARDS WINNERS

\$31,250

- Joseph Schooling (swimming)
 - Quah Zheng Wen (swimming)
- Each with three individual golds and three team golds

\$26,250

- Quah Ting Wen (swimming)
 - Quah Jing Wen (swimming)
- Each with two individual golds and three team golds

\$20,500

- Feng Tianwei (table tennis)
- One individual gold, two team golds

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From left: National athletes Michelle Sng (athletics), Mark Leong (water skiing), Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu, Jaris Goh (bowling), Singapore's chef de mission for the Kuala Lumpur Games Milan Kwee, Nurzuhairah Yazid and Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin (both silat) posing at a photo booth at Orchard Hotel. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

