



Early last September, the Macau women's handball team was involved in a traffic accident on their way back to the hotel after competing in the last game of the 2011 Chinese National City Games in Nanchang. In the incident, the student athletes remained calm, helping each other pass through difficult times. Five months after the incident, the main coach Sou Pui Kei still highly praises their calmness, saying they have fully summoned up their team spirit. He also believes that following the incident the team has become genuinely more mature.

Accident Occurred in Chinese National City Games

Sou recalls that the atmosphere was unusually quiet inside the vehicle cabin prior to the accident and that they sensed that something bad was about to happen when the vehicle suddenly accelerated. "Then the vehicle started to roll over. We had difficulty remaining seated; nevertheless, we grabbed other team members with one hand so that we would not be thrown out of the vehicle". In the accident, 13 teammates and coaches plus a local volunteer were injured and admitted to hospital. Teammate Chao Sio Teng was relatively seriously injured and had to be hospitalised whilst everybody else only had minor injuries. Every cloud has a silver lining: Sou is tremendously surprised that the team was exceptionally calm during the accident, saying, "None of them cried. All they were concerned about was everyone's safety".



No Panic in Emergency: Hand in Hand to Tide over Difficult Times

Strong-willed Athletes Become Strong

In experiencing a life-and-death moment, their friendships grew deeper and stronger and they also think in a more mature way than they did in the past. Sou said, "They used to make fun of each other, and one could easily sense their immaturity. Since returning to Macau from Nanchang they've grown up a lot. The incident has heightened their enthusiasm for handball, enabling them to understand that this sports activity does make people stronger and helps to develop a stronger will. This has thus become a target for which they strive".

Sou Pui Kei: Solidarity

This year, the women's handball team will face new challenges: in addition to the Macau and Hong Kong Interport Handball Tournament, they are also slated to train outside Macau and participate in the Aged Group Handball Competition in Taiwan. Sou hopes that the athletes can unite their efforts through hard work to display a good example for new athletes. Sou also believes that handball has yet to gain popularity in Macau and so the number of participants in women's handball is limited. This is primarily due to misunderstandings by certain schools. He noted that, "Many schools think that they need a pitch to develop a school handball team so their support for this activity is limited. Some even think that handball involves a lot of collisions; in fact, all sports activities involve physical contact and handball should therefore be looked at in the right light".

Hospitalised for Nearly Two Months

On the day after the accident, the team returned to Macau except for Chao and the main coach Sou. She had to be hospitalised in Nanchang, with Sou at her side. The Macau Sport Development Board arranged for a medical unit and her parents to go there to assist and visit her. Chao recalls, "I knew my family members were very worried about me and they were very relieved when they saw me in the hospital. I was very touched when they visited me in Nanchang." On returning to Macau, Chao was hospitalised for two months. Her teammates visited her in the hospital to understand the situation, spent time with her and encouraged her, and she was particularly gratified by their kindness. Following lengthy treatment, she has almost fully recovered.

During her hospital stay, Chao said that she missed handball all the time and desperately wanted to join competitions with her teammates once out of hospital. But on completing physiotherapy, both her doctor and her family members advised her not to engage in any strenuous exercise which may revive her injuries. In time, the attitude of her family members softened, "At first, my family members were strongly against me playing handball again, but when they saw me very depressed at home, they took the initiative to ask me to resume practice. Personally, I'm not worried but I will avoid triggering the old injuries. I will compete only when necessary in the inter-school games".

Chao Sio Teng: Appreciate more of the things I have



Chao Sio Teng sat in the last row of the vehicle when the accident happened and was most seriously injured. She was thrown out of the coach cabin, causing fractures in the I to IV lumbar transverse, and had been hospitalised for nearly two months upon returning to Macau. She has now almost fully recovered, and does not require any physiotherapy. Having been a member of the team for only one year, she now treasures more than ever the happy moments she shares with other teammates during training and competition.

Hope to Fight Side by Side

To begin with, Chao had no interest in sports; she was actually made to play handball. It was the sense of satisfaction from high scoring that triggered her love for the game. She said smilingly, "I had never participated in sports and I had never thought I would have achieved something in handball. I hope that I can fight side by side with my teammates in the future". She disclosed that since the accident teammates have become more active during training, remarking, "No-one practised if there was no competition in the past but now the situation is different; we all work hard and insist on practicing as we want to achieve better results".

