

Winning makes it all worthwhile for Sarah

BY CHAN YI SHEN

SARAH Afiqah Rodgers took three weeks off from school and flew halfway across the globe to compete in the national ice-skating championships recently.

But it was all worthwhile for the Scotland-based Singaporean after she won the girls' preliminary category two Saturdays ago.

Speaking with a thick Scottish accent, the chirpy 10-year-old explained: "This is my best moment in skating. I really wanted to come in first.

"I have never come in first before and this was the nationals, not any regular competition. It was great. My relatives were all here to support me."

Her previous best was a second in the pre-preliminary category in the 2004 championships.

The 1.22-metre girl, whose mum Eny is Singaporean and dad Jim is a Scot, was born in Singapore but has been living in Glasgow since she was four months old.

She got her first pair of skates at three and has been competing regularly in inter-club competitions in Scotland since she was five.

Said Sarah: "We used to come back to Singapore about four or five times a year to visit relatives and friends. But, since I started school, the visits have been getting fewer and fewer.

"Nowadays, we just come back once a year for the nationals."

Her performance caught the eye of Singapore Ice Skating Association's director of training and development, Andrea Derby.

Said the Canadian, who is an international judge: "She has good technical abilities. Her skills now will place her among the top 30 per cent in her age group in the world.

"She also has something extra which even some world-class skaters don't have - personality and charisma.

"The potential to become a top-class skater is definitely there."

After a three-week stay here, Sarah will fly back to Scotland and return to her books at Glasgow's Mount Cameron Primary School.

So can she juggle skating and studies?

"I can cope with all my subjects, except maths!" she laughed. "I'm crap at it."

She says languages are her forte in school.

Besides English, she speaks fluent Gaelic and wants to pick up at least two more.

Mum, who is Malay, teaches her Malay at home. Sarah also hopes to learn Chinese and French.

Besides training six days a week at Olympia Figure Skating Club, she still finds time for fencing, pottery and drama.

Living in a football-mad city, she pledges allegiance to Celtic, rather than Rangers.

"I don't like the colour blue," she quipped. "I watched my first Celtic game two years ago. It was Henrik Larsson's last match for Celtic."

She hopes to don the red-and-white of Singapore in future and is in the national development squad.

"Watching the Winter Olympics was quite inspiring. I want to become an Olympic skater and represent Singapore," she said.

So why Singapore, not Scotland?

"I like it here," she said. "I have a lot of friends and relatives here.

"The weather is nice and hot. I can't stand the cold. And I like spicy stuff. Laksa is my favourite."



PHOTO: ALBERT SIM

WINNING FORM: Only 10, Sarah claims the girls' preliminary category in the national ice-skating championships after taking a break from school and flying here from Scotland.