

WOMEN GET RIO 470 NOD

At World Cup leg, Low & Lee ensure S'pore qualify outright for 1st time in this sailing class

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The decision to campaign for an Olympic berth was made less than three months ago, and their partnership is just nine months old, but local sailors Priscilla Low and Lee Shu Xian have accomplished what no others before them could do.

The duo, competing in the women's 470 event at the Qingdao leg of the International Sailing Federation (Isaf) World Cup, earned Singapore a berth at next year's Rio de Janeiro Games yesterday.

They finished 13th in a 16-strong fleet largely made up of Chinese sailors. With China and Japan already qualified, the lone slot up for grabs went to Singapore after Low and

Lee finished ahead of Malaysia and Hong Kong sailors.

This is the first time Singapore has qualified outright in the women's 470 class for the Olympics. At the 2008 Beijing Games, Toh Liying and Deborah Ong competed using an unused quota place given by Isaf.

Said Low, 26: "Conditions were tricky and tough because winds were light and shift, and it was a technical and tactical course. We decided to try for this to give ourselves and our country a chance to qualify for the Olympic Games."

The pair had paid their own way to compete at the regatta, as they did not meet the Singapore Sailing Federation's (SSF) criteria for funding. Singapore has now earned a

spot at the Rio Olympics in three sailing classes, on top of the Laser Standard and Laser Radial events.

Despite being the ones to earn qualification, it is not guaranteed that Low and Lee will compete in Rio, as the SSF will conduct internal trials to determine the sailors who will represent Singapore.

Singapore Sailing high performance manager Terence Koh said the internal trials will be open to all women sailors, even if they do not train regularly on the 470.

He said: "We always keep the selections open. Anybody can join. We wouldn't know if there's another pair that comes and says they want to do it."

"There's still a lot to be proven at that level, especially for the girls. The qualifications were a lot easier but now they have to push on and make it."

Low and Lee, for one, are determined to be the ones to represent

Singapore in Rio next year.

Lee, 21, a third-year law undergraduate at the Singapore Management University, is planning to take time off her studies to focus on their Olympic campaign.

Meanwhile, in the men's 470, Jeremiah Yeo and Darren Choy missed out on securing a berth after finishing behind South Korea and Thailand.

However, there are more slots available at the world championships in Israel next month.

Justin Liu and Denise Lim kept up their fine form in the Nacra 17. They hold a 14-point lead going into today's medal race and could secure another Olympic berth for Singapore should they win the event.

The Qingdao regatta serves as the Asian qualifier for the double-handed dinghy, the Finn and the Nacra 17 classes.

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