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— Singapore silat great Sheik Alau'ddin on Alfian Juma'en's final victory

Singaporean ignores foot injury and downs world champion to claim gold

Reports by SAZALI ABDUL AZIZ

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He strode into the arena with a Singapore scarf tied round his head, a la The Karate Kid.

Fittingly, Singapore's teenage silat exponent Alfian Juma'en went on to emulate Daniel LaRusso (or Jaden Smith, if you've only watched the 2010 remake) and defeated his higher-ranked opponent in the final.

The 18-year-old pulled off the match-winning move in the dying seconds of the match, all while carrying a serious injury.

Alfian's 5-0 win in the tanding (match) Class F (70-75kg) category of the SEA Games silat competition at Expo Hall Two yesterday over world champion Vietnam's Tran Dinh Nam meant he successfully defended his title, won in Myanmar.

It was also Singapore's only gold medal in the sport at this Games.

Chuckling, Alfian told The New Paper later: "The scarf was given to me by my mother the night before the final.

"I didn't really know what to do with it, so I just decided to use it as a headband."

It turned out to be a fitting inspiration for the Ngee Ann Polytechnic student.

Just 20 seconds into the match, he managed to execute a takedown on Tran.

Alfian went on to pull off two more takedowns in the first round to establish a commanding lead over the Vietnamese, who had triumphed at the Pencak Silat World Championships in January, beating Alfian in the quarter-finals along the way.

But Tran showed mettle to fight back in the next round, delivering a flurry of kicks and punches which found their mark.

Just 26 seconds into the third and final round, Alfian suffered a deep cut between the toes of his left foot, after blocking a stinging kick from Tran.

Drops of blood were splattered over the green competition mat.

The match resumed after Alfian was given medical treatment, and the teenager seemed shaken by his injury.

Sensing his chance, Tran went on the offensive, and had his Singaporean opponent backpedalling.

But, with just 15 seconds to go, Alfian pulled off a counter-manoeuve to toss Tran onto the mat, earning the points which effectively handed him the win.

Alfian, who deferred two semesters of his business studies diploma to prepare for the Games, said: "At first, I didn't feel the pain (of the foot injury).

"But when I saw the blood and I looked at my foot, only then I realised it was very bad.

"But I told myself, I have to be strong and ignore the pain, at least for the home crowd.

"They were the best. Even before I entered the arena, they cheered so loud and it gave me so much confidence."

The cut needed nine stitches when he was treated at the Changi General Hospital later.

CONFIDENT

Local silat great Sheik Alau'ddin, who was watching on the sidelines of Alfian's fight, said he was never worried that the injury might affect the youngster.

"He's a very composed boy," said the two-time world champion.

"All my stress from the first day of the silat competition, about the performance of our athletes, and as organising chairman, went away when he won the gold."

Alfian, who got emotional on the podium when the strains of Majulah Singapura were heard, said he was in dreamland.

"To be able to defend my title in front of a home crowd, defeating a world champion... the feeling cannot be described," he said.

"If I said 'happy' and multiply it by 100, it's still not enough.

"All the effort, the hard work in training I've put in, all the dieting I've gone through and the sacrifices with my studies, they were worth it."

Alfian's gold was the only bright spot for local silat at this SEA Games, with a



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— Alfian (left) on shedding tears of joy on the podium

total tally of one gold, one silver, and six bronzes.

The 12 other gold medals in the silat competition were equally shared by Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia.