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Philip Chan values the fight for democracy as highly as his football career. Photo: Felix Wong

Taking aim at the goal

Footballer Philip Chan knows what it means to represent Hong Kong on the pitch. Now he wants to fight for his city's future, too, writes **Vien Tsang**

No one can question Philip Chan Siu-kwan's devotion to Hong Kong.

In September, the 22-year-old scored two goals to help Hong Kong reach the knock-out stages of the football tournament at the Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

But rather than celebrate, when he returned home he turned his attention to something even more important: standing up for young Hongkongers.

On just his second day back in the city, he showed up at Admiralty to join the Occupy protesters.

"I am very touched by how united Hongkongers can be. It's like a small town here," he says. "I have been here on and off for at least 10 days. We need to fight for our city and this is why I am here."

Chan, a Year Four student studying exercise and health at the University of Hong Kong, says he doesn't want to be defined as either an athlete or a student, but rather an ordinary Hongkonger fighting for the future.

"Let's not describe this as just a movement of students. They may have started it, but what is being fought for, genuine universal suffrage, is beneficial for everyone," he says.

"Recently I have realised that we may be the last generation to enjoy Hong Kong as it is.

I am very touched by how united Hongkongers can be. We need to fight for our city and this is why I am here.

If I am going to have kids one day, I want them to grow up in an environment with hope, where the core values of our home still exist."

Chan doesn't consider himself a radical, and doesn't want his profile to distract from the important issues.

"I think we have to be persistent. Even if in the end there are no quick changes, this fighting spirit should continue."

But Chan isn't just focused on social justice; he is also coming to an important stage of his football career. He was one of the stars of the football tournament at the Asian Games, scoring against Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to help Hong Kong progress to the last 16, where they lost to South Korea.

"The two goals were definitely a great surprise and I am happy with our performance," he says. "But I am going to look forward in search of more surprises."

Chan, a defensive midfielder for Premier League team South China, is playing his fourth season in the top flight. When he was just 14, he trained with Brazilian team Gremio, and has spent time with the mainland side Guangzhou R&F.

These experiences have helped Chan develop as a player and a person. But despite his success on the pitch, he's not getting ahead of himself.

"For now, I am not thinking of leaving Hong Kong. I want to establish myself as a core member of South China and gain more caps for Hong Kong."

Chan's father, Chan Pak-hung, was a champion jockey so he understands what it takes to compete at the highest level of a sport. But he doesn't feel the need to live up to expectations, preferring to keep his head down and simply work hard.

"Any pressure is from myself, rather from my father's name," he says. "We both know that the process counts more than anything. [I just want] to try my best and enjoy it."