

# S'PORE SAILORS DOMINATE ISAF CUP TO CLINCH RIO SPOT

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**SINGAPORE** – National sailors Justin Liu and Denise Lim wrapped up a dominant display in the mixed Nacra 17 class at the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Sailing World Cup event in Qingdao, China, yesterday, to book Singapore a spot in the event at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

The two 24-year-olds, who are also a couple, won their medal race yesterday to end the five-day regatta with 16 points and the World Cup gold medals around their neck.

The victory, for which they won €9000 (S\$14,200), also means they are the first Singaporean sailors to win an ISAF World Cup event.

Yesterday's triumph was a fitting end to the way Liu and Lim had dominated the regatta. They had entered the final day with nine wins from 12 races, a second-placed spot and two third-placed finishes. The medal race is worth double the points and not discardable, so after winning it and discarding one of their third places, they finished top of the 10-strong fleet with



an 18-point lead over China's Wen Zijin and Yuan Rubei (34 points).

Hong Kong's Tat Choi Fung and Yu Ting Chan came third (45).

Even though Liu and Lim felt they had prepared well for the regatta, they entered it feeling some pressure. This is because the World Cup event — which doubles as the Asian qualifiers for the Olympics — was their last chance to make the Rio

cut after missing out at the 2014 and 2015 Nacra 17 World Championships.

The Nacra 17 — which will make its debut in Rio — is the only Olympic sailing class with a mixed gender crew.

Last month, TODAY reported that Lim and Liu had forked out more than S\$30,000 from their own pockets to go on a three-month training tour of Europe to prepare for the World Cup. The duo did not meet the Singapore Sailing Federation's (SSF) criteria for funding, as they did not meet the minimum performance ranking at the other regattas.

However, their trip to Qingdao was partially funded by the SSF. They also arrived in Qingdao two weeks earlier to prepare their boat and get used to the sailing conditions.

"The preparation was done," Liu, a world champion and two-time Asian Games winner in the 420, told TODAY. "We came to Qingdao very early, and worked really hard to prepare the boat.

"Tony Rivas, our friend from Barcelona, also came here to help coach and guide us, and that enabled us to stay focused on each

race day and execute our strategy accordingly. But, having said that, (winning this way) was not expected... It was tough in Qingdao because we have light to medium winds (three to 12 knots), with very strong currents, and any mistake would have been costly. We knew we had to post good results each day, and stay consistent. We had massages each day at a nearby massage place to relax."

Said Lim: "It is extra sweet (to win this with Justin) and interesting because, in the past, we sailed together mostly for fun, but not in such a competitive setting. I understand him quite well, and vice-versa, so it's easy to get along out there at sea."

Liu and Lim said they will next meet with the SSF to discuss funding before planning their route to the 2016 Olympics. "There were many challenges we had to overcome to get to where we are now, but we also had a lot of support from friends and coaches, too," said Liu. "We haven't really thought about our plans towards Rio. We need to talk to the Federation for funding, so that comes first before we can plan anything."

Singapore has now earned four sailing spots at the 2016 Olympics, in the men's Laser Standard, women's Laser Radial, women's 470, and Mixed Nacra 17 classes.

SSF will conduct internal trials to select the sailors to represent Singapore at the Olympics in these classes.

**The victory means Denise Lim and Justin Liu are the first Singaporean sailors to win an ISAF World Cup event.** PHOTO: ISAF