



Victoria Lim coaxing a smile out of the tense Kiria Tikanah as Rebecca Ong (top right) and Elle Koh (on her left) look on proudly after Singapore defeated Thailand 45-36 in the fencing women's team epee final in Hanoi yesterday. Kiria, Lim, Ong and Cheryl Lim formed the quartet who lost to the Philippines in 2019. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

RELIEF AFTER TEAM EPEE FINAL TOUCH

**It's first women's gold in event
and they are targeting Olympics**



Kimberly Kwek
In Hanoi

Kiria Tikanah Abdul Rahman's legs were shaking but her facial expression remained stoic, even after scoring the final point to earn Singapore a historic first women's team epee gold at the SEA Games.

Such was the tension and pressure at the My Dinh Indoor Games Gymnasium that it took teammates and officials to put a smile on the 21-year-old's face moments after their 45-36 victory over Thailand on the piste.

For it was a gold that they had waited three long years for. At the 2019 Games in the Philippines, the women's team missed out on a maiden title after losing 45-39 to the hosts in the final.

Kiria, who won a silver in the individual event last Friday, said: "It was just very relieving because all four of us really wanted this gold."

"You can see from all of us that we were fighting very hard, we wanted to make a bit of history and we came very close the last time, and we didn't want to let it slip this time."

"Once I got the final touch, I was very relieved because we came here to win a gold and we're very happy that we managed to achieve it."

Their performance yesterday more than made up for their 2019 heartbreak. Kiria, Victoria Lim and Rebecca Ong were part of that team then, with newly minted women's epee individual champion Elle Koh the newest addition.

Lim, who was competing at her fifth Games, said: "We were really disappointed after 2019 even though everyone really did their best, so we told each other and ourselves that we would work very hard for this SEA Games."

Yesterday's final was a closely contested affair and the mounting pressure took its toll on debutante

Elle, 14, who was in tears after her second bout and needed to be comforted by her teammates.

Elle, a Secondary 3 Raffles Girls' School student, said: "I was actually really nervous. In my mind, I was like, I lost the lead and was putting all the pressure on myself."

"Any lead in epee is very important and crucial, I was overwhelmed with emotions."

She was grateful for the support of her teammates, adding: "We are very close, we train a lot together and are close. It's the team spirit and wanting to encourage and comfort each other that really brought us together."

Ong, a medical student at the National University of Singapore, said: "I'm really very pleased by the result... because this is a historic gold, I'm proud of the whole team for being able to come together and achieve this goal."

Kiria, who competed at last year's Tokyo Olympics, believes they can go further.

She said: "As a team, it proves that we are improving. As you can see we are quite young and hopefully this team can continue on for many SEA Games and Asian Games. At the end of the day, the main goal is to compete in the Olympics as a team."

kimkwek@sph.com.sg