

470 pair Yokoyama and Cheryl put studies on hold for Asian Games and Olympic qualifiers

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Leading defending champions Malaysia by just two points going into the final race where points count for double, national sailors Yukie Yokoyama and Cheryl Teo knew they had to finish ahead of Nuraisyah Jamil and Norashikin Sayed to seal the women's 470 gold.

But the Singaporeans got off to a horror start with a mistake at the starting line that resulted in the Malaysians pulling ahead of them by 20 metres.

"Our strategy was to stay calm and stay in front, but we found ourselves playing catch-up instead," said 17-year-old Cheryl.

"We were behind by so much right up to the last 10 minutes, we thought we were going to lose, and we started praying.

"And a miracle happened."

Some fine boat manoeuvring by 20-year-old Yokoyama at the helm helped the duo overtake the hosts and claim second place behind Thailand, which was enough to keep them at the top of the final standings.

Singapore won the gold with 16 points, followed by Malaysia (20) and Thailand (22).

The gold medal was the Republic's first in the event since Cecilia Low and Priscilia Low triumphed at Myanmar 2013.

"They did well to stay ahead of us but eventually, we managed to force them to make a mistake such that they didn't block us off properly," said Yokoyama.

After conquering South-east Asia, the pair will next set their sights on next year's Asian Games in Jakarta and the Olympic qualifiers in Aarhus, Denmark.

"We have been working hard for the 470, which as an Olym-

# Victorious sailors chase bigger goals



Sailors Cheryl Teo (left) and Yukie Yokoyama celebrate after winning the women's 470 gold medal yesterday.

PHOTO: SINGAPORE SAILING FEDERATION

pic class is more challenging than the 420 (Under-19) I used to compete in," said Yokoyama.

"But, thanks to the Singapore Sailing Federation's help, we were able to make the transition from youth to an Olympic class."

Both sailors have put their studies on hold — Yokoyama is an environmental studies student who just completed her freshman year at the National University of Singapore, while Teo is taking a break before starting her diploma course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic — to

chase their Tokyo 2020 dream.

However, funding from the Singapore Sailing Federation for expenses such as overseas training stints will cease after the SEA Games until they qualify for the Olympics.

Teo hopes that their SEA Games victory will convince potential sponsors to help them with their preparations.

She said: "We have already come up with a one-year training plan up to next August, where the first Olympic qualifiers will be held in Aarhus, Denmark.

"This gold medal is a small milestone that gives us confidence to go on and achieve our goals."

Yokoyama added: "With help from the SSF and the Singapore Sports Institute, we hope we can raise enough money and realise our Olympic dream."

In other events, Evangeline Tan and Jodie Lai won silver in the women's 420 (U-19), while Koh Yinian and Wong Riji took bronze in the men's 420 (U-19).

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