

Hazim ready for SEA Games rematch



Hazim Yusli at the South-east Asian Sultan's Pencak Silat Championship this week. The 17-year-old had to settle for the silver after withdrawing from the Class B final. Singapore ended second on the medal tally with two golds, six silvers and two bronzes. PHOTO: SINGAPORE SILAT FEDERATION

Nicole Chia

For two months, Singapore silat exponent Hazim Yusli knuckled down during training sessions in anticipation of his rematch with Hidayat Limonu at this week's South-east Asian Sultan's Pencak Silat Championship in Manila.

He was keen to avenge his loss to the Indonesian in the final of the World Martial Arts Masterships in August, but the 17-year-old injured his right foot en route to victory in Monday's semi-finals. He was eventually forced to withdraw from the Class B (50-55kg) final.

The duo could face off again in Manila in December, and Hazim, a junior and senior world champion, has vowed to come back stronger in his debut SEA Games.

"I felt a bit disappointed because I really wanted to fight him again, but I didn't want to take the risk of worsening the injury," said the Institute of Technical Education College West student. "He's a tough opponent for me but, hopefully, I'll beat him at the SEA Games."

Touted as a pre-SEA Games competition, the Sultan's championship saw Singapore's athletes winning two gold, six silver and two bronze medals to finish second in the medal table behind Indonesia (5-3-1).

While silat powerhouses Malaysia and Vietnam did not compete, Singapore Silat Federation chief Sheik Alau'ddin believes the Republic's performance bodes well for the Nov 30-Dec 11 SEA Games, where he is targeting two golds.

Singapore's two golds at this week's competition were won by Nurzuhairah Yazid (women's artistic singles) and the men's artistic team.

Sheik said: "Indonesia and the Philippines' first teams were there, so we could see (their standard).

"Realistically, the competition is a good warm-up for us and the SEA Games target remains two gold medals. We just need to stay focused and keep working hard for the Games."

This year's SEA Games will feature fewer match categories with only the lighter weight classes con-

tested – the heaviest categories are Class B (50-55kg) for women and Class D (60-65kg) for men.

As a result, men's Class J (90-95kg) champion Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin and three silver medallists will not be able to defend their medals. At the 2017 SEA Games, the silat athletes won two golds, four silvers and six bronzes.

But Sheik is confident they can achieve his target, citing the Oct 25-27 Singapore Open as another opportunity for the national athletes to prove their mettle.

Hazim is ready for one of the biggest fights of his life in Manila. He said: "I'm tall for that class but skinnier than my opponents, so I need to build up my strength. My height is an advantage because I have the height and reach to kick, but if my opponents start to brawl, it will be harder for me to win points because of my strength.

"(Being a world champion) is one of my biggest achievements, but that's in the past. I'm trying to focus on the future."

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