

Veteran sailor Koh Seng Leong made sure of victory with one race to spare. SINGAPORESAILING



SINGAPORE SAILING

Ready to battle China

Hosts are favourites, but S'pore's sailors want to stay as Asian Games kingpins

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SINGAPORE — They topped the 18-nation field at the Asian Games in Doha, Qatar, in 2006, returning home with five gold medals.

With just 10 months to go to the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou from Nov 12 to 27, Singapore's sailors are looking to cement the Republic's position as the continent's top sailing nation.

Judging from the results at the 14th Asian Sailing Championships, which was held at the Games' sailing venue at Shanwei, they will face a formidable challenge from host nation China.

The regatta ended yesterday with China topping the table with four gold, five silver and four bronze medals, while the Republic took second spot with two golds, two silvers and three bronzes.

But Mark Robinson, SingaporeSailing's head of high performance, believes the Republic's sailors can pip the Chinese in the big one.

Speaking to MediaCorp

from Shanwei, Robinson said: "China will be tough to beat on home ground as they are used to the conditions and environment ... but the signs are promising for our team, and beating them is still possible."

SingaporeSailing president Low Teo Ping feels the sailors are on track to deliver a good performance in November.

"Preparations are very much in full swing ... they've done fairly well at the Asian Championships and they've soaked in the conditions there, which will prepare them much better for November," he told MediaCorp yesterday.

"From now till the Asian Games, the plan is for them to stay focused and sail in conditions that simulate what they can expect in Shanwei."

Veteran sailor Koh Seng Leong (Laser Radial) and the men's 420 pair of Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng took top honours for Singapore, sealing their victories with one race to go on Sunday.

Yesterday's races saw the Keelboat team going down 3-0 to Japan in the final, while the Singapore women's 420 pair of

Rachel Lee and Benita Chua finished second behind Malaysia's Mohd Afendy Khairunisa and Mohamad Sayed Norashikin.

Women's Optimist sailor Kimberly Lim, women's 420 pair Daniella Ng and Cheryl Yee and men's 470 sailors Roy Tay and Terence Koh all took home bronze medals.

According to Robinson, the sailors know more work lies ahead before the Games begin.

"We came here to see what the opponents are like ... we also need to sail a bit more in big waves and we'll look at adjusting the competition schedule when we get back to Singapore," he said.

Training camps at the Guangdong Ocean Sports Training Centre in October have been earmarked to allow the sailors to acclimatise to the weather, wave and wind conditions.

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