

TODAY'S ATHLETE OF THE YEAR 2009



Take a bow, Elizabeth

After a stunning win in Brazil and big splash Down Under, world champ gets the nod

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SINGAPORE — I wonder if it is tough being Elizabeth Yin. She's 18, awaiting her A-level results right now, although everyone who knows her expects her to maintain her straight As form.

She's a high-achiever, gifted the ability to find a balance between studies and sailing, the sport she loves.

Yin the sailor is a world champion.

She is also TODAY's Athlete of the Year, 2009.

She won the Laser Radial world crown in July, finishing top among a field of 38 sailors at the Volvo Youth Sailing ISAF World Championship in Buzios, Brazil, in July.

She ended the year in style, winning the Laser Radial event at the Australian national championship on Monday.

The choice was not easy, especially with Feng Tianwei among the five selected by TODAY for athlete of 2009.

Feng was thrust into the leading role in Singapore table tennis after Li Jiawei went on a sabbatical. She came close to succeeding Li in TODAY's honour roll after a busy year.

The 23-year-old led the Singapore women to second place in the Asian table tennis championships and World Team Cup. She won the Korean Open and finished

with two gold medals at last month's SEA Games in Vientiane, Laos.

Feng was a favourite for many TODAY readers, and there was also big support for swimmer Quah Ting Wen.

The 17-year-old had a great time in the pool over the course of the year. Three individual golds and one relay win saw her crowned Athlete of the Games at the inaugural Asian Youth Games, held here from June 29 to July 7.

At last month's SEA Games, she set tongues wagging after winning two individual events and three relay golds, a feat that also earned her Best Female Athlete of the Games honours.

Reader Elizabeth Chong voted for Ting Wen, the youngest on the list, because the swimmer displayed tremendous grit to overcome the pain barrier in Vientiane, after suffering from back spasms during the SEA Games.

Footballer Hariss Harun knows a lot about pain. The 19-year-old midfielder returned to competitive football in July, after suffering serious damage to his anterior cruciate ligament.

His knee is getting stronger and stronger, and his game continues to improve, after impressive performances in the Singapore engine room against teams like Liverpool, China, Thailand and Iran.

With hard work, a level head and some luck, I believe Hariss has the talent to become a formidable force in Asian football.

He can be that good.

Young shooter Jasmine Ser is also very good. She made history in 2009.

Ser became the first Singaporean to

qualify for a final in the World Cup series in Changwon, Korea in April, and the 19-year-old proved it was no fluke when she matched the feat in Beijing, China, the same month.

She has bags of potential, Ser is already focusing on mounting a challenge at the 2012 Olympics.

IN SHARP FOCUS

It is very much what Yin is focused on, too. Immediately after her A-level examinations, the Victoria Junior College student headed off to Sydney to train.

She intends to enrol in the University of Sydney so she can continue to study and train in a top class environment.

Talk to anyone in the sailing fraternity and he or she will tell you she is disciplined and focused. She beat the best young sailors from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain and other powerhouse sailing nations to stand tall in Brazil.

She won the Byte world youth title in 2006, and then the Laser 4.7 crown in 2008. She has improved steadily and is now on top of the world in the prestigious Laser Radial category.

Past winners of Youth Worlds titles have gone on to become some of the biggest names in sailing. There is three-time America's Cup winning skipper Russell Coutts of New Zealand, triple-Olympic gold medallist Ben Ainslie of Great Britain and former Volvo Ocean Race winner Stuart Bannatyne, another Kiwi.

Elizabeth Yin, TODAY's Athlete of the Year, 2009, is on course, as she pursues her Olympic dream.

THE HONOUR ROLL

1

Elizabeth Yin



2

Feng Tianwei



3

Quah Tingwen



4

Hariss Harun



5

Jasmine Ser



POINTS OF VIEW

Elizabeth Yin is on the threshold of sailing greatness, having won three world titles so far in her fledging career. And she did that while being a full-time student! She's really put Singapore on the sailing map.

READER HENRY LIM

I would like to vote for Quah Ting Wen as TODAY's Athlete of the Year 2009. At the SEA Games in Laos, Ting Wen swam on despite being in pain. I'm proud she's a Singaporean.

READER ELIZABETH CHONG