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SHI Tingmao (CHN): “I am proud of myself”

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After yet another golden double at the FINA World Championships – three 3m individual titles in a row and four in

the 3m synchro - Shi Tingmao continues her glorious streak by claiming her fifth FINA Best Female Diver crown in

succession. So, congratulations on a perfect entry in her yearbook of 2019 for which she is rightly proud, particularly

after a nightmare year in 2018.

How would you describe your feelings on learning that you have won your fifth FINA annual award in a row?

I am very, very happy and honoured to get this award again. It is always refreshing and exciting to win something. I am not a self-satisfied person but this time I really want to give myself the thumbs up and full marks as a conclusion of my year of 2019! I am grateful to everyone who helps and supports me all the time. My grandfather used to tell me that it's hard to focus on one thing in life and it's impossible to do it perfectly. I want to tell him I just did that in diving! I have learned a lot from working on my dives and have many precious feelings of life, thanks to diving.

I became like a rookie diver all of sudden

Why do you give full marks for your 2019?

To be honest, I had a terrible year in 2018 when I lost my rhythm on the springboard and lost my feelings towards diving. I stood on the edge of a cliff and thought I might fall down to the bottom anytime. It was a very bad situation I faced. It was not only the bugs on the technical details but also the sense of controlling. I did not expect that situation after my success at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and at the 2017 Budapest Worlds. But it happened. I became like a rookie diver all of sudden: I did not know how to dive one morning. I could not finish dives by myself but had to rely on the protecting belt all the time during training. Every dive was a fear for me and I had to face all those fears one by one. I was terribly afraid that I could not dive and I could not eat and sleep well during those days. But I was very lucky, I had a great and strong team with me. Everyone in the team helped me, motivated me and encouraged me to tackle the difficulties. That is the reason why I give myself full marks for 2019, because I overcame my fears and weaknesses from the previous season and had an enlightened 2019. I am proud of myself.



Have you learned what caused those hard times?

I am a person with high demands and high expectations of myself. I consider myself a talented diver. So I was under great pressure, which I had not been aware of after my recent victories at the Rio Olympics and the World Championships. I was unbeaten all the time and I became afraid of failure. Then suddenly I lost my control of my body and sense of diving, I did not know what to do at first, but after that I was reborn as a new person. When I looked back, I found out it was not that bad a situation at all. I exaggerated the dilemma and made myself panic more. I should be grateful for the difficulties and challenges I experienced. I felt I am stronger and tougher in mind. And that is why I want to praise myself.

I don't want to waste time thinking about the result

How would you assess your performance at the international competitions this year?

I completed a golden treble in the 3m springboard individual at the Gwangju Worlds, just as I did in the synchro. My goal is to exceed the 400-point barrier all the time but in July I collected 391.00 points. I made a minor mistake in my fourth dive, a 107B (forward 3-1/2 somersaults piked), which was ranked second with 77.50. I was a little bit off of the springboard when I bounced up and then I tried my best to adjust my body gesture in balance. I tried to finish my dive with a clean entry. It was not easy to make up for the mistake at the start but I did it. If I had been young and inexperienced, I might have finished the dive with poor scores. I dealt with the problem and corrected the mistake right away. I also suffered my first failure in all the meets I have competed in since 2013 at FINA/CNSG Diving World Series in Beijing leg in March. I stepped on a stone on my way back home and that sprained my ankle at the end of February just before my departure for the Sagami-hara leg in Japan. I could not walk right away and took some days off before the competition. Then I took two golds in Japan but when I came back to Beijing my ankle was getting worse. I was below my standards and lost to Wang Han in the individual event. I can totally accept failure. It is better to take the loss earlier than late.

How were your national competitions this season?

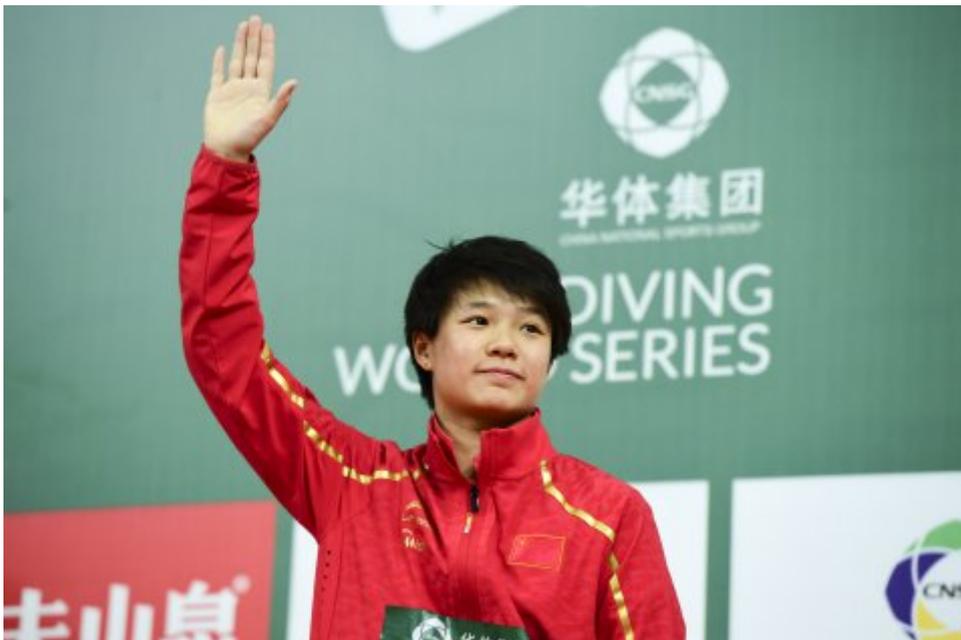
There were National Championships in April and September. I was the winner and my final scores were each over 400

points: 413.70 and 415.35. I should say I was more relaxed in the national events and competed with myself all the time. I adjusted my mistake during the competition again and dealt with the errors when I felt them. It is normal to have technical mistakes in the competition, but the most important thing is to show courage to face it.

The Tokyo Games will be your second Olympics. What is your goal? How are you preparing for it?

It must be a historic moment for me. But right now, I want to prepare for the Tokyo Olympic Games in peace and keep my mind cool. I need to focus on the winter training, which is very important to me. I don't want to waste time thinking about the result but I imagine the competition scenes every day in my mind. I want to try my best in everyday practice so that I can perform my best in the competition.

I think I am more open-minded than before



Is there any difference in your attitude towards competition? Do you still think you are a rookie?

I have always considered myself as the latecomer and rookie since I entered the national team very late, when I was 21. I was eager to prove myself and used to think about diving and competition from the perspective of diving. Now, as I grow

up, I learn to consider diving from the perspective of life. These are totally different angles. I think I am more open-minded than before. I feel a lot calmer now. I'm still hungry for victory.

How about your training, are there any differences?

We just had a physical test competition last week. We called it triathlon, but in fact there were four parts, including running 3,000 metres, plate support movement, tyre rolling and power bicycle. It is fun to test our strength, speed, endurance, coordination and flexibility. I did a good job as a 28-year-old veteran compared with our youngsters. The most important thing is to improve my physical condition and ensure the necessary strength for my diving. There are some changes in the training as I train for less time but more efficiently.

What is your way to reduce the pressure?

I enjoy watching other sports, like tennis and golf. I've only played golf once, but I like it very much. I want to distract myself from diving and learn what great athletes mean to be great. Like Roger Federer, Tiger Woods and the others.

