

Building Career in Two Homelands

—From representing Hong Kong to coaching in Canada

Special Interview

● A former world number 6 in mixed doubles ●

Cathy Chau Hoi Wah

Cathy Chau Hoi Wah, a former Hong Kong national team player with an impressive career including a world ranking of 6th in mixed doubles and a bronze medal at the World Championships, is here as a coach in Team Canada. This is her second time leading player to Shonai, following last year's visit. Born in Hong Kong and moving to Canada as a child, played professionally in Hong Kong before transitioning to coaching in Canada. It's been five years since her retirement. We spoke with her about the background of her unique career, her aspirations as a coach, and so on.

Interview and Writing ■ Naomi Yamaguchi

— It seems that you have decided to become a coach after retirement since you were an active player, doesn't it? Why is that?

To talk about that, I have to start with how I ended up playing for Hong Kong. I started playing badminton after my family moved from Hong Kong to Canada when I was nine. At first I was just playing for fun, and I started training when I was 12/. Isn't it late? Even so, I improved my spirits and became a top junior in the country, and then participated in the World Junior Championships for Canada. At that tournament, the Hong Kong head coach got interested in me and when he heard that I was born in Hong Kong, he invited me to go back and play for Hong Kong. But I refused immediately.



Regarding Zhang, a top-eight finisher in last year's Shonai tournament, she says 'Hopefully she'll use that experience to give it her all this year and play with confidence'.

— Did you refuse !?

Yeah. After all, although I had two nationalities, I felt like I was already Canadian, and I became a junior national player in Canada where I met badminton, and my whole family lived in Canada. I was like, "Why do I need to change the country?". I absolutely didn't want to go to Hong Kong alone. So I didn't hesitate to say "no," but I'd meet again with that Hong Kong coach. Before going to university, I also wanted to try my best to become a professional, so my father let me go to China to see if I was capable to do so. I was there for nine months and trained with a Chinese team, and during that time I met the coach again at the All China Games. He invited me to the Hong Kong team then. Although I was interested in becoming a professional, I refused again as I had no intention of becoming a



At the 2017 World Championships, Chau/Lee secured bronze medals after a loss to the formidable Indonesian pair, Tontowi Ahmad and Liliyana Natsir.

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She stood on the podium at the 2017 World Championships (fourth from the left). This is among her three most memorable competitions.

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— Move forward diligently, make the impossible possible —

-----What do you want to share with the next generations after you gained a lot of experience as a player?

Asian badminton is still far for us. What is the difference? For example, when I was a player, I learned how hardworking Japanese players were. I was involved in the team UNISYS for training at a certain time, and I saw their careful preparation for the tournament, as well as the concentration and dedication of their practice. I think Japanese people have a great mentality that we need to learn. Also, while training in China, I was able to get close to Gong Zhi Chao, former world number one and gold medalist at the Sydney Olympics. Watching the final of the Sydney Olympics on TV, I first learned the greatness of real badminton, so she has always been my idol. When I actually met her, she was so humble, despite being such an incredible person, and was willing to teach anyone anything. I learned a lot from that attitude. Not only is my technique and tactics, but I share everything I have learned through badminton with my players. And while you don't know what will happen in life, if you move forward diligently, you will definitely open the path and continue to make the impossible possible.

— Last year you came here as a coach for the first time. What did you think about this event?

First of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to compete in such a tournament. Playing against strong Asian players and seeing how they behave is an opportunity to find what we lack. What I want my players to do is to learn from others and to put all their energy into it at any time. It would be better if the results were there, but for their age, I believe that approaching and thinking is more important than the results. As for myself, it's nice to be able to meet my former friends through these opportunities and I love the quiet and beautiful area of Shonai. Last year I also participated in an excursion, and was taken to a historic temple or a jellyfish aquarium to refresh myself. There are plenty of fun this year too!



She advises Chloe Choi (left) and Chloe Hoang at Canada International 2023. "My dream and goal is for many Canadian players to perform at the top of the world."

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Cathy Chau Hoi Wah | Date of Birth: June 5, 1986

Born in Hong Kong, Cathy moved to Canada at the age of 9. In 2005, she returned to Hong Kong and began competing as a member of the Hong Kong National Team. Partnering with Lee Chun Hei in mixed doubles, she achieved a number of historic milestones: winning Hong Kong's first-ever Asian Championships title in 2014, capturing the Australia Open (Superseries) title in 2015, competing at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, and earning a bronze medal at the 2017 World Championships. She reached a career-high world ranking of No. 6. On her 34th birthday, June 5, 2020, Cathy announced her retirement from the Hong Kong National Team. She has since returned to Toronto, Canada, and embarked on a new chapter as a coach at Mandarin Badminton Club.

representative of Hong Kong. Later I told my dad about it over the phone and he yelled at me, he was like "Are you stupid? The coach remembers you, whom you've only met once, and he invited you not only once but twice. It's because he really thinks you're an excellent player!". He raised his voice, which was unusual, so I decided to rethink it, and called Hong Kong to accept the invitation. It was when I was 18.

— Have you ever asked the coach why he scouted you so enthusiastically?

Yes, I did. I asked him "Why me?". He said, "There were no Hong Kong girls who have such an ambition, strength, power and simplicity like me". It seems that he not only found my athletic ability, but also my inner potential. I'm really grateful for that.

— The feelings since leaving Canada —

— Then you built your career as a Hong Kong representative for the next 15 years, right?

Yes. However, ever since the day I headed to Hong Kong, I have always wanted to succeed and return to Canada in the future to contribute to Canada's badminton. I would like to use my experience to be involved in developing excellent training facilities, systems and programs. I was lucky enough to have two nationalities and have been selected by Hong Kong national team, but even if you wanted that, it's not a chance for anyone to get. That's why I wanted to create an environment where players who have potential to succeed in the world can develop even in Canada. That way, young Canadian talent doesn't have to be separated from their families and go abroad like I did. The owner of the Mandarin Badminton Club, where I work, had known me for a long time, and had seen the paths I had walked, and he also understand the dreams I have.

— Was it such a painful experience to be separated from your family?

It was a very exciting experience to jump from Canada to Asia into a more competitive and challenging environment, and in the end my possibilities have expanded greatly. However, it was sad that I couldn't see my family, and one particularly painful event was the death of my father in 2012. I lost my emotional support and told my mother, "I want to go back to Canada now. I don't want to be separated from anyone of you anymore." My mother encouraged me, saying, "You still have a long way to go. You shouldn't make that decision now that you're feeling upset." Just as I was trying to get some energy out again, I was told to team up with my highest ranking partner, Lee Chun Hei. I hadn't been able to practice for three or four months since my father passed away, but I returned to Hong Kong and practiced for about two weeks before taking part in a Taiwan tournament. And then we finished second. Everyone was surprised that it was a perfect match. We then won the historic gold medal for Hong Kong at the 2014 Asian Championships, and in 2017 we won the bronze medal at the World Championships. It is also memorable that we defeated many top athletes at the Australian Open in 2015 to win a gold medal. It was a transition from the worst time of my life to the best time of my career. I regretted that I wanted to show my dad what I achieved, but after losing my dad I became more independent and more desperately devoted to the sport.



In 2014, She teamed up with Lee Chun Hei (Hong Kong) and achieved a world ranking of 6th. They were also runner-up at the 2015 US Open.

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