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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STTA announces revamp of high performance and transformation strategies to prepare for Tokyo 2020

The Singapore Table Tennis Association today announced a new high performance strategic plan to take it through to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The high performance strategy plan was developed by the STTA after a consultation session with key stakeholders including Sport Singapore, Singapore Sports School and Singapore National Olympic Council, coaches and players.

Rejuvenation of the national team to be future ready

Said STTA President Ellen Lee: "After the Rio Olympics, it is indeed timely for STTA to develop, rejuvenate and refresh our teams to be future ready. Bold moves are needed if we are interested in challenging the top table tennis nations for honours.

"With competition becoming a lot keener, and with rivals like Japan catching up with Singapore, winning at the world stage has become a lot harder. We need to develop and rejuvenate our national teams to be future ready, and we need to place greater emphasis on the development of our youth players."

With an eye on Tokyo 2020 and beyond, national men's team stalwart Gao Ning will assume a new role as the men's assistant coach cum player. Gao will begin his professional coaching career as an understudy to current national men's coach Liu Jiayi. Gao will be closely involved in mentoring and training the younger generation of players from the national team and intermediate squad. Gao is expected to retire from playing after the Asian Games 2018.

Said Gao, who is 34 years-old: "This is a great opportunity which has been given to me by the STTA. I have always wanted to contribute back as a coach after my playing days are over. I am happy that I am given a chance, and will work hard and learn as much as I can from Coach Liu. It is my hope to help as many young Singaporean players fulfil their potential and win medals for Singapore."

With Gao's impending retirement from the team, Clarence Chew will be primed to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Clarence is committed and focused on doing the nation proud at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and is juggling both training and studying concurrently. STTA will work closely with him on his training and competition plan.

Said Clarence Chew: "I'm deeply appreciative of the opportunity to be able to train and study full-time and I will dedicate myself to doing my best and making our nation proud. It is any athlete's dream to represent the country at the Olympics. I will continue to train hard and work towards my goal of qualifying for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and would love to have Singaporeans stand by us as we take the next step forward."

Apart from Clarence, the STTA will be placing emphasis on the development of Chen Feng who had proven himself by earning the Rio ticket in the singles event.

Changes will also be made with the National women's squad. Feng Tianwei, who has been a member of the national team since 2007 and who will be 34 years-old during the Tokyo Olympics, does not fit into the STTA's current plans for rejuvenation.

Said Ellen: "Feng Tianwei has been a cornerstone of the national team since 2007. She has brought many golden moments to the sport. We would like to thank her for all that she has done for Singapore table tennis, and we would like to take this opportunity to wish Tianwei all the best in her future endeavours"

With Zhou Yihan, Lin Ye and Zeng Jian in their early twenties, they will be able to lead the national team for the next 2 Olympics cycle. The immediate task is to improve their world rankings in the next four years. Meanwhile, the STTA will monitor Yu Mengyu's injuries closely.

This will also give STTA between 4 to 8 years' time to groom the next generation of athletes for succession.

Said Ellen: "With our strategy plans in place, we strongly believe that our younger generation of players will lead Singapore to greater sporting achievements, with the aim of scoring a medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. We also hope to field a local-born talent to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. We urge Singaporeans who have put their belief and trust in us to continue to support us."

Emphasis on Youth Development

The STTA will also be placing greater emphasis on local youth development. The STTA will continue to work closely with our stakeholders including the Singapore Sports School, Sport Singapore, the education fraternity, the athletes and their parents to provide high potential athletes with the best support in their pursuit of sporting excellence and nurture a new generation of accomplished athletes to join the national team.

Said Mr Tan Teck Hock, Principal of Singapore Sports School: "We are pleased to learn that STTA plans to place more emphasis on local youth development. The Singapore Sports

School will work closely with STTA on developing more world class athletes. Together with STTA, we will do everything possible to nurture our high potential athletes. We hope that this will begin the process of change that will eventually see more Singaporeans on the world stage.”

The school within school programme in the Singapore Sports School serves as a good pipeline for the intermediate squad (IS) and national team.

Together with SSP, we will develop more high potential athletes who are serious about pursuing sports at the highest level.

Academic pathways and opportunities

To address the concerns of the parents and to assure our high potential athletes that there are academic pathways after their sporting career the STTA intends to explore more academic pathways for our high potential athletes in our national team.

Currently, the STTA has a network of educational partners: Nanyang Technological University, Beijing Sports University, SIM University (UniSIM) and University of Liverpool that provides special admission or scholarships to high potential athletes in our national team. These academic pathways will definitely benefit our high potential paddlers in the long run in terms of a career beyond their sports, and hopefully, this will encourage more local talents to pursue professional table-tennis as a career.

Intermediate Squad

The STTA started the intermediate squad in 2015 to develop high potential local athletes for progression into the national team.

As the way forward, we will be promoting more local talents into the Intermediate Squad and eventually to the National Team to help increase the base of talents who can end up representing Singapore at major Games.

The STTA has narrowed the Intermediate Squad down to several high potential youth players and more support and resources will be made available to them. We have high hopes that these local youths are able to take their sporting careers to greater heights.

Bursary Scheme to support needy high potential athletes

The STTA will leave no stone unturned in our quest to get more Singaporeans, especially kids, into the sport, and producing more winners on the world stage. We want to help promising young sportsmen and sportswomen who are struggling financially to achieve their sporting dreams. These high potential talents will be given a boost from STTA to help fund their training and/or competition cost.

The STTA will be initiating a Bursary scheme in 2017 for needy families whose child is in our youth development programmes: Junior Development Squad, Youth Training Squad, School

within School and Intermediate Squad. The objective of this scheme is to support a child's aspirations if the parents may not have the means to support the child's training and competitions. The scheme will provide subsidy to cover the monthly training fees and/or parents' contribution for overseas training and competitions.

Finally, the STTA will constantly challenge ourselves and to raise the bar. We must be bold as there is too much to lose. We all need to play our part in ensuring our sport continues to prosper, so we are inviting all those who support this vision to join us.

Milan Kwee, President of the Singapore Taekwondo Federation and Singapore's chef de mission for the 2017 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur said: "A robust youth sport development programme is paramount in developing a sustainable high performance programme. STTA's desire and commitment in developing young athletes puts them in good stead for continued success."

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