

**TOKYO 2020: TEAM SINGAPORE**

# TIME TO TAKE OFF

After a one-year delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Tokyo 2020 will open on July 23 and Team Singapore will field its most diverse Olympic contingent ever with 23 athletes from 12 sports. *The Straits Times* begins its countdown to the Games today.



David Lee

Athletes are constantly locked in a special tango with time – the sports in which they compete are all about beating the clock, or performing a specific task with immaculate timing. And the Olympic Games are the culmination of the years of hard work, distilled into timely executions that place the athletes among the world's elite. Since Lloyd Valberg became Singapore's first Olympian at London 1948, slightly more than 200 of his countrymen have followed in his footsteps. They include at least five who were selected for China's athletics, basketball and football teams at London 1948, and 22 who wore Malaysian colours at Tokyo 1964. In between, weightlifter Tan Howe Liang won the nation's first Olympic medal – a silver at Rome 1960. Following independence in 1965, the Republic raced to grow and its development plans included pumping in considerable investment into building top-class sporting infrastructure and expertise. And how times have changed.

Tokyo 2020 will be the first gender-balanced Games with female athletes making up 49 per cent of competitors. And with the pandemic pushing the opening a year back, Tokyo 2020 becomes the first Olympic Games to be held in an odd-numbered year. The calendar is not the only thing the coronavirus pandemic has thrown into disarray in the world of sport. The 12-month postponement gives sportsmen 364 days more to prepare, but an extra 8,736 hours to ponder and reschedule. Ahead of previous major Games, athletes worked towards meeting milestones, scheduling training camps, and checking their gear and equipment. They sometimes worried about food poisoning or catching the flu bug. But for Tokyo 2020, the already stressful conditions they are familiar with will be distinctly different. Based in Osaka for the past year, table tennis player Feng Tianwei has been waking up every morning fearing the worst. As a foreigner, she could not receive the Covid-19

vaccination in Japan until late last month. The 34-year-old is Singapore's most bemedalled Olympian with one silver and two bronzes, but still she trudges on, defying age and niggling injuries. She doesn't just want to co-own the national record of four Olympic appearances with Joscelin Yeo and Li Jiawei, but also another medal in what might be her final hurrah. Rowing joan Poh had to extend her no-pay leave from her job as a nurse to pursue Olympic qualification, which she achieved less than 100 days before the July 23 opening ceremony. Windsurfer Amanda Ng, who is an audit associate, saw her flight date and training camp destination change from "Sunday, Hong Kong" to "Thursday, Weymouth". These are just some of the upheavals the athletes have to take in their stride. In its bid to curtail the spread of Covid-19, the International Olympic Committee is barring participants from entering the Olympic Village earlier than five days before their first event. They are required to follow a strict itiner-

**SHANTI PEREIRA, 24**  
Sport: Athletics  
Event: Women's 200m  
Competition date: Aug 2-3  
Personal best: 23.65sec (June 10, 2015; national record)  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Full-time athlete

**JOAN POH, 30**  
Sport: Rowing  
Event: Women's single sculls  
Competition date: July 23-30  
Personal best: 7min 4sec (Singapore score)  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Nurse at Tan Tock Seng Hospital

**FENG TIANWEI, 34**  
Sport: Table tennis  
Event: Women's singles, women's team  
Competition date: July 24-Aug 5  
World ranking: 9th  
Olympic career: Fourth outing (2008, 2012, 2016)  
Occupation: Professional paddler

**AMANDA NG, 27**  
Sport: Sailing  
Event: Women's RSX (windsurfing)  
Competition date: July 25-31  
World ranking: 32nd  
Olympic career: Second outing (2012)  
Occupation: Audit associate at Deloitte

**CAROLINE CHEW, 29**  
Sport: Equestrian  
Event: Individual dressage  
Competition date: July 24-28  
Personal best: 69.674 (June 18, 2021)  
World ranking: 27th  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Lawyer at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer



**TAN SZE EN, 20**  
Sport: Gymnastics  
Event: Women's individual all-around  
Competition date: July 25-29  
Personal best: 51.15 (Feb 2, 2018)  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Environmental science undergraduate at Stanford University

**ADELE TAN, 22**  
Sport: Shooting  
Event: Women's 10m air rifle  
Competition date: July 24  
Personal best: 632.5 (Jan 26, 2020; national record)  
World ranking: 21st  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Psychology undergraduate at National University of Singapore

**LOH KEAN YEW, 24**  
Sport: Badminton  
Event: Men's singles  
Competition date: July 24-Aug 2  
World ranking: 42nd  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Professional shuttle

**KIRIA TIKANAH ABDUL RAHMAN, 21**  
Sport: Fencing  
Event: Women's individual epee  
Competition date: July 24  
World ranking: 207th  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Psychology undergraduate at National University of Singapore

**JONATHAN CHAN, 24**  
Sport: Diving  
Event: Men's 10m platform  
Competition date: Aug 6-7  
Personal best: 438.5 (Nov 25, 2018)  
Olympic career: Debutant  
Occupation: Architecture undergraduate at Singapore University of Technology and Design

**JOSEPH SCHOOLING, 26**  
Sport: Swimming  
Event: Men's 100m butterfly, 100m freestyle  
Competition date: July 27-31  
Personal best: 50.39sec for 100m fly (Aug 13, 2016; Olympic, Commonwealth, Asian and national record); 48.27sec for 100m free (Aug 10, 2016; national record)  
Olympic career: Third outing (2012, 2016)  
Full-time occupation: Professional swimmer



**CHIEF DE MISSION:** Benedict Tan, Singapore National Olympic Council vice-president, former national sailor  
**AGE:** 53  
**OCCUPATION:** Changi General Hospital, chief of sport and exercise medicine department  
**OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE:** 36th in Laser event at Atlanta 1996

ary and leave Japan within two days of their final competition. Athletes also face scrutiny from groups that think it is unwise to have a sporting event that involves 80,000 people flying into a country that has yet to have the pandemic under control. As their Olympic date draws near, the athletes can only do their part by adhering to safe management measures and pray for an explosion of sporting talent but not another wave of Covid-19 infections. In this past year, some athletes have become quicker and better, while others have slowed down and deteriorated. A few have recovered, a handful have retired. Not everyone will make the podium. Barring ties, there are just 1,017 medals on offer. Most of the 11,000 athletes will have to be content with completing their events in sport's promised land. Ng is one of those who will haul her battered body across the finish line. Suffering a Grade 2 medial collateral ligament tear just before securing qualification in April, it was too late for her to undergo surgery and make a comeback, so she will tango not only with the wind and waves, but also time, on a stiff left knee. There will be miracles and fairy tales, and near-misses. Jing Junhong lost in the table tennis women's singles semi-finals and bronze-medal match at Sydney 2000 before Li followed in her frustrated footsteps four years later in Athens. The paddlers finally broke a 48-year medal drought at Beijing 2008 when Wang Yuege, Li and Feng edged past South Korea in the semi-finals en route to a women's team silver. The trio went on to claim a women's team bronze, with Feng adding a women's singles bronze, at London 2012. And now, Singapore will finally enter the Games with an Olympic champion. In 50.39 seconds, Joseph Schooling won the 100m butterfly final, walked into the national, Asian, Commonwealth and Olympic record books, and wrote a timeless tale at Rio 2016, as he rallied a nation glued to their TV sets 15,000km away. But after realising a lifelong dream, the swimmer has been candid about his quest to rediscover his love for the sport, how his body has changed with age, and how the extra time helped him regain his form. Meanwhile, Team Singapore have also made significant progress in their Olympic journey since London 1948. This year, they will have their most diverse group with 23 repre-

sentatives from 12 sports as Jonathan Chan and Freida Lim take an unprecedented big leap for Singapore diving, while Amrita Berthier and Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman are the country's first Olympic fencers. Wearing a saddle adorned with five stars and a crescent moon, there will even be a historic horse when Caroline Chew will lead out which she becomes the Republic's first Olympic equestrian as she takes on a mixed-gender field. Like 74 per cent of all Summer Olympians, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many. Athletics universality placeholder Shanti Pereira will relish the 20-odd seconds in her 200m race, while marathon swimmer Chantal Liew, who is retiring after Tokyo 2020 to pursue a masters in human-computer interaction, will cherish the two-plus hours in her 10km slog. But whether they depend on fast-twitch muscles like Schooling, rely on more drawn-out patience like Adele Tan, who competes in the relatively sedentary sport of shooting, or count on a friendly gelding named Tribiani like Chew, now is the time for this unique tribe to take flight.

**This year, they will have their most diverse group with 23 representatives from 12 sports as Jonathan Chan and Freida Lim take an unprecedented big leap for Singapore diving, while Amrita Berthier and Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman are the country's first Olympic fencers. Wearing a saddle adorned with five stars and a crescent moon, there will even be a historic horse when Caroline Chew will lead out when she becomes the Republic's first Olympic equestrian as she takes on a mixed-gender field.**

**SINGAPORE'S OLYMPIC FACTS**

<p><b>2</b> Lloyd Valberg (high jump) was Team Singapore's first Olympian at London 1948, but footballer Chua Boon Lay and weightlifter Wong Seah Kee are regarded as the first two athletes from Singapore at the Games when they represented China at Berlin 1936. Also, Ng Liang Chiang (400m hurdles), Chia Boon Leong, Chu Chee Seng (football) and Wee Tian Siak (basketball) were in the China squad in London.</p>	<p><b>54</b> Size of Team Singapore's biggest Olympic contingent at Melbourne 1956, when they competed in six disciplines, including team sports like basketball, hockey and water polo.</p>	<p><b>5</b> Weightlifter Tan Howe Liang was Singapore's first Olympic medalist when he won silver at Rome 1960. He is also one of at least five athletes who competed for Singapore and another country at separate Olympics: Cager Wee Tian Siak also played for the Republic of China, while Tan and fellow weightlifter Chua Phung Kim, sprinter C. Kunalan and shooter Kok Kum Woh represented Malaysia at Tokyo 1964.</p>	<p><b>3</b> Paddler Feng Tianwei will be the third Singaporean to participate in four Olympics at Tokyo 2020. The other four-time Olympians are paddler Li Jiawei (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012) and swimmer Joscelin Yeo (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004).</p>	<p><b>8</b> Sets of siblings at the Olympics – Tan Eng Bock &amp; Eng Liang (1956), Alexander &amp; Wiebe Welters (1956), Bernard (1964), Patricia &amp; Roy Chan (1972), Oon Jin Teik (1984) &amp; Jin Gee (1984, 1998), Desmond (1988, 1992, 1996) &amp; Gerald Koh (1996), Terence &amp; Koh Seng Leong (2008), Quah Ting Wen (2008, 2016) &amp; Zheng Wen (2012, 2016, 2020); Lo Man Yi (2008) &amp; Ryan (2020).</p>	<p><b>1</b> Ang Teck Bee (1964) and Ang Peng song (1984, 1988) are the only father-and-son pair who have featured at the Olympics.</p>
--	--	--	---	---	--

<p><b>YU MENG YU, 31</b> Sport: Table tennis Event: Women's singles, women's team Competition date: July 24-Aug 5 World ranking: 47th Olympic career: Second outing (2016) Occupation: Professional paddler</p>	<p><b>LIN YE, 25</b> Sport: Table tennis Event: Women's team Competition date: Aug 1-5 World ranking: 60th Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Professional paddler</p>	<p><b>CLARENCE CHEW, 25</b> Sport: Table tennis Event: Men's singles Competition date: July 24-30 World ranking: 186th Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Professional paddler</p>	<p><b>RYAN LO, 24</b> Sport: Sailing Event: Men's Laser Competition date: July 25-Aug 1 World ranking: 10th Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Enrolling at Erasmus University Rotterdam</p>	<p><b>KIMBERLY LIM, 24</b> Sport: Sailing Event: Women's 49erFX with Cecilia Low Competition date: July 27-Aug 2 World ranking: 31st Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Accountancy undergraduate at Singapore Management University</p>	<p><b>CECILIA LOW, 28</b> Sport: Sailing Event: Women's 49erFX with Kimberly Lim Competition date: July 27-Aug 2 World ranking: 31st Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Aeronautics undergraduate at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Asia</p>	<p><b>YEO JIA MIN, 22</b> Sport: Badminton Event: Women's singles Competition date: July 24-Aug 1 World ranking: 30th Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Professional shuttle</p>	<p><b>AMITA BERTHIER, 20</b> Sport: Fencing Event: Women's individual foil Competition date: July 25 World ranking: 60th Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Sociology undergraduate at University of Notre Dame sociology</p>	<p><b>FREIDA LIM, 23</b> Sport: Diving Event: Women's 10m platform Competition date: Aug 4-5 Personal best: 296.00 (May 4, 2017 at Fina Diving Grand Prix, Puerto Rico) Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Culinary science and nutrition/dietetics graduate from University of Georgia</p>	<p><b>QUAH ZHENG WEN, 24</b> Sport: Swimming Event: Men's 100m backstroke, 100m, 200m butterfly Competition date: July 25-31 Personal best: 53.79 sec for 100m back (Dec 4, 2019; national record); 51.87 sec for 100m fly (Dec 6, 2019); 1:56.01 for 200m fly (Aug 8, 2016) Olympic career: Third outing (2012, 2016) Occupation: Molecular cell biology graduate from University of California, Berkeley</p>	<p><b>QUAH TING WEN, 29</b> Sport: Swimming Event: Women's 50m, 100m freestyle Competition date: July 28-Aug 1 Personal best: 24.32sec for 20m free (Aug 2, 2019; national record); 54.62sec for 100m free (June 19, 2019) Olympic career: Third outing (2008, 2016) Occupation: Professional swimmer</p>	<p><b>CHANTAL LIEW, 22</b> Sport: Marathon swimming Event: Women's 10km Competition date: Aug 4 Olympic career: Debutant Occupation: Communications and law media graduate from National University of Singapore</p>
---	--	--	--	--	--	---	---	---	--	---	--