

Heel injury may hurt Stefan's SEA Games bid

■ BY VALERIE CHIA

A HEEL injury is threatening to jeopardise national triple jumper Stefan Tseng's chances of qualifying for the South-east Asia (SEA) Games in December.

The 19-year-old Auckland University of Technology student, who set a national record of 16.04m at the Negri Sembilan Open in April, needs to clear 16.07m by August to qualify for the Laos Games.

However, his injury, which started off as a slight bruise on his right heel three weeks ago while in competition at the Arafura Games in Australia, threatens to derail his bid.

It was further aggravated last Sunday at the Singapore Junior Athletic Championships where he jumped 15.80m to win the boys' U-20 event.

Stefan now feels a slight pain even when he walks. The pain sharpens when he lands for his jumps.

His coach, Valeri Obidko, has ruled out the athlete taking part in upcoming competitions for now.

However, the Russian says that such heel injuries are common for jumpers. "It's an ordinary bruise on the soft tissue under the heel," said the national jumps coach.

"Now, it depends on how quickly he recovers before we decide on when he'll compete again."



Despite his heel injury, national triple jumper Stefan still won the boys' U-20 event at the Singapore Junior Athletic Championships last Sunday. But the win came at a price - the injury was aggravated by his participation in the competition. ST PHOTO: ALBERT SIM

Stefan, who reckons he needs three weeks to regain full fitness, said: "I'm not upset as I've had this injury a couple of times before. It's not very serious and I'm still confident of qualifying."

Still, the injury could not have come at a worse time for the rising young talent. Based on his performances this year, Stefan is currently the top-ranked jumper in South-east Asia.

The Singapore Athletic Association has confirmed that he is the only jumper in the region to clear the 16-m mark this year.

This puts him in medal contention if he qualifies for the Games.

In contrast, the top-three winners of the triple jump at the 2007 SEA Games have not come close to their winning distances.

Obidko said that gold medallist Phialakong Theerayut of Thailand, who won in 2007 with his 16.44m effort, and his compatriot Sukon Kittisak, who took silver with 16.21m, have managed only 15.9m and 15.8m respectively in competitions this year.

Third-placed Delicano Jobert (16.07m) of the Philippines is jumping less than 15m.

To aid his recovery, Stefan is presently avoiding jumping during training and is focusing only on running and weight training. He will also meet Dr Ben Tan, head and senior consultant sports physician at Changi Sports Medicine Centre, on Friday for a full assessment of his injury.

When asked if the SAA would appeal for Stefan's inclusion in the SEA Games squad if he fails to qualify, technical director C. Veeramani said it was too early to comment.

"We can only decide what's best for him after the doctor's assessment," he said.

"And even if we do appeal, we will need concrete information stating the basis of our decision to do so."

Said Stefan: "I definitely want to qualify on my own merit and I'm confident I can. I'll work to achieve that."

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