

Super typhoon Mangkhut derailed his training, but HK teen rower Wong Wai-chun can't wait for the 2018 Youth Olympic Games

The 18-year-old athlete will also need to change up his training regimen to adapt to the shorter distance of the Youth Olympic Games format

by **Kelly Ho** | Published: 11:15am, 2 Oct, 2018 ▼



At 1.93 metres tall, Wong Wai-chun says he has a competitive edge.

Hong Kong rower Wong Wai-chun thought he had missed out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to compete in this month's Youth Olympic Games when he failed to qualify. But now that he has got a second bite at the cherry, he is ready to do his best.

Wong was heavy-hearted when he finished fourth in men's single sculls at last year's Asian Rowing Junior Championships. This is because only the top three rowers would qualify for the Youth Olympic Games to be held from October 6-18 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As luck would have it, he was given a ticket to the Games after a rower from Uzbekistan pulled out.

"The qualification process was truly an emotional roller coaster, but I am very grateful to have made the cut," he said.

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The 18-year-old said rowers from the United States and Germany would pose the biggest threat at the Youth Olympics, after they demonstrated excellent form at the World Rowing Junior Championships in August. Wong said his goal would be to finish in the top six, and to enjoy every moment of his first appearance at an international competition.

"I don't know much about the city of Buenos Aires, but I'm really looking forward to experiencing the atmosphere at a World Games," said Wong.

Unlike in a typical rowing competition, the races in the Youth Olympics, except the time trial which is 900 metres, have been reduced to 500 metres. The standard World Championship race distance is 2,000 metres. This means Wong has had to adjust his training to prepare for the Games.

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"Normally I focus on cardio exercises but, with a shortened race distance, I am trying to improve my muscle strength by using more weights to become faster," he said.

The rower's plans suffered a hiccup after Super Typhoon Mangkhut damaged facilities at the Sha Tin Rowing Centre two weeks ago. All on-water training has been suspended; Wong can now only use the rowing machines there.

"To be honest, I'm a bit worried that it may affect my performance, because there is not much time left before the Games. But I'm still pretty confident I can do well in the competition," he said.

Wong took up the sport just four years ago, but he is already one of the best junior rowers in Hong Kong. In 2016, he partnered with Chau Yee-ping to win gold in men's double (1x) at the Asian Rowing Junior Championships.

He told *Young Post* he has a competitive edge because his height – he is 1.93 metres tall – allows him to propel the boat further forward.



The Sha Tin Rowing Centre was damaged by Typhoon Mangkhut, interrupting his training plans. Photo: K.Y. Cheng/SCMP

Wong had been rowing for two years when, at the age of 16, he decided to become a full-time athlete. But he said it was difficult to get his parents' permission.

"My parents had been very supportive when I was training part-time because rowing gave me a sense of purpose. But becoming a full-time athlete raised doubts about my education, so they were very hesitant," he said.

Wong's parents eventually came around when he assured them he would do both. Now, he is a part-time student studying health education at the Education University of Hong Kong.

Looking beyond this year's Youth Olympic Games, Wong has set his sights on the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, as well as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. "As I turned 18 this year, it also means I'm going to take part in senior-level competitions. I'm excited to see how far I'll go," he said.

Edited by M. J. Premaratne

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