

Shakir goes from flab to fabulous

Straits Times, 2 December 2012, Page 55

Article also available on Microfilm Reel NL32327

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Once fat and lazy, he worked nine years on his silat act and is now world champion

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This is a story about a silat world champion that took nine years and 16kg to write.

In 2003, Shakir Juanda was a pudgy 14-year-old standing at just 1.5m but weighing 70kg.

"If eating was a sport, I would take part in it," the newly crowned fighter recalled. "I was fat, lazy, loved to stay at home and loved to eat."

The irony is that on his way to the "I" Class (85kg-90kg) victory at the 15th World Pencak Silat Championship in Chiang Rai, Thailand, on Monday, he had to gain weight - 16kg to be exact.

Flashback to 2003. He was told by his grandfather to get off the couch and get fit by signing up for classes at the Grasio Sports Silat School.

Shakir went from flab to fab. Within four years, he slimmed down to 56kg and made it to the national team in 2007, when he competed in the SEA Games in Korat, Thailand, and finished fourth in the "C" class (56kg-60kg).

The irony is that he ended up putting some of those kilos back on, because he felt he stood a better chance in the heavier weight classes.

In the cocoon that was his Kem-

bangan home, he devoured five meals a day packed with carbohydrates and topped it all with weight-gain supplements.

The metamorphosis was complete a short month later, when he emerged as a 76kg, 1.73m tall beefcake.

Shakir's gambit paid off. He bagged a silver at the 2009 SEA Games in Vientiane, Laos, and a bronze at the 2010 World Championships in Jakarta.

But he wanted more than just a third-placed finish at the world event. Cue more weight gain, as he put on another 10kg to finally win gold in Thailand.

On Monday, he breezed through with 5-0 wins over Russia's Akim Terentev in the qualifying round, Briton Dwayne Crizzle in the quarter-finals and Dutchman Rion Rijker in the semi-finals.

In the final against Vietnam's Le Si Kien, Shakir lost the first round and had to stage a rousing fight-back to win 3-2.

"I have a positive mindset. When I step into the arena, I feel confident. That is already half the battle won," he said of his triumph.

"I was losing badly at the start and I wondered if this is another story about me losing. But I kept believing and never stopped pressing and attacking.

"Eventually, I managed a take-down in the third round. That was the turning point. I went on to win even though I didn't know I had won because there was so much adrenalin pumping and the arena was so noisy."

Shakir, a part-time administration staff at the Singapore Silat Federation (Persisi), is Singapore's first world champion since 2007 when the men's artistic team of Syarif Hidayatullah Abdul Raziz, Abdul Rahim Anwar and Hafiz Azhar won, and Razif Moklas and Imran Abdul Rahman clinched individual titles.

He now joins 12 other Singapo-

rean world champions in Persi's Hall of Fame in its Bedok premises.

The 24-year-old's achievement has Persi CEO and former double world champion Sheik Alau'ddin predicting a bright future for him.

Sheik said: "Shakir can go far as he is still young. As long as he wants to fight and win for Singapore, he can still be a champion."

"This world champion title has opened doors for him. The Singapore Silat Federation and our coaches will keep supporting him. He just needs to toughen on the mental aspects, maintain his physical fitness and continue training."

Singapore head coach Hidayat Hosni said: "Shakir is very dedicated towards training. He is very hum-

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ble and always willing to learn and dares to try new skills.

"He needs to improve in maintaining his composure during fights. He can still achieve for the next five years."

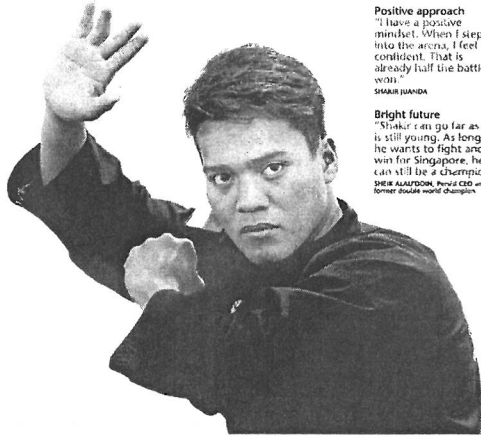
With a bright future ahead of him, Shakir will need to be hungry, quite literally, for more silat glory.

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Shakir Juanda, a silat exponent for the past nine years, won the 'Y' Class title at the World Championships on Monday.

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