

## [ BOXING ]

# 'Quietly confident' of first gold since 1985

Sanjay Nair

Living in dormitories; shuttling between competitions in a mini-van; cooking nutritious meals for one another.

Singapore's boxers roughed it out for one month in Australia ahead of the SEA Games, which will be a key barometer of the sport's progress here.

Boxing has been in the wilderness since the early 1990s, following internal squabbles.

But it is seeing a renaissance, partly owing to the hosting of the 2010 Youth Olympic Games where promising flyweight Hanurdeen Hamid advanced to the semi-finals.

This inspired more youngsters to enter the ring, said Singapore Amateur Boxing Association president Syed Abdul Kadir.

Having honed their skills in centralised training over the last few years, the association is sending its five brightest prospects to Myanmar.

This is a jump from just two Singaporean boxers who took part at the 2011 Indonesia edition.

Kadir is "quietly confident" of a first gold medal in boxing since Mohammed Muklis' welterweight title at the 1985 Bangkok Games.

The former Commonwealth and SEA Games champion said: "There's a lot of potential in these boys to be future champions.

"They have the courage and drive, no doubt. Now, it's about getting the right experience and who knows what can happen in the ring on any given day."

Expected to lead the charge is Muhamad Ridhwan, 26, who won Singapore's only boxing medal, a bronze, two years ago.

Since graduating from Nanyang Polytechnic in April, the lightweight has devoted himself to the cause. He trains up to three times every day, and it showed in a bronze-winning effort at the recent Taipei City Cup international boxing tournament.

During their stint Down Under, Ridhwan and Co. trained in boxing clubs in Melbourne and Adelaide, where they had regular sparring sessions with the local folks.

The Sugar Ray Leonard fan clocked over 100 practice rounds and had a 1-1 win-loss record.

He said: "I feel sharper, fitter and definitely smarter in boxing IQ compared to 2011."

In Naypyidaw, Thai Sailon Ardee, a two-time Olympian, is the man he is looking to topple. The double SEA Games gold medallist is the world's eighth-ranked lightweight.

Ridhwan said: "I don't need to be reminded of how Singapore hasn't won a boxing gold in nearly 30 years. I want to be the one to end that streak."