

AUG mates Ng, Pang relishing home comforts

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Shuttler Scott Ng has competed in international meets overseas, but for the 26-year-old, the 18th Asean University Games (AUG) on home soil is the one most special to him.

The final-year business student from Singapore Management University (SMU), who featured in the previous edition of the biennial Games in Palembang, said: "One of the reasons I wanted to compete in the AUG is that I want my grandfather to come and watch me play."

"He has never seen me play before as he can't travel overseas due to his age (late 80s), so this tournament is the perfect time he can watch me."

The Games are also a special occasion for SMU schoolmate and Singapore flag-bearer Pang Xue Jie, who is also competing in his first regional multi-sport meet at home.

The paddler, who was part of the Republic's 2013 SEA Games contingent, missed out on last year's Games owing to national service.

Said Pang: "Of course playing at

home is always a special feeling.

"It's a great honour to be chosen as flag-bearer and to represent Singapore, and hopefully I can deliver good results and make the country proud."

The 23-year-old is gunning for a gold medal, but added that competing on home ground will not give him additional pressure.

"I've never actually competed on home ground before, so at the moment I'm not feeling any pressure," said Pang.

Singapore is hosting the Games for the first time in 22 years. Yesterday's opening ceremony at Nanyang Technological University was attended by about 1,500 athletes and officials from 11 countries.

Among them was Thai flag-bearer and football captain Natpakan Kleapbua, who led his team to a 7-1 defeat of Laos during the football preliminaries on Saturday.

Said the 24-year-old: "I am honoured and proud to be appointed Thailand's flag-bearer, and I'm excited for the competition."

Thailand are defending football champions, and Natpakan is confi-



Paddler Pang Xue Jie and flag-bearers from 10 other regional countries at the Asean University Games' opening ceremony. He missed last year's home SEA Games and wants a gold medal to make up for it. PHOTO: DANIEL NEO FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

dent his team will retain the title.

"The pressure of defending our title is still there, but we are confident we can repeat history and win," added the defender.

Singapore began with a 1-1 draw against Cambodia.

AUG organising committee chairman Tan Eng Liang was quick to temper any high expectations of

Singapore's medal chances, despite their status as hosts.

"Of course we want our athletes to do well, but we must be realistic - other countries' athletes train almost full time, while our athletes train part time," he said.

"So my advice to our athletes is do your best and win as many medals as you can; don't care about the col-

our as long as it is a medal.

"Our expectations are for you to do your best and break your personal best. If you have done that, you've done well for yourself and Singapore."

The Games, which feature 16 sports, end on July 19.

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