

Shahrir Mohd Anuar (far right) and Ng Chin Hui are among nine athletes who have been identified as medal hopefuls.

TODAY FILE PHOTO



SINGAPORE SPORTS

No shortage of talent

Track and field fraternity confused as SAA send out mixed signals

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SINGAPORE — Less than two weeks ago, Singapore Athletic Association (SAA) chief executive officer Steven Yeo sounded an ominous warning for the sport, when he said the poor standard of track and field at youth level meant Singapore would probably do little at the SEA Games and Asian Games for at least one generation.

Yesterday, various media reports claimed the association was targeting 13 medals at the 2013 SEA Games.

The SAA would be introducing coaching clinics, more local events, and would set up two Centres of Excellences in Temasek Polytechnic and Gombak Stadium, in a bid to achieve the target.

Nine athletes — including sprinters Ng Chin Hui, 16, and Shahrir Mohd Anuar, 17, and 21-year-old thrower Wan Lay Chi — were identified as potential medallists in 2013.

Many in the fraternity were taken aback by the latest development.

“First they shoot themselves in the foot, because they are responsible for nurturing talent ... now, they say they can produce 13 medals and sprinters like Shahrir are not even in their Youth Olympics list,” said an industry insider.

“These new plans ... It’s just old wine in a new bottle,” added the source.

Yeo, who joined the SAA in mid-2009, had lamented the lack of talent coming through the ranks, after revealing that the Youth Olympic Games qualifying times and distances posted by the 16-member short-listed squad were well below the marks set by the SAA.

Junior athletes were required to compete in the All-Comers Meet in January and February, and the National Junior Championships, with the average performances bench-

marked against the 10th-placed results from the last three IAAF World Youth Championships.

Veteran thrower and nine-time SEA Games gold medalist James Wong, Singapore’s chef-de-mission for the inaugural Youth Olympics, said: “Of course it’s a surprise to hear the news ... we have some raw diamonds who are untapped, and we just need good craftsmen to polish them, but I don’t think we have that.”

At last year’s SEA Games in Vientiane, Laos, Singapore’s athletes won just three medals — gold in women’s shot put and men’s discus, silver in men’s 4x100m relay — from 45 events.

I don’t think it’s fair to say there’s no talent. It’s not only the Sports School that’s producing athletes, but all the schools.

Schools coach Tan Wei Leong

SAA chief Loh Lin Kok and his management team were heavily criticised for the performance.

Yeo’s comments about the lack of talent among the young athletes was rebuffed by local developmental coaches.

“We have many talented youngsters, just go down to the schools and look ... we have a 13-year-old boy doing 39-plus seconds in the 300m,” said veteran coach Loh Chan Pew, who guided the national women’s 4x100m relay team to a new national mark in 2007.

Added schools coach Tan Wei Leong: “I don’t think it’s fair to say there’s no talent. It’s not only the Sports School that’s producing athletes, but all the schools.

“We always have youth athletes doing well at regional events like the Asean Schools Championships, and even Hwa Chong Institution throwers like Scott Wong and Alan Teh are doing well ...

“The problem is that the mismanagement in the administration has caused athletes to lose interest.”



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