The Star

Special talents shine at school sports awards

Sunday, 16 Jun 2024



Ethren Ethanael, Pei Ler and Ainul Mardhiah.

Perseverance and resilience are key qualities that can transform dreams into reality, said 13-year-old aquatic swimmer Ethren Ethanael Lim Churn.

The student athlete from SJKC Chung Hua Krokop, Sarawak, said his journey in competitive swimming made him acknowledge the importance of discipline, time management, and most importantly, the ability to rise above negativity and criticism. “When you stay focused on what you want to achieve, distractions and negativity from others become less important.

“Make sure you love what you do and don’t listen to what the haters say,” he advised aspiring student athletes at the 2023 Education Ministry-Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM)-Milo Awards, on May 23.

The “Anugerah Tunas Harapan Putera” recipient said his ability to ignore the negativity around him and to concentrate on his goals instead has been key to his success.

Ethren Ethanael was among students, teachers, coaches and ministry officers who were presented with awards in 12 categories during the awards ceremony in Putrajaya.

Introduced in 1968, the KPM-MSSM-MILO Awards is an initiative to reward students who excel in sports and those who contribute to sports development in schools.

Ethren Ethanael said his journey in swimming began when he was very young, with his father introducing him to the water at age two and by age seven, he began competitive training.

“My parents have been my biggest supporters, inspiring me to pursue my passion in this sport.

“Swimming practice takes up half my afternoons daily, which is why it is important for me to have self discipline and to manage my time properly.

“To balance academics well with your sports schedule, student athletes should always pay close attention in class and ask for clarification when needed,” he said, adding that he also does light revision of his lessons at night to keep his memory sharp.

Like Ethren Ethanael, 15-year-old Tan Pei Ler who received the “Anugerah Khas Puteri” for wushu said her passion for the sport did not deter her from balancing training and academics.

The aspiring World Champion from the Bukit Jalil sports school in Kuala Lumpur said she discovered her passion for the sport when she first saw a wushu performance that left her in awe.

“I was wowed and wanted to learn it (wushu). I am very happy that I have reached this milestone today.

“Balancing academics and sports is important to me. If I don’t have training, I’ll use the free time to do my homework so I don’t waste time,” she said, adding that it is important for youths to know what they want to accomplish as that would give them direction and purpose.

Meanwhile, father of Ainul Mardhiah Mohd Afif, a 14-year-old autistic chess prodigy shared how perseverance and finding the “right platform” can enable anyone to succeed, regardless of their challenges.

It was her father, Mohd Afif Md Nasir, who sparked Ainul Mardhiah’s interest in chess when he introduced her to online chess during the movement control order.

“We stumbled on chess when the Covid-19 pandemic hit,” Mohd Afif recalled, adding that his daughter’s natural talent quickly became evident when she won chess competitions at the district and state level tournaments.

He said Ainul Mardhiah, who bagged the “Anugerah Pendidikan Khas Puteri” trains daily for three hours to prepare for monthly major tournaments.

He said despite her autism, which affects her verbal communication, she excels in chess, a sport that allows her to showcase her skills without much speaking.

“One of her biggest strengths is her photographic memory, which gives her an advantage in chess.

“I am extremely proud of her because for a person with disabilities (OKU), she may be disadvantaged when it comes to academics, but in chess, she can excel,” said Mohd Afif who is also a father to four other autistic children.

Deputy Education Minister Wong Kah Woh, who presented the awards to the recipients, said schools are crucial for discovering and nurturing talent, preparing students to represent the state and country internationally.

“We hope that with dedicated effort from all quarters, we can continue to produce more young talents to represent and bring honour to our country,” he said in his speech.