



SWEET SWEDE

Marcus Kinhult of Sweden celebrates with Games staff after winning the mixed team golf competition at the Nanjing Youth Olympics on Tuesday. PHOTO BY XINHUA

A perfect sport for complete athletes

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

The modern pentathlon, which features swimming, fencing, running and shooting as well as horse riding, requires a versatile, multitasking athlete that can push his or her personal limits in stamina, strength, accuracy and intelligence.

That complete package of athletic skills is exactly what Pierre de Coubertin hoped for when he founded the modern Olympic Games, said Dr Klaus Schormann, the president of the International Union of Modern Pentathlon.

"This sport combines all parts of skills, the physical part, the mental part, the sensibility for horse riding. It is special for our sport to create the most complete athletes," said Schormann, who was elected the UIPM president in 1993. "This sport encourages athletes to do more than just one discipline. You have to work much harder to combine the training and make the balance."

For young modern pentathletes competing at the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games, the sport offers more possibilities and more fun compared to any single event.

"As a sportsman, you always want to try many events, but you can't be as strong in all. (In modern pentathlon), you can combine them together and maybe have better outcomes than just competing in one," said 18-year-old Aleksandr Lifanov from Russia after winning the men's overall individual gold medal.

Lithuania's bronze medalist, Dovydas Vaivada, who is a horse-riding master, agreed with Lifanov.

"Five disciplines are more exciting than one. If you just compete in one, you have to fully focus on one discipline, which will be boring over long hours. It's fun to do five disciplines as you can have them switched," said the 17-year-old.

There is no place like home

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sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

For Henry Choong, a young British modern pentathlete, the memory of competing in China during the Nanjing Youth Olympics will always hold a special place in his heart.

Choong, the younger son of a Chinese-Malaysian who married a British woman, has enjoyed the journey to Nanjing in part because he has been able to trace his family heritage with his parents and grandparents.

"My dad is from Malaysia and he has Chinese heritage. It's a really lovely country. It feels good to be able to come back to where my dad's family originated and to sort of explore it a little bit," Choong, 17, said after finishing 11th overall in the individual competition on Sunday.

Choong has been to China four times, including a trip to Wuhan to compete at the World Junior Championships in 2013, and he said he feels as welcome as he does at home.

Choong was well supported by his family throughout the event, including his wheelchair-bound grandfather.

Despite the long journey, Choong's grandfather was determined to come and see the youngster perform, said Beverley Choong, Henry's mother.

Choong's mother, who used to play netball, is also interested in the family's Chinese history.

"The whole family has absolutely loved the trip to Nanjing," she said after taking a family photo with the Nanjing YOG mascot, Lele.



Henry Choong (second right), a British modern pentathlete, pose with his family.

PHOTO BY SUN XIAOCHEN / CHINA DAILY

"The Chinese (family) descent made the trip special, helping us easily to find something to relate to emotionally, for example the food.

"We love Chinese food back in England. It's in the heritage. Henry tries to learn some Mandarin even though it's very hard to learn Chinese in England. He likes his Chinese heritage, he's proud of that," she said.

While he has his mother's looks, he apparently has his father's athletic gene in the pool as he is also a strong swimmer.

"We all enjoy sports. The emphasis for my

husband is on his academic work but he and his brothers and sisters all love sport. My husband is a good swimmer," said Choong's mother.

In the pentathlon's swim section, Choong topped all 24 contenders to stay eighth overall before the evening session's running and shooting events.

Having grown up in a family full of sports enthusiasts, Choong remains committed to being a versatile athlete, which is why he picked the pentathlon as his sport of choice.

"I really love it. It's such a wide variety of sports, which force you to be an all-round athlete and that is good," said Choong, who finished third at the Under-16 European Championships in 2012.

Choong's mother said the sport helped her son to become a better person.

"If you miss five shots (in shooting), you drop five places (before the next discipline) and you are disappointed but you have to cope with it. In life, you get highs and lows, it's all the same."

Still, the teenager can't invest his all into the sport right now as he has to report to the University of Cambridge to study mathematics after Nanjing.

"At the moment, Henry is probably a chance for Tokyo (Olympics) in 2020. But he will go to Cambridge to earn his master's degree to get a good job in life and then really go hard for the Olympics. It's a hard balance to make but he is very determined in the modern pentathlon," said his mother.