



Sailors Sherman Cheng and Justin Liu have had a good year so far. FILE PHOTO: SINGAPORESAILING

Now, for that elusive 420 crown ...

S'pore one of the favourites at this week's 420 world championships

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SINGAPORE — Singapore has, over the past few years, produced sailors who've brought home 14 world titles.

They include Colin Cheng's 2006 Laser 4.7 crown, Darren Choy's back-to-back wins in 2009 and 2010 in the Byte CII class and Elizabeth Yin's hat-trick of titles in the Byte CII (2006), Laser 4.7 (2008), and Laser Radial (2009).

That list does not include a world title in the men's 420 category, however, and national sailors Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng are aiming to change that later this week.

The duo, both 19, are currently in Haifa, Israel, for the International 420 World Sailing Championships to be held from Thursday to next Friday.

The regatta has attracted more than 150 competitors from more than 20 countries, and 11 races have been scheduled.

Both sailors head into the regatta as one of the favourites on the back of a consistent year so far, including their victory at last month's prestigious Kieler Woche — part of the seven-leg Isaf Sailing World Cup series — when they topped a 194-strong fleet to clinch the 420 title.

The International 420 World Championships is also a selection trial for the national 420 sailors' for this November's Asian Games

in Guangzhou.

"Justin and Sherman know other countries are watching us as we're capable of doing well," team manager Serena Wong, who heads the 10-strong squad, said in a telephone interview with MediaCorp yesterday.

"But they're not thinking about that. They are more interested in sailing the conditions here than worrying about the event itself."

TESTING THE WATERS

Justin, the helm, and Sherman have sailed together for nearly half a decade. In that time, they have bagged several honours including

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Team manager Serena Wong, who heads the 10-strong squad

the 420 gold medal at the 2006 Asian Games and the 2007 Junior European Championship.

They started this year by winning the International 420 Class 2009/2010 Australian Championships in Adelaide (Dec 27, 2009, to Jan 3 this year). In March, they were crowned continental champions when they won the 420 class at the 14th Asian Sailing Championships in Shanwei, China — a test event for

this year's Asian Games — and are seen as one of the biggest threats to hosts China's hopes of dominating the Games' sailing competition.

But Serena said: "They know it themselves that their competitors are watching them, but they want to take it each race as it comes ... They know where they stand in the team, both are really humble, even though they have what it takes to win the Asian Games spot."

Singapore's other pairings at the regatta are Ko Chuan Yang and Andrew Chan, Rachel Lee and Cecilia Low — both pairs were fourth and fifth respectively at the Kieler Woche regatta — Griselda Khng and Sakina Mohd Halim, and Denise Lim and Benita Chua.

The squad arrived in Israel over the weekend to get used to their new surroundings well ahead of the regatta — the practice races begin Thursday, with the opening race scheduled for Saturday.

Having spent the first few days resting and getting used to the surroundings, the sailors are scheduled have their first practice session off the Haifa Sailing Club today. It will also be the first time Singapore's sailors will be sailing in Israeli waters.

"We spoke to the locals to find out about the wind and conditions, so we have a pretty good idea of what to expect," said Serena. "But we will only know for sure when we go out and test the waters ourselves."