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**New Stars**

Leung Tze, Victoria and Ma Hok Him, Ryan

When speaking of Latin dances including Samba and Cha-Cha-Cha, most will think such are dances for the elderly. Dancesport is one of the sports with which Hong Kong people are less familiar. However, there are two young people who have fallen in love with this sport at first sight since very young and later embarked on the road to becoming athletes. At the age of only 19, Ryan Ma has been a member of the Hong Kong Dancesport Team for a decade. His 18-year-old partner Victoria Leung has also been its member for 7 years. Both of them were the champions of the Latin Dance Competition in the 17th National Youth Dancesport Championships.

*Falling in love with Latin dance*

A sport event of the East Asian Games, dancesport can be divided into two streams, namely the Latin dance and standard dance, each consisting of five dances. A combination of both streams is called ten-dance. The five Latin dances are Samba, Cha-Cha-Cha, Rumba, PasoDoble and Jive. While the Hong Kong team achieved notable results and won many medals in the past international dancesport events, very few in the public eye has noted the emergence of this sport. Ryan was first introduced to Latin dance by his family. He said he had tried other sports such as swimming as well but soon gave up, and Latin dance is the only exception. With fast-paced music, Latin dance allows dancers to incorporate their own personal styles into it. It is a different story for Victoria. As a matter of fact, she had learnt Chinese dance before getting into Latin dance. She said she preferred Latin dance over Chinese dance as she could wear high heels. In addition, she loved its music melody, driving her to devote to dancesport with continuous practice.

*Splitting and pairing up*

While Ryan and Victoria have participated in dancesport for years, they did not partner with one another until two and a half years ago. As dancesport is always more popular among women than men, it is quite difficult for Victoria to find a suitable partner. Before meeting Victoria, Ryan had had a dancing partner for many years, but they split up because the then partner had to study abroad. “Before coming across a stable dancing partner, I mainly participated in individual competitions. My previous partners were unable to continue to be my dancing partner for various reasons. Later on I heard Ryan looking for a dancing partner, and so asked him if he was interested in partnering with me.” Victoria shared.

*Not perfect, but valuable to mutual growth*

Dancesport is a sport requiring two dancers to move in perfect harmony with one another. Coordination of movements and mutual communication between the two are of great importance. Both coincidentally agreed that there was actually no such a thing called “a perfect match”, and that only by learning from every training session and competition can they gradually enhance their bonding with and tacit understanding in one another. There are both bitter and sweet moments for Ryan and Victoria as a team. For example, Victoria is not good at English, and so often has difficulties communicating with foreign coaches during overseas training, but Ryan is always by her side to help with interpretation. With positive personalities such as perseverance, diligence and determination, Victoria has profoundly influenced Ryan in such a manner to always remind him to strive for excellence. There was an unforgettable setback when they were still learning how to mingle well. “At the very beginning of our partnership, we had always done well in overseas competitions, but we encountered a major setback in the WDSF World Open held in Thailand. We had defeated opponents in the past, but that time our fortune reversed. We could only end up looking with disappointment at the prize giving podium afar as spectators”. After the competition, Ryan once thought about quitting dancesport, but soon regained his confidence with encouragement from many around him. Victoria also said that such a failure was the one that they would never forget. They kept smiling and comforting one other despite great frustration with the poor results. “I felt much better after waking up the next day after the competition. I told myself firmly that I must come back as a champion in the future events”. In the subsequent 17th National Youth Sports Dance Championships, their wish came true and they became the Latin dance champion.

*Lifelong devotion to dancesport*

Completing the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination earlier, Ryan and Victoria have already set their goals in life, dedicating themselves to dancesport in the years to come. Ryan said he had questioned whether he should choose dancing as his lifelong pursuit during secondary school years. It turned out that dancing had become part of his life and a source of happiness. He therefore set his motto "Let Your Dream be Your Wing" on the home screen of his mobile phone to remind himself every day to forget all of the worries, in pursuit of his dreams in dancing along a self-discovery journey. Although Victoria was troubled by injuries before, she still believes dancing is more important than her life, and so is determined to move ahead, seeing dancing as her lifelong career. Ryan and Victoria came out of the haze with perseverance, spending most of their time on practising Latin dance every day in preparation for 3 to 4 ranking competitions and 2 to 3 international competitions each year. Their hopes are to achieve notable results in the coming Asian Games, aspiring to rank among the top 24 in the World Championships. Winning glory for Hong Kong, they believe their dedication to and strong belief in the sport may augment the public’s understanding of dancesport, while encouraging their greater participation in such a fascinating sport.