



Going past the pain barrier



Peng Kean to ignore knee injury in quest to win nation's first gold

By LIM TEIK HUAT

PETALING JAYA: It hurts every time he lunges at his opponent, but sabre fencer Yu Peng Kean is taking it all in his stride.

Peng Kean, who became the first Malaysian Olympic fencer in 48 years when he competed in London in 2012, has a chance to steal the thunder by claiming the nation's first gold medal today.

Three individual gold medals - in men's epee and sabre and in women's foil - will be decided tonight as fencing returns to the SEA Games after missing out in Myanmar two years ago.

And Peng Kean, who trained with the Romanian fencers in Bucharest for 45 days in preparation for the Games, is hoping his knees will not fail him at the crucial moments.

"I went for ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) surgery on both knees after the London Olympics ... and I've not really recovered.

"It's painful each time I put pressure on the knees when I move.

"The problem is I did not wait until I had properly recovered before going for competitions ... that's why it's bothering me.

"But I'm coping with it through injections



All set to shine: Malaysian fencer Yu Peng Kean in action during a practice session at the OCBC Arena in Singapore yesterday. — S.S.KANESAN / The Star

and I also have my painkillers by my side. I hope I'll be okay," said the 24-year-old, who won the men's team sabre gold with Liang Ming Chang and Muhd Radhi Hasim in the 2011 edition in Jakarta.

In Jakarta, Joshua Koh also bagged the men's individual foil title for the country's first fencing gold medals in more than two decades while "I also got a bronze in the individual competition and I'm aiming for a better colour this time".

"It will be difficult to defend the team gold this time as we have new members.

"I'm the only one left from the 2011 campaign," said Peng Kean, who sees the Vietnamese and Thais as their biggest rivals in the sabre event.

The Universiti Putra Malaysia student is

making his third SEA Games appearance since Korat in 2007. Fencing was not contested in Laos in 2009 as well.

Peng Kean's team-mates this time are Wong Tzer Chyuan, Muhd Shafiq Rizal and Adam Nicholas Lindbichler.

Prior to the Games, Peng Kean trained in Romania while his team-mates trained at home under Chinese coach Rao Bin.

Should his knees act up, then Peng Kean will turn to the support and love from his girlfriend Leung Chii Lin, a former national swimmer and SEA Games gold medalist, to see him through.

"She's a former athlete and understands what I'm going through. She encourages me not to give up easily and is very supportive," he said.