



YOUNG TALENT: At 13, Low Jianghao is the youngest member of the Singapore Shooting Association's pioneer batch of shotgun trainees.

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» SHOOTING

On your mark, get set, shoot!

Shotgun talent ID programme kicks off as SSA looks for new generation

BY TERENCE VOON

LOW Jianghao, 13, used to get his kicks from computer games like Counterstrike.

Not any more. The Secondary 2 student is taking aim at real targets these days – as a budding clay shooter in Singapore's first talent-spotting programme for young shotgun enthusiasts.

"My father wanted me to do something other than just staying at home and playing video games," said the Fajah Secondary School student.

"Since I liked shooting games, he introduced me to the real thing. I was hooked."

The shotgun's powerful recoil and the joy at seeing his clay target explode draws Jianghao to the Singapore Gun Club's Bukit Timah range at least four times a week.

His love affair with the sport is a rarity in Singapore, where trap shooting has long suffered a dearth of young talent.

For years, the national squad has been dominated by the likes of 16-time South-east Asia Games gold medallist Lee Wung Yew, 42.

His fellow SEA Games gold-medal winners like Choo Choon Seng and Mohd Zain Amat are 36 and 33 respectively.

Younger shooters like Lee Yee, 28, who won a team bronze in skeet at last year's SEA Games, have yet to scale the same heights.

To nurture a new generation of marksmen, the Singapore Shooting Association (SSA) kicked off its first shotgun talent identification programme in February.

The programme identifies promising recreational shooters aged below 30, and puts them through an intensive six-month training scheme conducted by two of the SSA's top shotgun coaches.

For the first two months,

Talent programme

'Problem': Dearth of young talent. Veterans like Lee Wung Yew, 42, Choo Choon Seng, 36, and Mohamed Zain Amat, 33. Younger ones like 28-year-old Lee Yee, who won a team bronze in skeet at last year's SEA Games, are not ready for a real shot at glory. **Solution:** First shotgun talent identification scheme started in February, which identifies promising recreational shooters aged below 30. They are put through six months of intensive training. The best will then be inducted into the national squad.

the trainees practise twice a week at Bukit Timah, which offers down-the-line (DTL) shooting, where the targets are thrown at a fixed height.

DTL is a simplified version of the Olympic trap event, which throws out targets at a higher speed and at wider angles.

Trainees will spend the last four months of the programme at the SGC's Choa Chu Kang range, where they will hone their skills in Olympic events like skeet, trap and double-trap shooting.

There are nine shooters in

the pioneer batch of trainees. Jianghao is the youngest of the lot, while the rest are men in their 20s.

At the end of the six months, the best will be inducted into the national squad.

"This is not an easy sport, so I expect a high drop-out rate," said SSA president Chng Seng Mok. "Even if only three of them make it to the squad, I will be happy."

Chng, a former national trap shooter, expects the scheme to groom shooters to meet SEA Games standards within three years.

Unlike air rifle and pistol disciplines, shotgun events are not popular in schools, owing to their high cost.

A practice session at the SGC will set each shooter back about \$40 – including the cost of a box of 25 rounds, the clay targets, gun rental and daily membership.

There are only two clay shooting ranges in Singapore – at Bukit Timah and Choa Chu Kang.

In contrast, many schools have their own air weapons ranges, and a box of 500 air rifle rounds costs just \$8.

To help attract newcomers, clay shooters in the SSA's new programme pay only \$20 for each session.

There are also plans to launch new groups of trainees every month, and to get schools into the act.

Lee welcomed the move, which he said was long overdue.

"We cannot wait until the next SEA Games to start looking for new shooters, so this course is a good start."

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