

SHARPENING SABRE TEAM

Fencing Singapore banking on Hungary's Decsi to boost discipline

By MAY CHEN

A FORMER world Under-17 champion has been roped in to add some thrust to Singapore's sabre fencing team.

Hungary's Andras Decsi is the Republic's new head coach for sabre, and has been tasked with strengthening a discipline that has kept a low profile in recent years.

The 35-year-old – the 1997 European Championships silver medallist before injury ended his career – has been here since March and is contracted to coach the Singapore team till 2016.

He was previously in charge of the Hong Kong national team. His former charge, Au Sin Ying, won an individual silver at the 2010 Asian Games after beating China's world champion and Olympic silver medallist Tan Xue.

The goal is for Decsi to groom similar world-beaters in Singapore, and his first impressions are

encouraging.

"What I'm seeing here now is at least as good as what I saw when I first arrived in Hong Kong – if not better," he said.

"Physically, the fencers here are quite fit and they have quite strong technical foundations, which means I can focus more on tactics."

The fencers, too, have embraced Decsi as "a breath of fresh air".

Said Ann Lee, Singapore's top woman sabre fencer: "A lot of coaches are multiple world or Olympic champions but they lack this quality of being able to relate to their students."

"He is able to get students to believe in him and that's a big advantage in helping the team move forward."

"I believe he can take us all the way to qualify for the Olympics," added the 21-year-old Singapore Management University undergraduate.



Fencing coaches Andras Decsi (left, from Hungary) and Fu Hao (from China) have been engaged by Fencing Singapore to groom a team that can see the Republic through the next two to three Olympic cycles. Decsi, a former world Under-17 champion, will look after the sabre team while Fu will be in charge of the epee discipline. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

Since winning a silver and two bronzes at the 2007 SEA Games, the sabre fencers have not enjoyed as much success as their counterparts in the epee and foil.

Singapore won a silver and two bronzes at the SEA Games last year, but none were from sabre.

Having spent three months looking over the team, Decsi says

they need more competitive experience and mental fortitude.

"They have potential – but that doesn't mean that we are ready," he said. "Fencers in other countries, especially in Europe, go for competitions almost every weekend from a very young age."

"It will be very important in choosing carefully and systemati-

cally the planning of competitions for our fencers."

He believes Singapore fencers have the potential to stand alongside the best in Asia – but first, they must dominate South-east Asia.

"In the long term, we can reach the standards of the Hong Kongers and Japanese and be

“

CONFIDENCE VOTE

"I believe he can take us all the way to qualify for the Olympics."

– Ann Lee, Singapore's top woman sabre fencer, on Andras Decsi

”

third or fourth in Asia. But we have to first be tops in South-east Asia," he said, identifying Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia as the Republic's main rivals.

It is a view echoed by Fu Hao, a 39-year-old epee coach from China who joined Fencing Singapore's (FS') stable in April.

He said: "The Olympics should always be a long-term target, but we need to make sure that we are comfortably on top in the region."

Both Decsi and Fu are aiming to score on their first test – the South-east Asian Championships in November.

Said FS president Nicholas Fang: "We're looking to put together a team that can see us through the next two to three Olympic cycles."

"Decsi and Fu are definitely valuable additions."

"I believe that with this coaching team, we should be on the right track."

✉ maychen@sph.com.sg