

Athletics: Marc Brian Louis breaks U-20 100m record; 0.02sec off senior mark



Sprinter Marc Brian Louis crossed the line at the Club Zoom Kindred Spirit Series to finish first on Dec 11, 2021. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO



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PUBLISHED DEC 11, 2021, 10:32 PM SGT



SINGAPORE - Heading into his final meet this year, sprinter Marc Brian Louis had a clear goal: to break the Under-20 100m record and possibly even the 20-year-old men's record held by U.K. Shyam.

And as he crossed the line at the Club Zoom Kindred Spirit Series to finish first on Saturday (Dec 11), the 19-year-old achieved his first target at the Home of Athletics at Kallang.

What was more remarkable was his time of 10.39sec was just 0.02sec off Shyam's mark from 2001, an achievement that put Louis third fastest on Singapore's all-time 100m runners' list. It was also 0.04sec off the 2019 SEA Games winning time of 10.35sec by Malaysia's Muhammad Haiqal Hanafi.

"I'm really proud of myself and I'm very happy but it hasn't really sunk in yet so I still don't know how I really feel about it," said Louis, who was greeted with congratulatory hugs and cheers from his coach and club teammates after his race.

Hailed as one of the young guns for Singapore's sprint team, Louis' record is the second in four months after he smashed the U-20 110m hurdles record with a 13.77sec run at the World Athletics Under-20 Championships in Nairobi in August.

His 100m record on Saturday was also his second personal best time in two weeks after clocking 10.60sec in a time trial.

While Louis did not do any special preparation for the meet, he credited his hurdles training earlier this year for helping him get faster.

He said: "I did a lot of speed work and endurance during that time and I also increased my strength. One thing of the main things I focused on was strength because I used to be quite small and weak.

"When I was training for the hurdles event, it helped with my sprints as well because even if you can clear the hurdles easily, you still need basic speed to help you so that's what I've been improving on also and that really helped a lot."

His coach Benber Yu said he had expected Louis to break the U-20 record, but not by such a huge margin as he finished 0.14sec quicker than 2008 Olympian Calvin Kang's previous best of 10.53sec clocked at the 2008 Asian Junior Championships.

Yu, who has coached Louis since he was in Primary 3, said: "I think if someone was there pushing him, he would have broken the senior record also but it's okay, he's just 19 and has many more years to go. The most important thing is we're training consistently and having continuous improvement."

Yu, 40, also paid tribute to Louis' club teammates from Team Cicada Trackers who helped push him during training.

He added: "I feel really proud of Marc because this is a boy I groomed since he was young. He was very quiet at first and lacked confidence but he has improved a lot. As the captain in the club, his leadership ability has improved also.

"We're trying to see if we can go for another competition in Malaysia next week and if he does, hopefully he can break the senior record there."

While a tad disappointed at missing out n the men's record, Louis is eyeing a 100m medal, and possibly gold, at the SEA Games in Hanoi, Vietnam in May next year.

But he was realistic about his chances as he is enlisting in national service next month and is unsure of his training plans next year.

He said: "I'm not thinking much about (the SEA Games) yet because anything can happen in a few months. But for now, I'm thinking I can get a better timing and maybe even a podium - that's the hope."

With Muhd Amirudin Jamal winning Singapore's last 100m medal - a bronze - at the 2013 SEA Games and Gary Yeo clocking the fourth fastest time of 10.44sec in 2012, which was also the last time a sprinter came closest to Shyam's record, the athletics fraternity are understandably excited by Louis' achievement.

Shyam, 45, was heartened to see Louis come close to his record and hopes to see a "consistent and upward trajectory with his performances".

He said: "It's high time the record is broken because it's been 20 years. Global standards have moved on. I hope for the future of the sport that our young sprinters continue to clock fast times to bring Singapore up to regional and global standards."

Singapore's 10 fastest men's 100m times

- 10.37sec U.K. Shyam (Aug 27, 2001)
- 10.38 C. Kunalan (Oct 13, 1968)
- 10.41 Mohamed Hosni (Aug 22, 1994)
- 10.44 Gary Yeo (Dec 15, 2012)
- 10.46 Muhd Amirudin Jamal (Oct 19, 2013)
- 10.47 Calvin Kang (June 9, 2015)
- 10.56 Muhd Elfi Mustapa (July 25, 2010)
- 10.57 Tang Ngai Kin (Sept 27, 1980)
- 10.57 Haron Mundir (Sept 16, 1987)
- 10.57 Mohammad Naqib Asmin (June 12, 2014)