THE Asian Games lights up in Doha on Dec 1. Singapore will be represented by 134 athletes. Some are world-class, others have not even made a name for themselves on the South-east Asian scene yet. The Straits Times rates their hopes and aspirations for this Asiad.

Today, the focus is on athletics and rowing.

The Straits Times rating system

Four-star: World-class
Three-star: Asian/Commonwealth Games standard
Two-star: SEA Games standard
One-star: Unproven at SEA Games

Athletics

Rating: One star
Unproven at SEA Games level

Competition dates: Dec 7-12

Gold medals at stake: 45

Team Singapore:
Michelle Sng (high jump)

2002 showing: No medals

Overview: A novice on the big stage, Michelle Sng will find it tough going against a top-quality field of high jumpers. Elsewhere, the spotlight will be on China's Liu Xiang, the 110m hurdles world record-holder. A new world mark from him is a possibility, though the lack of quality opposition to push the 23-year-old suggests otherwise.

But men's athletics is not a Chinese stronghold. Hosts Qatar, Japan and Saudi Arabia will also be fighting for honours. Instead, China are expected to dominate the women's competition, especially in the long-distance events.

India, Japan and Sri Lanka will lead the chasing pack.
Model Michelle aims to raise bar

Teenager wants to better national high jump record of 1.8m at Doha Asian Games

BY CHAN YI SHEN

SHE is a former gymnast and ballet dancer. She is also a pretty face and a freelance model.

But those attributes will not matter to Michelle Sng, 19, next month.

What will matter is one statistic: Her high jump clearance at the Asian Games in Doha.

She will be the only athletics representative in Singapore’s 134-strong contingent for the 1-15 Games.

And a freelance model. Just this year, she featured in the L’Oreal and a pretty face...

BY ACCIDENT

“I was the sports captain of my class. Nobody wanted to jump, so I had to sign myself up to fill the spot. I had to read up on how to jump properly on the Internet.”

The former rhythmic gymnast subsequently leapt 1.51 metres for the gold.

From then, she was in love with the sport – a love that will see her making her debut in a major event at next month’s Asiad.

But for the accidental “discovery” on the field, she might be treading a different run-way – the catwalk.

She was, after all, a ballet dancer and child model. Just this year, she featured in the L’Oreal hair show at the Singapore Fashion Festival.

There was also her third prize of Plaza Singapura’s Most Fashionable Shopper contest in April. She won a pendant, cellphone and $300 in vouchers.

As strenuous and monotonous as the run-up to leaping 1.8m might seem, she prefers it to training for fashion shows.

“For the Singapore Fashion Festival, I had to go through this one-day walking course. “You have to cross your legs on the catwalk, strike a pose at the end, look good, and not fall off your heels.”

Different movements are required in high-jumping, with one objective – not letting the bar fall.

In Michelle’s case, she has actually raised the bar – twice.

Yu Long Nyu’s 1.74m had been the national standard since 1993 but, in May, Michelle raised it to 1.79m.

That lasted just two months, as the run-up, take-off and clearance of ending Singapore athletics’ 32-year Asian Games drought.

Singapore’s last Asiad athletics medals came in Teheran in 1974, when Chee Swee Lee and Co brought home one gold, one silver and two bronzes.

Michelle’s aim is simple – to set another national record.

She said: “The target is to make it into the top 12 and qualify for the final. “That will give me more opportunities to set a personal best and break the national record again.”

She did not make last December’s SEA Games as she failed to meet the third-place qualifying mark of 1.80m.

But her May effort of 1.79m at an international junior meet in Beirut earned her the ticket to Doha.

It bettered the qualifying mark of 1.75m, which was the sixth-placed clearance at the 2002 Busan Asiad.

That the Asiad is a different league from the regional Open and junior meets that she usually competes in is not lost on her.

Defending champion Tatiana Efimenko of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan’s Svetlana Radzivil, Kazakhstan’s Marina Korchova and Anna Ustinova, and China’s Zheng Xingjuan have all cleared over 1.9m this year.

“I am a notch below them,” said Michelle. “But I jump better when there is less pressure on me. “Anything can happen in a competition. If I can get everything together – run-up, take-off and clearance – I’m confident that I can jump well over 1.8m.”

Her coach Chan See Huey, a former long-jump and triple-jump national record-holder, is looking ahead to next year’s SEA Games.

Said Chan: “She should take this as an opportunity to get experience at a big meet so that when it comes to next year’s SEA Games, she can do well.”

The Asiad at the 50,000-capacity Khalifa Stadium will be a far cry from her school sports day six years ago, but Michelle is unfazed.

“I grew up performing, so I like the stage,” she said. “The track is now my stage, in a sense. “Everyone will be watching, so I’m going to put on a good show.”

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