

Singapore's gold medal hopes in silat rest on the broad shoulders of (from left): Sheik Farhan, 17, Muhammad Iqbal, 21, and Nur Alfian, 18. Farhan is a world champion, Iqbal a South-east Asian champion while Alfian is a SEA Games champion. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



Silat

GOLD MEDALS ON OFFER: 13

Singapore have a reigning world champion in their ranks in Sheik Farhan, but other fighters will have to step up if the hosts are to match top guns Vietnam and Indonesia in the arena.

WATCH OUT FOR

Sheik Farhan

The reigning world champion has three golds from the World Championships, Sijori Championships and South-east Asian Championships. The 17-year-old is looking to emulate his famous father, Sheik Alau'ddin, the holder of four SEA Games golds.

Nur Alfian

The defending champion of the last Games' Class F (70-75kg) title is set to re-establish his dominance in this class. The 18-year-old is high in confidence after clinching a gold in April's South-east Asian Championships.

Muhammad Iqbal

The 21-year-old will be looking to set things right after being unable to clinch any medals in his past two Games. Gold looks likely this year after Iqbal clinched silver in January's World Championships and gold in April's South-east Asian Championships.

TEAM SINGAPORE

Men

- Muhammad Ridhwan Selamat (Match Class A)
- Irham Mustafa Kamal (Match Class B)
- Muhammad Haziq Mohamad Yusli (Match Class C)
- Abdul Raaziq Abdul Rashid (Match Class D)
- Sheik Ferdous Sheik Alau'ddin (Match Class E)
- Muhammad Nur Alfian Juama'eri (Match Class F)
- Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin (Match Class H)
- Muhammad Iqbal Abdul Rahman (Artistic singles)
- Sheik Ferdous Sheik Alau'ddin (Artistic doubles)
- Muhammad Shakir Juanda (Artistic doubles)

Women

- Nur Shafiqah Sheik Alau'ddin (Match Class B)
- Nurul Shafiqah Mohamed Saiful (Match Class C)
- Nurul Suhaila Mohamed Saiful (Match Class D)
- Nurul Khairunnisa Azlani (Artistic team)
- Nur Fazlin Juma'eri (Artistic team)
- Nur Shafiqah Sheik Alau'ddin (Artistic team)

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2015

THE STRAITS TIMES

Silat looking to youth to rekindle glory days

By JEREMY LIM

THEY may boast two world champions in their line-up, but if the Singapore silat community is hoping for the sport to return to its previous heights, then it will need its less-heralded athletes to shine at next month's SEA Games.

In 14 editions, silat has won 16 golds. From 1991 to 2003, a total of seven Games, it won 11 golds - an average of 1.57 golds per Games. In recent years, this figure has dwindled. Over the past five editions, the sport has delivered only four golds - an average of 0.8 gold per Games.

This year, Persi chief Sheik Alau'ddin is tipping the sport to bag at least three golds for the first time in five Games. He is

banking on Nur Alfian, 18, Muhammad Iqbal, 21, as well as world champion Sheik Farhan, 17, to deliver the goods.

Even though the team have an average age of just 20, the team manager thinks that his young charges are in a good position to meet his expectations.

He said: "These young athletes have nothing to lose. The pressure is there but they just have to enjoy and compete in front of the home crowd. Hopefully, we will be able to clinch more than three golds from the Games with the potential in the team."

Despite an early setback to the team's gold-medal hopes after the withdrawal of former world champion Shakir Juanda from the contact event due to a knee injury,

the silat federation has Class J (90-95kg) world champion Sheik Farhan to fill in for Shakir in the Class H (80-85kg) category.

The teenager was relieved when the Singapore National Olympic Council approved Persi's application for Farhan to replace Shakir after initially rejecting the appeal for him to compete in the Games' Class J category.

Said Farhan, who has since dropped to 84kg: "I felt bad when Shakir had to withdraw from the Games but now that I'll be fighting, I'm aiming for gold. There is no point in aiming for anything less.

"Each match will be like a final for me with the cheer of the home crowd to spur me on, unlike the other matches which take place

overseas."

Iqbal, who is competing in his third SEA Games, is desperate to make up for his mistakes in the artistic category. In 2011, he dropped his keris during his performance and the error left him without a medal.

He fancies his chances after winning silver in January's World Championships and gold in April's South-east Asian Championships.

He said: "I've had a new coach (Hamdi Muhammad) since last year and aside from improving my techniques and moves, he reminded me that only I can make the effort to change myself.

"I think my results have reflected the progression of my improvement and hopefully I will perform

well especially in front of my family and the home crowd."

The stakes are higher for Alfian. Despite his tender age, the Class F (70-75kg) fighter already holds a gold medal from the 2013 SEA Games and will be looking to retain his title on home soil.

However, he received an early wake-up call after being knocked out by Vietnamese Tran Dinh Nam in the quarter-finals of the World Championships in Phuket.

He said: "It was a timely reminder that I am not dominant in my class yet so I am motivated to be fully prepared for the Games.

"All of us are going to fight on home soil for the first time but we are ready to fight till the last bell in front of everyone."

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