

Lee takes 41st spot in Olympic dress rehearsal

THERE is plenty of work to be done if Singapore's Lee Wung Yew is to snatch a surprise medal at the upcoming Beijing Olympics.

Lee, the Republic's top trap shooter, finished a disappointing 41st out of 95 competitors in the men's trap event at the Good Luck Beijing ISSF World Cup yesterday.

The competition, held at the Beijing Shooting Range, is regarded as a full-dress rehearsal for the Olympic shooting competition.

The veteran marksman hit a total of only 110 birds out of 125 over two days — nine shots shy of the 119 total needed to reach the final.

Lee, the only Singaporean to have qualified for a shooting event at the Beijing Games, had scores of 20, 23, 23, 24, 20.

"It wasn't so good," admitted the 42-year-old. "I had a bad start in the opening shoot, and I ended badly in the fifth."

Slovakia's Mario Filipovic won the gold with 142 birds, outscoring his opponents in the six-man final.

The silver went to 2004 Olympic champion Alexey Alipov of Russia and American Bret Erickson won the bronze. Both had finished on 140 initially, but Alipov won the subsequent shoot-out.

Lee was not the only one who fared poorly. China's Olympic hopefuls Li Yajun and Zhang Bing also failed to make the final, after scoring 106 and 104 respectively.

Lee explained that many of the world's top shots posted low scores because of the new targets that were being used.

According to him, these are made of a denser material and are harder to break.

"Everyone's trying to get used to the targets because they are the same ones which will be used at the Olympics," he said.

With four months to go before the real thing, he believes there is still plenty of time to prepare himself.

He said: "Technique-wise, I think I am okay. I just need to improve my mental strength."

The shooter plans to work with Italian coach Marcello Dradi and sports psychologist Zhao Junhong over the next few months to steel himself for the mental challenge generated by the Olympic pressure cooker.

Consistency, said the Singapore Shooting Association's high performance manager Lim Meng Kiaw, is also key.

"Our aim is to allow Wung Yew to focus throughout all his five qualifying shoots and get consistent scores," he said.

"There's still much to be done before August."

One thing which Lee believes is to his advantage is Beijing's environment.

"I know the Europeans are struggling with the food, but it's like a second home to me," he said.

The wet and humid weather in the city come August would also be similar to conditions in Singapore.

At the 2004 Games in Athens, Lee was 21st in the men's trap event.

He intends to do better this time, though he did not want to go into details.

"I don't want to add pressure on myself," he explained. "I've prepared long and hard for this, and I believe I still have a fighting chance for a medal."

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