

SPORT

Pumped-up Polo takes fourth in bodybuilding competition

28-year-old Cambodian Sok Sopheak, aka Polo, claimed his best-ever placing of fourth in the 2009 Asia Bodybuilding and Fitness Championships in Thailand

BY EM MEAK

CAMBODIAN bodybuilder Sok Sopheak, also known as Polo, has finally seen all his hard work payoff, claiming fourth in the 2009 Asia Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship held August 11-17 in Pattaya, Thailand.

Despite failing to make the podium, he was delighted with his best-ever placing in an international event.

Training out of Phnom Penh's Rama Fitness Club, Sok Sopheak entered the competition at the 1.65-metre division of the Men's Classic Body category. Iran's Seyed Roohollah Mirnoorollahi took the gold medal, with Daljit Singh of India coming second and Thailand's Kittipong Jansuwan taking third.

Polo, who has adjusted his weight between 60 and 75 kilograms to suit his competitions, has never gained such a good placing in overseas competition. In the same tournament last year, he ranked ninth in Men's Body Building category, while at the 2007 South East Asia Cham-



Sok "Polo" Sopheak shows off the physique that won him fourth in the 2009 Asia Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship. SOVAN PHILONG

pionships, he took eighth in the same classification.

Polo explained that experience from previous events has helped him significantly to improve his placings.

"I didn't know clearly what food was necessary for bodybuilding," he said. "But experiences from several competitions, and through acquaintance with foreign

bodybuilders, I got to know how to eat properly."

Polo remembered meeting a Thai athlete in Hong Kong last year, who set him straight on the correct way to balance his diet. "He told me what food to eat and what not to eat."

The 28-year-old Cambodian expressed his pleasure at achieving at something that came out of his own effort, thanking the encouragement of Cambodian youngsters around him.

Rama Fitness club owner Ky Sao, who recommended Polo to travel to Pattaya to join the competition, applauded the bodybuilder's success, saying: "This is the pride of Cambodian sportsmen."

Polo said he had gone through various difficulties in building up his body and attending international competitions, initially without the support of sponsors. However, support from Paul Chua, secretary general of Asia Body Building and Fitness Federation, and Pakpong Kriangsa, director of the Thailand Fitness Federation, eventually allowed him to participate.

Moreover, Polo noted that his food requirement was extremely expensive, with six daily meals including eggs, fish, vegetables, fruit and chicken breast, costing between US\$15 and \$20 per day. "My mother always scolded me because she was not sure what my money was spent on when she gave it to me," Polo revealed.

Unfortunately, the Cambodian received no cash prize for his fourth rank, with just the prestige and a medal to reward his efforts.

Kong Phalla, secretary of the Cambodian Fitness Federation, acknowledged that the institution was lacking in funds to support the daily fees incurred by its registered athletes, stating there was not even enough to subsidise travel and accommodation costs. However, he praised Polo's achievement, saying: "The result of Sopheak makes me pleased."

Polo is now hoping to attend the World Body Building Championship in Dubai in November, although he has yet to confirm whether he will receive sufficient funding to go. ■

BRIEFS

Odds favour Patriots

● NEW YORK – The odds on National Football League teams to win the 2010 Super Bowl in Miami, courtesy of Las Vegas Sports Consultants, which advises Nevada sports books on odds for sporting events, were released Wednesday. The New England Patriots are 4-to-1 favorites to win the championship, meaning a winning US\$100 bet would return \$400 plus the initial stake. The Minnesota Vikings, after the addition of three-time NFL Most Valuable Player Brett Favre at quarterback, currently rank eighth among the league's 32 teams with 14-1 odds to win the Super Bowl. The Detroit Lions, who went the whole of last season winless, are the rank outsiders at 100-1. BLOOMBERG

Smoltz signs for St Louis

● LOS ANGELES – John Smoltz, a 42-year-old right-handed pitcher who ranks among the top hurlers of his era, agreed to a Major League Baseball contract with the St Louis Cardinals on Wednesday. Two days after being released by the Boston Red Sox after struggling as a starter, former Atlanta Braves ace Smoltz joined the National League Central division leaders to become a fifth starter or key bullpen reliever. Smoltz, expected to join the Cardinals on Thursday in San Diego, was 2-5 with an 8.33 earned-run average in eight starts for the Red Sox. Smoltz has a career record of 212-152 with a 3.32 earned-run average and 154 saves in 21 seasons. He is the only pitcher in major league history with 200 victories and 150 saves. AFP

National teams slug it out at Baribo ballpark

KAMPONG CHHNANG – Players of the Cambodian National Baseball team have been gaining invaluable match experience through a tight schedule of games against each other, after splitting Sunday into two sides: the Royals representing Phnom Penh and the eastern Cambodian provinces Kandal, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Preah Sihanouk and Preah Vihear; and the Braves, representing the western provinces of Kampong Chhnang, Siem Reap, Anlong Veng and others.

Top first-round picks for the Royals included Moun Chan Ton, Chea Theara and Som Vichet, while the Braves chose Teng Sakhan, Hoey Siphon and Nget Vanna.

The Braves triumphed in the first two games Tuesday and Wednesday, delayed by a day due to rain, winning 5-3 and 4-3, respectively. The Royals seemed to come up short at the end, with the

Braves able to capitalise with a strong finish.

Braves slugger Som Vijet has had all the breaks so far, stunning the Royals with a 6-6 record including two doubles, two RBIs and three runs in the two games.

Meanwhile, 15-year-old Poen Pea Rum – now playing in his fourth season – has been lighting up the Royals mound, pitching four innings without giving up a single run, with nine strikeouts, no walks and no hits.

Games continue nearly every day at the wet and muddy Baribo field in Kampong Chhnang province, starting at 1:15pm.

Changing their acronym

At a meeting Tuesday in Baribo, the Cambodia Baseball Federation announced a change of their acronym, from CBF to CBAF, as well as updating their constitutional laws with cooperation from the National Olympic Committee. CBAF ■

Decorated athletes return

Cambodia won 15 medals in total at the 2009 ASEAN Para Games

BY KHOUTH SOPHAK CHAKRYA

ELEVEN Cambodian athletes made a triumphant return to the Kingdom on Thursday, fresh from winning 15 medals in the fifth ASEAN Para Games in Malaysia.

The event – held in Kuala Lumpur from Saturday to Wednesday – brought together disabled athletes from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as East Timor, to compete over 11 events.

Speaking to reporters Thursday during a press conference at the National Paralympic Committee of Cambodia, the committee's secretary general, Yi Veasna, praised the athletes for their accomplishments during the games, which included winning one gold, 10 silver and four bronze medals.

"These medals show that our disabled athletes are just as strong as those from other countries in ASEAN," Yi Veasna said.

He added that the results stacked up well against regional powerhouses such as Thailand and Vietnam when considering the total number of athletes Cambodia sent to the games, and how many medals they brought home.

Thailand led all participating nations with 289 medals, 157 of which were gold. Host nation Malaysia placed second with 246 medals, 94 of them gold. Vietnam had the third-highest medal count with 130, including 73 gold.

Unbelievable performance

To Rithya, director of the Centre for Education and Sport, who trained and led the Cambodian team to Malaysia, said he had little hope that his athletes would do so well after seeing the strength of competitors from other nations upon arriving in Kuala Lumpur.

"I almost can't believe that we have done as well as we did, receiving 15 medals from

the competition," To Rithya said.

He added that Cambodia's medal haul might have been better had two of the athletes – in swimming and athletics – not been pulled from competition.

"They had health problems, so we had to take them out of the games," he said.

Cambodia's top athlete in the games, Chim Phan, took home five medals including gold in the 400 metres.

"I was very excited about my competition because I won a gold medal," he said.

The athletes who earned medals will also be given a little extra treasure. According to a governmental decree from 2008, issued to provide incentives to Cambodian athletes, medal winners are to receive cash prizes for each time they make the podium. This year's Para Games medal winners will pocket more than 200 million riels (over US\$48,000) in total. ■

McLaren may ax Heikki

● LONDON – McLaren boss Martin Whitmarsh has hinted that Heikki Kovalainen could be dropped for next season after a disappointing year with the team. The 27-year-old Finn has won just nine points this season, and despite the poor performance of the team's cars, Whitmarsh said the driver has also been below par. "Heikki has not raced as well as he would have liked and we would have liked him to this year," said Whitmarsh, according to the Sun newspaper. McLaren's reigning world champion Lewis Hamilton could face internal competition from a different teammate next season with Poland's Robert Kubica and German Nico Rosberg at the top of the list of potential replacements if Kovalainen fails to improve in the second half of the season. THE GUARDIAN

WEEKEND TV TIME

FIA F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP
Saturday August 22

■ European F1 GP – Qualifying
6:50pm – Live on STAR SPORTS

Sunday August 23

■ European F1 GP – Main Race
6:45pm – Live on STAR SPORTS