2006 Asian Games sailing silver medallist wants a shot in 2010

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SINGAPORE — One of Singapore’s most experienced sailors is back.

Koh Seng Leong, a silver medallist at both the 2006 Asian Games and 2007 SEA Games, has returned to sailing after more than a year’s absence.

He resumed training in July, and won the Laser Standard event at the Pesta Sukan Regatta in August — his first competitive outing since last year’s Beijing Olympics.

Speaking to MediaCorp yesterday, Koh, who turned 26 last month, revealed his big target is next year’s Asian Games in Guangzhou, China.

"I’d done a bit of keelboat sailing at SMU (Singapore Management University) in April and realised I still enjoyed sailing very much," said Koh, a business management student at SMU.

"I’ll try for next year’s Asian Games ... the Olympics (in 2012) is still too far away, especially as I’m not sure of the condition of my back and fingers (after a motorcycle accident in 2005)."

Next year’s Asian Games in China will be held from Nov 12 to 27.

Koh, who came in second in the Laser Radial event at the 2006 Games in Doha, added: “Since there is no sailing in the SEA Games this year, there’s some time to train up for some regattas next year and hopefully I’ll qualify and be selected for China.”

After finishing 36th out of 43 boats in the men’s Laser Standard event at last year’s Olympics, Koh moved on to other commitments.

Apart from his studies at the SMU, he helped out in the sports science department at Singapore-Sailing. He opened an events management company called Beaufort Five, and was selected to be on the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee’s executive board.

He also spent time recuperating from a chronic back injury — two slipped discs.

But Koh could not stay away for long. “Sailing is very high on my priority list now. But it demands a lot of training, I know, because I’ve been to the Olympics,” he said.

“So I’ve to cut back on my business commitments. I’ve an agreement with my business partner (for him) to control more of our company now.”

In 2005, Koh was involved in a freak traffic accident when a car door suddenly swung open at him as he stopped his motorbike at a traffic junction.

It left him with two fractured fingers, a dislocated thumb and severed nerves in his left hand, causing him to miss the SEA Games later that year.

The injuries left him with a weakened left hand.

He fought back to taste success in 2006 and 2007, and he is determined to work as hard to get back into shape.

Presently, Koh trains twice a week in the gym and spends up to three sessions a week on the water.

He said: “Physically, I’m still not up to it. So a lot of time is spent on physical training. You can’t forget how to cycle, but you can be unfit for cycling.

“That’s my main challenge now. Sailing at this level requires a huge level of fitness.”