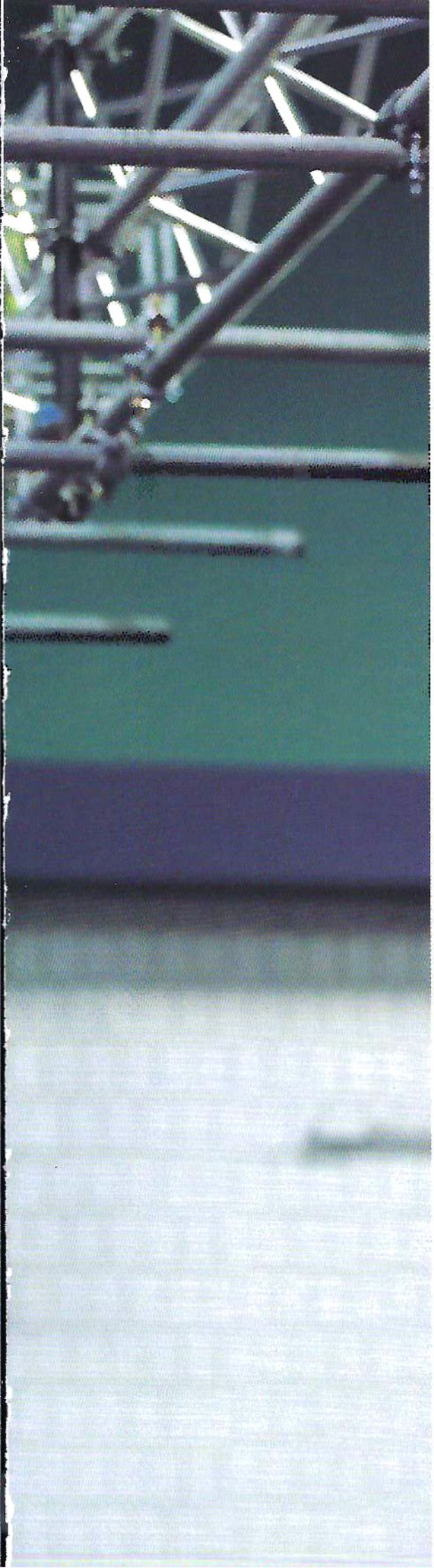

ASSOCIATION
HONG KONG OBSTACLE COURSE RACE



SUMMER WONG

CONQUERING OBSTACLES FOR NINJA SPORTS

Weeks before the Taipei Gymefit Games 2024, then 29-year-old Summer Wong injured her shoulder. Despite her daily cocktail of anti-inflammatory medication and painkillers, she could barely lift her arm to brush her teeth, never mind climbing, swinging and propelling herself from the predominantly aerial obstacles in her upcoming obstacle course race (OCR) competition.

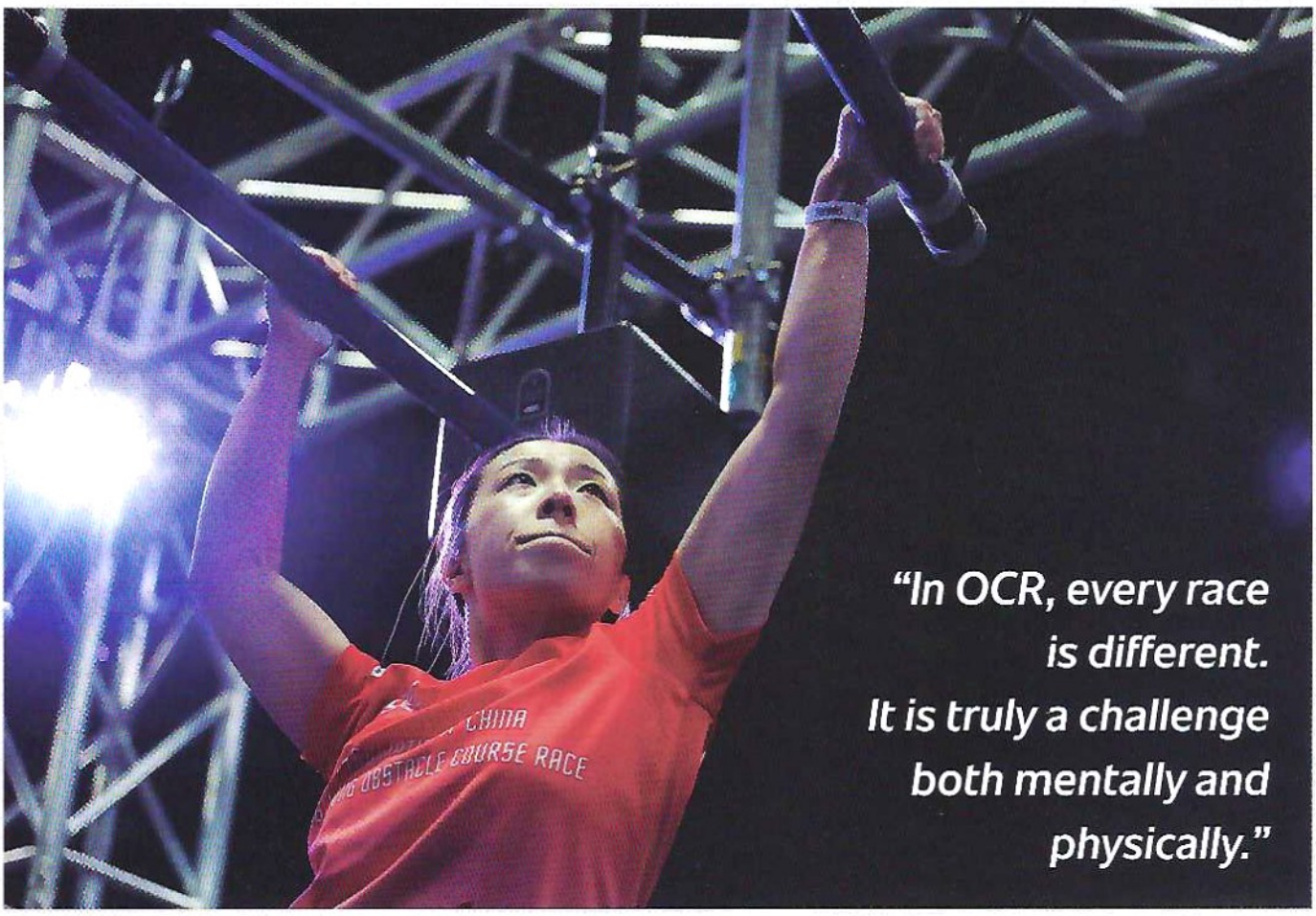
Yet, on the afternoon of April 7 last year, shoulder throbbing, Summer took first place, beating her competitors by mere seconds. The crowd went wild for the miracle win, drowning the thick tension with rambunctious applause. But underneath her delight, she was pinching herself for not doing better.

"I've practiced these obstacles countless times at our gym in Hong Kong, so I shouldn't be making any errors despite my shoulder pain," she laments. "The mistakes you make in competition reveal underlying problems, whether they be a lack of training or a need to work on balance, power, speed, hand-eye coordination – you name it."

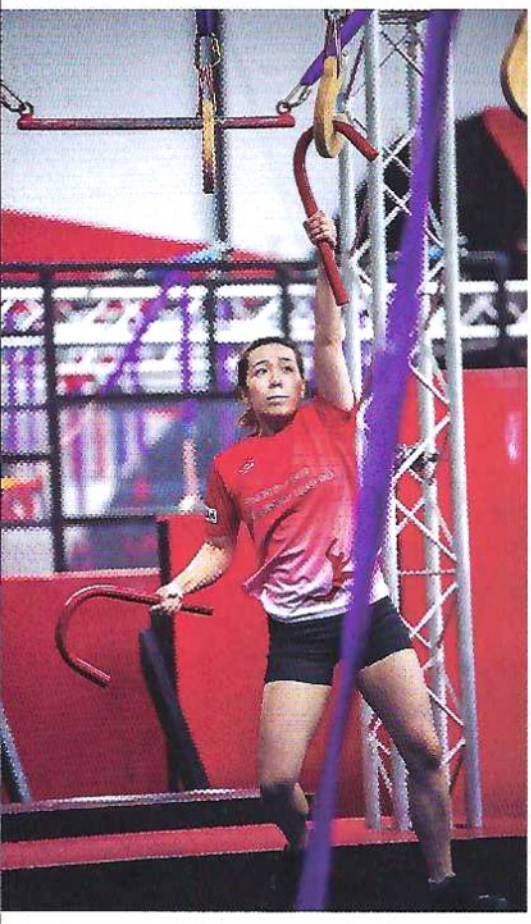
For the next few days, Summer would review the competition footage and drill the same techniques and obstacles, both at the competition venue and back at home in Hong Kong, attesting to the adage of "fall down seven times, stand up eight". She admits self-criticism is both a motivation and a flaw.

"When the next competition comes around, I can't make the same mistakes again," she says. The humility is inspiring, especially given her fear of heights.

Dating back to the 1800s with roots in military training, OCR highlights obstacles such as wall climbs, monkey bars, rope swings and



"In OCR, every race is different. It is truly a challenge both mentally and physically."



more in a sport that's an amalgamation of parkour, gymnastics and rock climbing. Races can span mere metres to kilometers and feature elements of track, road, cross country or trail running. Today, OCR leagues can be seen globally: some competitions – the Ninja series – are televised nationally, others have two athletes competing for speed on identical courses, and even more extreme versions stage courses atop 25m-tall Swiss mountains. In Hong Kong, the first of its kind was Spartan in 2017, which had competitors crawling, swinging and climbing across tracks that stretch five to 21 kilometers.

A former junior women's powerlifting champion, Summer began OCR in 2017 – the same year she graduated from Bachelor of Arts in physical education and recreation management at Hong Kong Baptist University, when she dreamt of a career in teaching. Growing up, Summer was into ball games – table tennis in elementary school, basketball in high school and softball in university – yet nothing stood out. Still, her talent loomed: she took home her first powerlifting win and broke four records in the spring of 2016, just shy of a year into the sport.

In the same year, Summer became a personal trainer at a gym that began experimenting with OCR obstacles. In 2017, she took home her first Spartan Race women's championship in the 18- to 24-year-old category in its inaugural year, followed by increasingly more OCR competitions around Southeast Asia. Unlike other sports she's done, she enjoys the razor-sharp focus OCR demands and the unpredictable variations in every race.

"In powerlifting, I am in full control; the result you get in a competition is the fruit of countless

practice: the moves are almost choreographed. In OCR, however, every race is different. No matter how much you train at your own gym, the textures of the grips or the distance between obstacles on site, for instance, can still vary. It is truly a challenge both mentally and physically," says Summer.

Caught at a Crossroads

The attributes of good OCR athletes, however, take a complete 180-turn from that of a powerlifter. The former commands continual, explosive strength, high flexibility, fine motor control and, most contrastingly, lower body mass so they can swing and jump farther and faster between obstacles. The latter, however, spotlights on single bursts of power, big muscle groups and even bigger legs to support heavy weights.

So while it pained Summer to leave behind a devotion of three years, she knew she had to bid farewell to powerlifting.

"The explosive strength required in OCR will deplete with age, meaning there's an expiry date with this sport. I am confident I can return to weightlifting at a later age with regular practice," she says. "I want to focus on OCR when I still can."

Since then, she's won trophies around Asia and, impressively, partaken in internationally renowned games like the World Ninja League Championships in America and Ninja World Cup in Australia.

More than a Sport

With recognition, however, comes the pressure of maintaining and topping personal records – not an easy task for such a volatile sport.

To add onto the mental load, she became head coach, in 2023, to the Association of China Hong Kong Obstacle Course, which, as of this April, received the greenlight from the HKSAR government to wear the regional emblem during competitions.



"In the beginning, OCR competitions were fun; I joined them to learn, to enjoy the thrill of the race, and to make friends. Now, I'd consider whether I have the capacity for them and whether I'd have enough time to train for them. Every time I stand on the starting line, I am upholding my name and representing both the Association and Hong Kong," she says. "Sure, it can be stressful but it's also extremely motivating."

Just last month, Summer was in Barbados for the 2025 Ninja Throwdown and Munich Airport for the Ninja Championship Series, where she was up against OCR world champions, members of national climbing teams, and world record holders. The event is backed by the very same organizers who, in 2021, hosted an OCR race 25m above Bungy Niouc in Switzerland, one of the highest bungy jumps in Europe. In September, she's competing in the OCR World Championships 2025 in Sweden.

Going forward, Summer hopes to qualify in the top 10 globally by 2028. Currently, she sits at around 30-plus.

"I am far from an elite athlete when compared to the crème de la crème internationally. There's a long way to go, but Hong Kong OCR athletes are slowly getting there."

Text: Joyce Yip