

asiaone SHOWbiz

HOME NEWS SHOWBIZ

Pole powers

Jennani Durai

The Straits Times

Wednesday, Dec 04, 2013



She had no experience in gymnastics or dance until she took up pole dancing nine years ago, but a 38-year-old American beat seasoned rhythmic gymnasts and dancers in the women's division of the International Pole Championship.

Ms Natasha Wang, who is of Chinese descent, won the top prize for her routine inspired by the Chinese legend of Madame White Snake.

The four-hour competition was held last Saturday night at the National University of Singapore's University Cultural Centre, and attracted more than 1,000 people.

Organised annually by the International Pole Dance Fitness Association, the competition was held in Singapore for the first time this year. It drew 30 of the world's best pole dancers from 12 countries, including Finland, Australia, Singapore and the United States.

The competition's Poland-born founder Anna Przeplasko said she decided to hold the competition in Singapore this year mainly because of pole dancing's increasing popularity here.

Contestants were judged for their technique, originality and choreography in five competition divisions: women's, men's, women's disabled, masters and doubles. Winners clinched prizes such as training scholarships and professional sponsorship.

Ms Wang, who lives in Los Angeles, said her lack of athleticism was what first motivated her to try her hand at pole-performing when she was 29. "I realised I was almost 30, so I decided to take up something physically challenging," she told Life! after her win.

She soon fell in love with the sport, and became an avid performer and instructor, clinching titles such as the US Pole Dance Champion 2011 and California Pole Dance Champion 2010.

The win meant a lot to her, as she had been considering taking a hiatus.

"As you get older, your body doesn't do some things as easily, so I had to take it easier with my training. And there are so many rising stars on the scene, so I thought maybe it was time for me to step aside."

Victory though, has made her reconsider. "Now, I don't know if I'll stop competing," she said with a laugh.

Having no background in gymnastics or dance also makes her "a little insecure" around the other performers, she admitted. She believes part of her winning formula, however, involves "always being a little bit scared".

"I believe the most important thing is never to rest on your laurels, and never become complacent," she said.

Fellow American, Derick Pierson, 23, won the top award in the men's category.

Mr Pierson, who has been training in pole for six years, said that the win is special to him as it is his first international prize.

The winner of the disabled division was the hearing-impaired Eri Kamimoto from Japan, who beat the category's other contender, Australian Deb Roach. Ms Roach was born with one arm.

Australian Joanna Littlewood-Johnson won the masters division, while her compatriots Ruth Mansfield and Tiffany Downes took home the Doubles title.

Singaporean Daniel Kok, 37, competed in the men's division that night but did not finish in the top three.

He told Life! that he felt "very inexperienced compared to everyone else there", but added that he learnt a lot from the other competitors, including how they train and prepare for competitions.

"Year after year, the standard keeps getting higher, but the atmosphere backstage among the competitors is very friendly and warm," he said.

THE STRAITS TIMES

Get a copy of The Straits Times or go to straitstimes.com for more stories.