

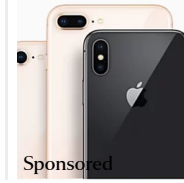
THE STRAITS TIMES



NTU tells students to stop brewing



Football: Luciano Spalletti, Walter



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Fencing: Singapore women's foil team win silver at World Junior and Cadet Championships



Amita Berthier (left) in action in the semi-final against Germany's Sophia Werner. PHOTO: INTERNATIONAL FENCING FEDERATION

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SINGAPORE - Singapore were seeded 13th among the 26 women's junior foil teams but, as Amita Berthier put it, they were not going to be pushovers.

And they walked the talk. One by one, the giants fell at their feet at the World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships in Verona, Italy.

Amita and Maxine Wong, both 17, Nicole Wong and Tatiana Wong, both 19, stunned Poland (fourth seeds), France (fifth) and Germany (eighth) to book their spot in the final for Under-20s on Monday.

While the quartet could not topple the United States, losing 30-45 to the third seeds at the Societa Cattolica, the silver lining is that Singapore won their first junior medal at the world meet. The cadet competition features U-17 fencers.

This marks the third straight year that Singapore have won medals at the world championships, following Lau Ywen's cadet sabre gold in 2016 in France and Amita's cadet foil bronze last year in Bulgaria.

Amita, who is based in the US and will begin school at the University of Notre Dame in September, said: "I would definitely say we exceeded expectations. We were ranked 13th so we were just focusing on getting into the top eight. But we focused on one match at a time, gave our best and fought hard, and that was what took us to the final."

Singapore reached the final in dramatic fashion, after pulling off a superb 45-43 come-from-behind win over Germany.

They trailed 38-40 heading into the last bout, but Amita beat Leonie Ebert 7-3 to clinch the win. Earlier, they had beaten Australia 45-23 in the round of 32, title holders Poland 45-39 in the last 16 and France 45-42 in the quarter-finals.

The format of each match is a race to 45 points over nine bouts and requires three fencers from each team - with an additional fencer in reserve - to have a bout with all three members of the opposing team.

Each bout lasts three minutes, or until the fencer claims the maximum points, whichever is sooner.

Each team are limited by the maximum they can reach in each bout, in increments of five - five in the first bout, 10 in the second, 15 in the third and so on.

For Nicole, who turns 20 on April 26 and will be ineligible for next year's meet, it was the perfect send-off from junior competition.

Said the University of Pennsylvania freshman: "Everybody expected us to be the underdogs, but it didn't feel like that to all to us, and we showed we are good fencers."

Added Amita: "I think most people expected the world champions to beat us when the draw was out.

"But we didn't care about the ranking. We went in with the mentality that we wanted to win, no matter what.

"Our attitude was that we were not going to let anyone push us around. If they do, we'll push back."

National foil coach Andrey Klyushin was delighted with his charges' performance.

"Last month, the girls won the silver at the Asian Championship, so it was a sign maybe we could do well here," said the 55-year-old Russian

"But how well? It was not possible to say. I am always proud of my fencers when they win medals, and I think the girls are getting better, so I hope they can continue picking up good results."

The men's junior foil team finished in 11th place after beating the Netherlands 45-37 in their classification match.

Fencing Singapore president Juliana Seow said of the women's success: "We have made a deliberate effort to promote team events in the past two years and we are glad to see the results of this push last night.

"This is a sport we can have a future in and is worth investing."

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