

Viet Nam Olympics Team come home with no medal as expected. Their poor performance at the Olympics show the country's problems which must be fixed to lift Viet Nam up in the future



Quách Thi Lan of Viet Nam competes in the women's 400m hurdles semi-final on Monday at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo, Japan. AFP/VNA Photo

HÀ NỘI | Under heavy rain, Quách Thi Lan tried her best but could not reach the final of the women's 400m hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics.

Lan was the last Vietnamese athlete at the Games but the most successful and her result was better than expected. A place in the semi-finals is the nation's highest result in athletics at the Olympics in history.

The Viet Nam Olympic team arrived home empty-handed after winning medals at all of the last three Olympics. Their incomplete mission highlighted Viet Nam's weaknesses and the amount of work that needs to be done to fix its problems.

Losses and hopes

Viet Nam sent 18 athletes to compete in 11 sports in the Olympics. None of them were tasked with winning a medal but sports officials still hoped that they would have at least a weightlifting bronze to bring home. Two athletes Thanh Kim Tuan and Hoàng Thanh Duyên showed great potential in the lead up to the competition.

However, both veteran Tuan and newbie Duyên failed to shine as their performances were not as good in Tokyo as they had been at home. Injuries were partly blamed for their losses.

Senior shooter Hoàng Xuân Vinh earned his slot thanks to an invitation from the organisers to defend his title. Some believed he could win a medal but he had not hit his peak for several years and subsequently, he missed out.

The rest of the athletes came to the Olympics with a strong spirit but more to gain some real-world tournament experience for future competitions.

Viet Nam Sports Administration (VSA) deputy director Lê Hoàng Yển told *Viet Nam News* in an interview that there was a big gap between Viet Nam and the rest of the world.

There were, however, some highlights for the team.

Apart from Lan, boxer Nguyễn Văn Địch also had a good result. Địch was a nobody at his Olympic debut. But he defeated Azerbaijani Aliyev Tayfur, who placed fifth in the world

championship in 2019, in his men's featherweight bout.

His win was a milestone for Việt Nam in a return to the Olympics after 33 years.

Duo Lê Thị Thảo and Đinh Thị Hương also made history as they achieved the highest ranking ever for Việt Nam in rowing in an Olympics. They came in No 15 in the women's lightweight double sculls.

Badminton player Nguyễn Thùy Linh, world No 49, performed successfully with two wins over No 41 Qi Xuefei of France and No 46 Sabina Zaquet from Switzerland in the group round. She also played well before losing to world No 1 Tai Tzu-ying of Chinese Taipei and failing to advance.

After her first Olympics, Linh, 23, said she believed that she would quickly improve and would be equal to her highest-ranked rivals in the near future.

Solutions to be discussed

Compared to the Olympics in Brazil, Việt Nam's result in Tokyo made headlines in national media and raised questions in the sporting community.

Five years ago, the team came home with one gold and one silver, making the Rio Olympics the most successful ever.

This time, however, they brought nothing home and statistics showed that 10 out of the 18 athletes performed well under their full ability.

"I must confirm that the Olympics is a tough tournament for Việt Nam. We have to keep in mind

that not all athletes are competing for medals as they are competing against world-class athletes. Just a few of them in specific sports have the opportunity to win a medal," said VSA deputy director Trần Đức Phấn.

"Gold and silver by Hoàng Xuân Vinh and some medals of other athletes are only highlights of our investment in sports in the past. This year, 18 Olympians showed Việt Nam's true position in the world," he said.

The chef de mission said there were reasons both in preparation for the event and during the competition for Việt Nam's failure to bring home a medal and one of them was the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most athletes had no international intensive training course or tournament to sharpen their skills. Swimmer Nguyễn Huy Hoàng, for example, earned his slot very early but he could only do dryland workouts for months and our weightlifters were quarantined for 42 days after they took part in the qualifiers."

Deputy director Phấn affirmed that Việt Nam athletes were not in their best shape physically.

"We are shorter, thinner and weaker and we always feel nervous even shaking ahead of our competitions. We know the gap between us and our friends, therefore we knew what our result would be here. I am not happy with that but our athletes did their best," said Phấn.

Former SEA Games champion Vũ Thị Hoàng agreed it was poor preparation.

"If they had good preparation and were in good condition, they would be more confident to compete, and vice versa. Poor preparation here could be due to injuries," said retired Hoàng, who ran in the 100 metres in the 2008 Olympics.



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