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Vanessa faces tough call

Teenager has to decide whether or not to train full time for Olympics

By Chan Yi Shen

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HEADY MOMENT: (From left) Vanessa Yong, and sisters Adrienne and Jasmine Ser showing off their silver medals.

DOHA - FIRST, two Commonwealth Games bronzes in March. Now, an Asia silver.

Not surprisingly, Vanessa Yong has been on cloud nine for the past few day

But, amid the ecstasy of winning the women's 10 metres air-rifle team silver, the 18-year-old is facing a tough decision in the coming weeks. She has to decide whether or not to go full steam ahead for the 2008 Beijing Olympics

She has been earmarked by the Singapore Shooting Association (SSA) for a full-time training programme for the Olympics.

Said Vanessa, who has just completed her A levels: 'Two years is a big commitment to make. There are many things to consider.

'I will have to sit down with my family and relatives to talk about it. I want have everyone's support before I decide.'

On the one hand, she is hoping to follow her friends into university. On the other, there is her Olympic dream.

According to SSA president Chng Seng Mok, the plans will be submitted for approval under the special project to support Singapore's athletes in their 2008 Olympics bid.

The project was announced by the Singapore National Olympic Council last month.

Also being considered by SSA are veteran trap shooter Lee Wung Yew and men's 10m air-rifle shooters Ong Jun Hong and Zhang Jin.

There is no deadline for Vanessa to make her decision, although Chng hopes it will be 'as soon as possible'.

If the programme gets the green light, training could start as early as February.

The costs of funding a full-time athlete for a year, with training and

competitions in Europe, varies from \$300,000 to \$500,000.

For Vanessa, if there were any doubts of her ability, the Doha Games have certainly eliminated them.

'It's an affirmation,' she said. 'I know I am capable enough. Maybe, that will make my decision easier.'

'As a shooter, I really want to compete at the Olympics. If I can train full time I can focus all my attention towards that.'

Chng believes that the only way Singapore shooters can challenge for an Olympic medal is to take up the full-time option.

In Singapore, they train once a day, four times a week, under China coach Zhang Manzhen.

Said Chng: 'The top shooters from China start when they are seven and they train full-time all the way.'

'The Singapore girls average 394. Sometimes, they can hit higher but it's not consistent.'

'That is where full-time training will make a difference. If Vanessa can average 397 in training, then she will be in medal contention at the Olympics.'

At the 2004 Athens Olympics, China's Du Li shot 398 out of a possible 400 to win the gold. Last Saturday, she also shot 398 en route to the Asiad individual gold.

Vanessa's personal best is 397, set at the Commonwealth Games in March when she claimed the individual and team bronzes.

She contributed 394 here to help Singapore clinch a team silver medal.

There is also the matter of qualifying for Beijing. To do that, shooters have to do well at the International Shooting Sport Federation's World Cup events.

While Vanessa is contemplating her future, teammates Adrienne (393) and Jasmine Ser (396) will not be taking the plunge to train full time owing to their studies.

Jasmine will be entering Anderson Junior College while Adrienne is in Year 1 at the National University of Singapore.

But they have not given up their Olympic dreams.

Said Adrienne: 'I will continue to train for next year's South-east Asia Games.'

'The Olympic Games is a dream of every athlete. I won't rule out training full time in future.'

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