

# SPORT

## YOUNG SILAT FIGHTERS AIM HIGH

Sheik confident world junior champs and team-mates have what it takes to reach top

Vanessa Kang

Silat has been a gold mine for Singapore for over two decades, with Sheik Alau'ddin's exploits in the 1990s putting the Republic on the world map.

The sport has since won a total of 11 world titles with the latest coming in January last year, when Sheik's son, Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin, 18, won the the 90-96kg category at the World Championships in Phuket, when he was 17.

The win, coming at such a tender age, signalled that a new wave of younger exponents is on the rise, and that was again indicative when 14-year-old Hazim Yusli, and 15-year-old Sharifah Shazza Shamsuri, topped their respective classes at the Dec 26-31 World Junior Cham-

pionships in Kuala Lumpur.

Singapore finished as the third best nation out of a field of 12, with a total of two gold, five silver and seven bronze medals.

Hazim defeated Vietnam's Lin Duc Hoc 5-0 to claim the Class A (39-43kg) title, while Sharifah won in Class E (55-59kg).

Sheik, now the chief executive of the Singapore Silat Federation (Persisi), had high praise for the youngsters, saying: "Hazim has a great future ahead of him because to be able to win the world junior championships at just 14 years old, it's amazing.

"Sharifah was excellent in the first round before the accident. It was the first time such a thing had happened and it was understandable that she got distracted but I think she handled it well."



Hazim Yusli hammered his Vietnamese rival 5-0 in Kuala Lumpur to win the Class A title, while Sharifah Shazza Shamsuri took the honours in Class E after a fiasco sparked by a protest over refereeing in the semi-finals ended with the top-three finishers all being given gold medals. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

He was referring to Sharifah's match against an Indonesian, which was marred by protests from both camps and even saw a member of the Indonesian contingent dragging a one-litre bottle of water across the arena and slamming it on to the competition mat to express their unhappiness.

In order to appease both Singapore and Indonesia, Megat Zulkarnain Oardin, secretary-general of

Malaysia's silat federation, decided to award gold medals to the top-three finishers.

Hazim and Sharifah are part of a group of about 100 promising junior fighters, aged between 14 and 16, who are currently training competitively with Persisi.

Both are looking to follow in their illustrious seniors' footsteps.

Said Hazim: "I may be young but think I have what it takes to go to

the next level and become a world champion or at least be a SEA Games gold medallist."

Sharifah too, exuded that confidence, saying: "The world juniors gave me a good head start in a sense that I know what to expect in the future and I will train hard to win a world championship one day."

Sheik is also confident that these young fighters are capable of carrying the torch.

"The younger generation definitely have what it takes to become world champions and do both Singapore and silat proud because they have the heart and soul to be the best," he said. "They want to be here and they know where they want to go and being so young, they have another 15 years or so for them to achieve their goal."

vankang@sph.com.sg