

Asian Games 2018 countdown: Sheik Farhan (silat)

Focused fighter sees no value in playing 2nd fiddle

High expectations of himself spur world champion on as he pushes to the limit and to the very last second

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Three rounds of silat. Two minutes per round. Six minutes in total. Three hundred and sixty seconds. Out of which 355 seconds have passed in the final.

And Sheik Farhan is still losing. It's the world silat championships in Phuket, Thailand in January 2015 and he's 17, a kid, son of the legendary Sheik Alau'ddin, just old enough to fight in the senior category, unseasoned, not expected to win by anyone.

Except himself. "I was going there to win. I didn't go there expecting maybe I will get bronze. I was expecting myself to win the gold medal. I know at that

point of time nobody expected me of all people.

"I had just come up to the senior team. I wasn't really the best when I was in the junior category. I wasn't the one that people brought up early to the senior squad for trials."

Yet he expects of himself. Farhan is sitting in the half-darkness of a silat training hall, a polite, sombre man who rations smiles as if he has a limited stock of them, a fast-moving man who talks slowly, an athlete coated with the quiet, comfortable assurance of the confident.

He's only 20 now and already a double world champion and back then in 2015 he expects of himself because he's ready. "In training you always have to go 100 per cent, they always push you to a high level. In

FIGHTING FOR HIMSELF

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SHEIK FARHAN, on how his 2015 world title was just validation of his talent.

competition the level you go at it depends on how hard your opponent gives it to you."

He expects then, but expecting isn't ever enough, you have to do, you have to show, you have to go and claim confirmation of your talent, not for anyone else, just for yourself.

But 355 seconds are up and he isn't winning.

In the 90-95kg category he fights only from the quarter-finals onwards. First fight, he struggles a little. Second fight is "relatively manageable". Third fight is the final and in the first round he's down 6-0 on points.

"In the last two rounds I just try to do whatever I do in training." He goes as "hard" as he can, he goes at "100 per cent". And sometimes

when you give everything, you get everything.

Because in the last four seconds of a 360-second fight, he takes the lead. And never gives it back.

Farhan is a study in understatement, his tone doesn't shift, his volume doesn't rise, his body language doesn't change, not even when he's discussing those last four seconds and how they change him.

"It was just kind of a normal feeling of winning. It wasn't like, 'Wow, I am a world champion'... The emotion is like something new, I didn't really understand, I didn't really feel whatever I thought I would. I didn't know my life was going to change that much."

Change is more interviews, change is in his status for suddenly he's one of silat's top athletes, change is the expectation people attach to him, change is the support he and silat get.

Of course he'll tell you he hasn't changed, not as a person, but he does as a competitor. Because in 2015 with that win he knows his worth, he confirms his skill, he validates all his practice.

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In December 2016 he wins the world championship again, in 2017 he wins SEA Games gold and now he's going to the Asian Games. He's not the type to project or boast or show his excitement, but you know he'll be ready.

Because of all people he knows every second counts.

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