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ALFIAN THE ONLY HOPE

Teenager is only Singaporean in silat's 10 finals after Malaysians boot three local hopefuls out

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Heading into yesterday's South-east Asia (SEA) Games pencak silat tanding (match) semi-finals, Singapore had a shot at winning five gold medals.

But, after the dust had settled at Expo Hall Two, only one hopeful remains.

The hosts will now rely on Class F (70-75kg) fighter Alfian Juma'en, who was the only Singaporean gold medallist at the 2013 Games in Myanmar, for a silat triumph.

What perhaps made the losses yesterday extra painful was that, of the four defeats, three were by opponents from Causeway rivals Malaysia.

Nurul Suhaila lost 5-0 to Siti Rahmah Nasir in the women's Class D (60-65kg), and local silat great Sheik Alau'ddin's two teenage sons, Sheik Ferdous and Sheik Farhan, also lost to Malaysian rivals.

Class E (65-70kg) exponent Ferdous was beaten 5-0 by Al Jufferi Jamari, while Class H (80-85kg) fighter Farhan was beaten 5-0

by Robial Sobri.

Singapore's other semi-finalist, Nur Syafiqah Sheikh Alau'ddin, lost to Laos' Olathay Sounthavong 4-1, after capitulating in the third and final round having led the match on points after two rounds.

Suhaila, Ferdous, Farhan and Syafiqah will all settle for the bronze at today's medal ceremony, leaving only 18-year-old Alfian to contest for gold.

Even then, his 5-0 triumph over Fauzi Khalid was contentious, going down to the wire in the match, which features three rounds of two minutes.

With the two fighters neck and neck on points, Fauzi attempted a takedown on Alfian in literally the final second of the match, which Alfian countered with a takedown of his own.

The clock stopped at 1min 59sec.

The Singapore camp felt Alfian had pulled off a match-winning manoeuvre.

The Malaysian camp, though, felt the points should go to them because they allege Alfian had illegally pulled on Fauzi's torso padding.

After the referee had consulted the five jurors from neutral Asean countries, the points were awarded to Singapore.

Enraged, Fauzi ripped off the torso padding and stormed away from the ring, leaving Alfian's hand to be raised in victory.

The drama did not end there.

Post-match, Malaysian silat officials alleged they were not able to lodge a formal protest against the result.



Megat Zulkarnain Oмарdin, the secretary general of Malaysia's silat federation, said: "We all saw how Fauzi had his place in the final taken away from him in the last second.

"We went through the proper channel after seeing video evidence which clearly showed Fauzi was pulled.

"But when we went to the appeals committee with the protest fee of \$200, they insist on it being US\$200, which was not made clear in the rulebook.

"Where were we to find US\$200 in 10 minutes, which was the deadline after a match? Based on that, our protest was rejected."

He later added: "Whatever it is, I want to congratulate Fauzi, he fought bravely, like a man.

"We understand that in subjective sports like these, when the competition is 50-50, this can happen.

"What rankles us is the fact there was just one second to go, and Fauzi would have won 4-1.

"But no matter how painful and bitter the decision is, we will accept it because we don't want to ruin the programme tomorrow, where we have (VIPs) arriving for the finals, and we want to give all our attention to that."

But Sheik, who is Singapore's silat chief, later told TNP: "Don't listen to them, it's a waste of time. They have no case.

"This (the payment of protest fees in US dollars) is a standard thing. You have to be prepared. When we went to Phuket for the World Championships in January, I had a big stack of US dollars with me for this reason."

THE LAST ONE STANDING:
Nur Alfian Juma'en (left) will be competing in the men's tanding Class F (70-75kg).
TNP PHOTO: KEN LU



ALSO OUT: Singapore's Nur Shafiqah Sheikh Alau'ddin (inset, left) lost to Laos' Olathay Sounthavong in the women's tanding class B (50-55kg) semi-final. PHOTO: AFP

To back him up, he showed TNP a copy of the competition rules, which state the protest fee indeed had to be in US dollars.

When asked what he thought of the Malaysian claims that video evidence backed them, the two-time world champion said: "Whatever it is, Fauzi didn't complete the match.

"He just stormed off and didn't fight in the last second of the match. I can also say he should be disqualified anyway."

Alfian, meanwhile, just wants to focus on his final today (5pm) against Vietnam's Tran Dinh Nam.

He lost to Tran in the quarter-finals of the World Championships in Phuket, Thailand, in January.

But he says he is banking on home support to fire him to another gold medal.

"Of course I feel a bit of pressure, firstly because I'm the only Singaporean left and secondly because I'm the defending champion," said the Ngee Ann Polytechnic student.

"But, as we saw today, the home crowd was an advantage to me.

"Their support gave me an extra boost. I was tired at one point, but their cheers reminded me to make their time here worthwhile. After all, they came to watch us win.

"I'll be out for revenge and hopefully I can claim it tomorrow."