

From the heartlands to the heart of the city, practically the whole of Singapore came together for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, in August. The nation watched in eager anticipation as Team Singapore battled China in the Women's Team Table-Tennis Finals.

Ms Li Jiawei, Ms Feng Tianwei and Ms Wang Yuegu are three young fresh talents from China who had taken up citizenship as Singaporeans under the Foreign Sports Talent Scheme. The Olympics this year was their best opportunity to represent their adopted country. And the three girls put up a fierce fight to bring home the silver medal eventually.

The excitement had begun to build up earlier, when Singapore beat South Korea in an epic semi-final battle that lasted nearly four hours.

Knowing that they were up against tough players from the Chinese team in the final, Team Singapore continued to keep a strong and united front, remaining determined and positive throughout the final leg of their quest to clinch the medal.

"At last, I can repay Singapore for giving me the opportunity to be where I am today," Ms Feng told Singapore's TODAY newspaper. "I knew the whole nation was behind me, and I felt greatly encouraged and motivated."

A loud roar of triumph, pride and joy was heard across the island as Singapore celebrated the country's victory. The medal win ended a dry spell of 48 years since the last time the Lion City brought home a medal from the Games, a silver won by weightlifter Tan Howe Liang at the 1960 Rome Olympics.

The Team Table-Tennis Women's match play took place at the Peking University Stadium, Beijing. The same stadium is now renamed the Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat Stadium, after a donation by the estate of the late Singaporean benefactor to promote sports and youth development in China.

Speaking about the silver medal win, Singapore coach Liu Guodong said to reporters: "Both China and Singapore are winners, for us to win silver is as difficult as it is for China to win gold."

Ms Li added: "We know the Chinese team are the best in the world and it was an honour to play against them in the final."

Singapore's Foreign Sports Talent Scheme nurtures talented non-Singaporeans to represent the country in international sporting events. Introduced in 1993, the scheme aims to not only elevate sporting standards in Singapore, but also to inspire young Singaporeans to excel in sports.

As Mr Wayne Clews, a Singapore Sports Council official, told the media: "The Singapore Sports Council encourages the national sports associations to think long-term, focus on local youth development and to see the recruitment of foreign talent as a short-term initiative to raise the standards in Singapore."

Singapore's Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Community Development, Youth and Sports), Mr Teo Ser Luck, agreed: "What is integral is that these athletes also help build the system, and be part of the sporting pipeline for Singapore."

ABOVE  
Singapore's Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan (back row, extreme left) said that swimmer Yip Pin Xiu (front row, second from left) and equestrian rider Laurentia Tan (behind Pin Xiu) will get national awards for winning medals at the event.

BELOW  
Singapore Paralympic swimmer Yip Pin Xiu ended the Beijing Paralympics outing with Singapore's first Olympic-level gold in the 50m backstroke (S3 category), plus a silver in the 50m freestyle (S3 category) and two world records.

# Olympics victory unites Singaporeans

## Singapore shines at Paralympics



Singaporeans found even more Olympic joy one month later at the 2008 Paralympic Games for the disabled, also held in Beijing.

16-year old Singaporean swimmer Yip Pin Xiu swam her way to a triumphant gold finish at the 50m backstroke. She is the first Singapore athlete to win gold at the Paralympic Games and for the first time in history, Singapore's national anthem, *Majulah Singapura*, was played at a medal ceremony in an Olympic arena.

Despite suffering from muscular dystrophy which causes progressive muscle weakness, Ms Yip clocked a time of 58.75 seconds, 7.32 sec faster than her British counterpart Fran Williamson.

"I am excited to win Singapore's first gold," Ms Yip, who started swimming at the tender age of five, told *The Straits Times*. "I'm only 16, yet I have gotten a Paralympic gold medal which has been my dream for some time."

Apart from winning the gold medal, she also set a new world record during the 50m backstroke heats and came in second at the 50m freestyle. Her coach and a former national swimmer, Mr Ang Peng Siong, commended his young pupil on her keen mental strength, saying in media interviews that "she shows that the mind can determine how one actually feels and does."

The Singapore Paralympian team comprised six athletes who participated in four events. Ms Laurentia Tan, 29, who suffers from cerebral palsy and profound deafness, was another Singapore winner. She won two bronze medals in equestrian events, with the first medal from the Individual Championships Test grade 1A.

"Singaporeans, especially our youth and disabled community, should be inspired by her," said Mr Teo. "We can live our dreams if we put our hearts and minds to it."

The Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC) is the key supporting agency promoting disability sports in Singapore. Mr Tan Ju Seng, President of the SDSC, said that the athletes "have inspired the whole nation with their performances here." The council will continue to educate and promote disability sports in Singapore.

Singapore's dream is to be one of the top 10 sporting nations in Asia by 2010. With rising stars in both the Olympics and Paralympics, and a nation intent on supporting its talented athletes, this dream looks set to be fulfilled.