

# SPORTS

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THE Asian Games lights up in Doha on Dec 1. Singapore will be represented by 134 athletes. Some are world-class, others have not even made a name for themselves on the South-east Asian scene yet. The Straits Times rates their hopes and aspirations for this Asiad. Today, the focus is on shooting

The Straits Times rating system

Four-star: World-class  
Three-star: Asian/Commonwealth Games standard  
Two-star: SEA Games standard  
One-star: Unproven at SEA Games

» SHOOTING

## From Ahmad Ibrahim to Asiad

Three girls will be out to do alma mater and Singapore proud in Doha air rifle event

By CHAN YI SHEN

TUCKED away in the northern corner of Singapore is the modest Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School.

This neighbourhood school in Yishun may not be in the same academic class as Raffles Institution or Hwa Chong Institution.

But, when it comes to shooting, Ahmad Ibrahim has no peers.

Nine months after former student Vanessa Yong returned from the Commonwealth Games with two bronzes, she and two former schoolmates will be gunning for glory at the Asian Games in Doha next month.

They will compete in the women's 10-metre air rifle event.

Like Vanessa, Adrienne Ser and her sister Jasmine all fell in love with the sport after joining the school's shooting club.

Vanessa, 18, has just completed her A levels. Adrienne, 19, is a National University of Singapore undergraduate while Jasmine, 16, has just finished her O levels.

Said Vanessa: "I enjoy sports and Ahmad Ibrahim has a good reputation in shooting. Had it not been for the school, I would probably not have picked up the sport."

The school's shooting history

can be traced back to the 1980s, when students were using the old 0.22-calibre rifles.

Things took off when they switched to the international standard 0.177-calibre rifle in 1998.

Said the school's vice-principal Mohamed Fauzi: "Shooting is our niche and we do our best to help students to excel."

"One of the goals is to act as a feeder to the national squad. We are very proud of all of them. Hopefully, they can inspire the younger students."

For the trio, it all began in Secondary 1, through the talent identification programme.

At Ahmad Ibrahim, all first-year students are screened to find those with steady hands and hearts required of a marksman. Measurements, such as the lengths of the arms and trigger finger, are also taken.

The school then provides them with rifles and shooting gear. The more committed and talented individuals are groomed by former national coach Zhang Shaoying.

Blossoming under Zhang, the trio have since stepped up into the national squad.

They are not the first crop of shooters to emerge from the school, though.

Several others, such as Zhou Peixuan and Lim Siew Mei, have also donned national colours at regional competitions, such as the South-east Asia Shooting Championships.

The camaraderie within the school's shooting alumni is good.

Said teacher in charge Ng Suan Ching: "Whenever they go for big competitions, I would send them an SMS to wish them luck."

"And we are very glad that they take time to come back and help the school during training camps and competitions."

For instance, Adrienne was on hand to guide and cheer on the team at this year's Schools National Championships where Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary won the B Division girls' title.

Added Vanessa: "We're like a big family. There are always gatherings with the team and we go to karaoke sessions and the movies together."

For now, the three sharpshooters have their sights trained on the Asian Games.

Said Adrienne: "It's exciting because this is my first major Games and the first time I am going with my sister. We are not thinking about medals."

"We have to focus and set targets for our own performances. If we can achieve them, then maybe we have a chance."

For Jasmine, taking up shooting was a case of following in her sister's footsteps.

Jasmine said: "She won a lot of medals in school and I wanted to be like her."

Despite being the youngest in the team, she has the highest personal-best score – a near-perfect 399 set at the NUS Invitational Shoot in June.

It is the highest score a Singaporean shooter has achieved in competition. That surpassed even her



SHOOTING QUEENS: (From left) Jasmine Ser, Vanessa Yong and Adrienne Ser honed their air rifle skills at Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary's shooting club. They have their sights on an Asian Games team medal next month.

sister's mark of 396.

Vanessa, whose personal best is 397, said: "It's good that she has set the standard for us to strive towards."

"Since she can do it, it's something we can achieve as well."

Team manager Thomas Soo

said the trio are good enough to win a team medal in Doha.

Their combined personal bests of 1,192 would have been good for a silver at the 2002 Games in Busan, behind China (1,194).

After her Commonwealth Games performance, Vanessa was

invited back to her alma mater for a special ceremony.

This humble school in Yishun is quietly hoping to invite more sharpshooters back: to show the Republic's first air-rifle Games medal.

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