

TRIATHLON

Lo goes his own way to silver

Triathlete scores medal just six months after quitting Sports Institute programme over lack of progress

Richard Castka

Ivan Lo Ching-hin quit the Sports Institute six months ago unhappy with his progress, but has emerged as Hong Kong's best triathlete.

Lo won a silver medal at the Asian championships in Japan last weekend, but he may not be able to share in the rewards it could bring, including increased funding.

The 22-year-old left the elite Sha Tin academy last November because he said he was not seeing any improvement. He gave up his scholarship of HK\$6,000 a month, funding for racing and training and the institute's support system, in favour of being coached by former national squad member Andrew Wright.

Lo won silver in the under-23 division at the Asian championships in Tateyama, which should earn points in the convoluted criteria for the sport to maintain its status at the Sports Institute. Successful athletes are given bigger allowances.

"Basically, I was not improving under the HKSI coaching system and so last November I decided to quit," said Lo, who is now living with his parents. "Prior to training at the institute I was being coached in New Zealand by [elite athlete] Clark Ellice, but

he had to concentrate on his own preparations for the London Olympics and so I returned to Hong Kong."

Lo won a gold medal in the junior event at the Asian championships in the Philippines in 2010 and the future looked bright, but his results failed to impress at the HKSI last season.

"As an HKSI scholarship athlete, I was receiving HK\$6,000 per month," Lo said. "I had no say in my training or in the races I competed in as everything was decided for me.

"Three or four of us had exactly the same training programme and when I asked for mine to be more specific to my ability I was told to stick with the programme provided.

"When I said that I was thinking of quitting the programme I was told that my funding would be cut and that I would probably not improve under anyone else's coaching, but here I am with an Asian championship silver medal."

Outgoing national coach Ruth Hunt agreed with Lo that his performances last year were not impressive. "Ivan raced very well in Japan, but it needs to be stated this was a duathlon [run-bike-run] event, which plays to Ivan's strengths."

Since the event was changed to a run-bike-run duathlon due to the frigid temperatures of the swim

course, Lo's achievement might not yet be rewarded with points.

"I would agree Ivan's results last year were not what we were hoping for, but without results we have very little data to work with to assess his overall performance," Hunt said.

"Funding is purely results based -

all of this information is available on the HKSI website in black and white, so if the results are not forthcoming then the funding will obviously remain at a lower level. If we don't have results to assess then we have to evaluate something else.

"As far as HKSI funding goes there is a mechanism for discretionary payment, and I can confirm it has been applied for on Ivan's behalf. However, it can only be paid if endorsed by the national coach."

Hunt said Lo had the potential to do well, but a good result from one event alone was not an indication of an outstanding athlete.

"Training with Andrew is very much like training with Clark [Ellice] - both have a flexible approach and both are very communicative," Lo said. "I competed in a race last year and then tried to telephone my HKSI coach after the race, but only got his voicemail. When I called the following day and asked why he didn't take my call he said it was his day off.

"As a HKSI-funded athlete I had the option of living rent free at the institute and having all meals provided, as well as massage and physio facilities. I now cover all these costs myself, and I do part-time fitness coaching to make some extra money."

A Hong Kong Triathlon Association spokeswoman said a grant had been secured for Lo after he gave up the HKSI funding. Lo confirmed this as being HK\$1,500 per month.



1:43:29

The time Ivan Lo Ching-hin clocked in the Tateyama ASTC Triathlon Asian Championship

• His next best result was 2:12:35 in Vilan in 2011