

Liu and Cheng off to a good start in Haifa

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SINGAPORE'S dynamic 420 sailing duo have begun their bid for the world crown with a bang.

Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng had led the International 420 World Championships Open category pack in Haifa, Israel, after their second second qualifying race yesterday morning.

They finished in second and first place in the first two of the three qualifying races.

They have since slipped to sixth place overall after finishing 16th in their final qualifying race, and are currently on 19 points.

However the 19-year-olds aren't letting their poor showing in their third race affect them, according to team manager Serena Wong.

"They're a bit tired after their long

morning – they had four to five hours out on the water," said Wong over the phone.

"However, they're still upbeat despite that last race and they're looking forward to today.

"Overall it was a pretty good day for them."

The boys have built a bit of a reputation for themselves after their early lead, as locals flocked to heap their praise on the them after seeing them top the scoreboards.

"The locals saw the scores and came up to us saying: 'The Singapore team is great! You guys are going to win the World Championships!'" recalled Wong.

"It's a little bit early for that though and to be honest, it was a little pressurising! Things were a little more quiet after that third race though!"

Wong feels that the changing conditions might have thrown off Liu and Cheng in their last race of the day – and the weather fluctuations show no real signs of abating.

She said: "It was really gusty today – we could even feel the strong wind onshore.

"On top of that, the winds have also been a bit shiftier as well.

"The lucky ones would have been able to spot the patchy conditions all over the course and use them to their advantage.

"The conditions are definitely tougher as compared to our first few days of training and according to the locals, the weather is going to get hotter and drier."

But Liu and Cheng know the French contingent will give them a real fight for the 420 crown.

They were run close by French pair Damien Brenac and Julien Lacaze in June's Kieler Woche in Kiel, Germany.

Meanwhile, Brenac and Lacaze's compatriots, Clement Ikhlef and Clement Pequin, currently head the standings in Haifa.

"The French team will definitely be tough competition for the boys," said Wong.

STANDINGS

OPEN QUALIFIERS

1. Clement Ikhlef and Clement Pequin (FRA) 5 pts
2. Georgios Vasilas and Stamatia Fragiadaki (GRE) 11 pts
3. Malte Winkel and Lucas Thielemann (GER) 15 pts
4. Mike Wood and Hugh Brayshaw (GBR) 15 pts
5. Edoardo Mancinelli S. and Leonardo Cucchiara (ITA) 18 pts
6. Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng (SIN) 19 pts

LADIES QUALIFIERS

1. Anna Burnet and Flora Stewart (GBR) 11 pts
2. Joanna Freeman and Hannah Mitchell (GBR) 11 pts
3. Rachel Lee and Cecilia Low (SIN) 14 pts
4. Roberta Caputo and Benedetta Barbiero (ITA) 15 pts