

Shooting still S'pore's goldmine

BY CHIA HAN KEONG

SINGAPORE'S hunt for South-east Asian Games gold in Laos this week could have been hit by the absence of the shotgun shooting categories.

After all, they had been sure-fire sources of triumphs for the past decade, as the likes of Lee Wung Yew dominated the competition.

Yet, shooting still remains one of the few sports in this SEA Games where Singapore has a good chance of snaring golds.

The reason? There are now a bunch of talented athletes gunning for glory over the numerous events in the air-weapons category.

Thanks to the Singapore Shooting Association's long-term plan to focus on this shooting discipline early this decade, the honours started to roll in for the Republic, starting from the 2006 Doha Asian Games.

During the 2007 Korat SEA Games, the air-weapons shooters snared four golds, five silvers and three bronzes - breaking a 34-year gold drought for Singapore in this shooting category.

And they would love to add to that medal tally in Vientiane during these two weeks.

Said former Sportsboy of the Year Ong Jun Hong, who is also Singapore's flag-bearer for the Games: "After experiencing the joy of winning at the last Games, all of us are eager to bring back more honours."

The 21-year-old National University of Singapore undergraduate added: "Although I've been somewhat hampered by my studies, I think I should still be able to contribute to the team in challenging for gold."

Indeed, when *my paper* visited the Yishun Safra range last month, it was a bustle of activities - shooters occupying most

of the lanes as they stepped up their training routines for the Games.

Said air-pistol shooter Poh Lip Meng, 40, who is taking part in four events: "Shooting is a sport that is all about your condition during competition. A slight loss of focus will cost you in such a high-level competition.

"We are confident that we can cope with whatever conditions in Laos. Hopefully, we can stay sharp and perform at our best."

Yet, for a sport that demands a very high level of focus and concentration, the shooters were remarkably jovial and relaxed, as they hammed it up gamely for various poses during the photo shoot.

Any nerves going into the biggest event of the year?

"I feel that we are more well-prepared for the Games than before," said a smiling Poh.

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