

# These Singapore shooting stars keep it all in the family

The SEA Games are a family affair for some among the 424-strong Singapore contingent in Hanoi. In dancesport there are siblings Gary and Chelsy Tsan as well as Jerome and Rachel Teo, silat has brothers Sheik Farhan and Sheik Ferdous while diving boasts the Ong twins, Sze En and Rei En. *The Straits Times'* Kimberly Kwek looks at the familial ties in shooting – father and son Gai Bin and Tianrui, sisters Adele and Fernel Tan, plus siblings Martina and Marat Veloso.



Clockwise from top: National shooters Gai Bin and his son Tianrui, sisters Adele and Fernel Tan and siblings Martina and Marat Veloso. Tianrui, Fernel and Marat are making their SEA Games debuts in Hanoi, following in the footsteps of their medal-winning family members. ST PHOTOS: SAMUEL ANG, DESMOND FOO

## GAI BIN AND TIANRUI

When your parents are Gai Bin and Fan Xiaoping, who share 16 SEA Games pistol medals between them, it is almost inevitable that your second home is the shooting range.

That was indeed the case for Tianrui but he did not take to the sport at first. He began shooting at 10 as part of the Ministry of Education's Junior Sports Academy programme, but preferred to play basketball with his friends while also dabbling in hockey and badminton in primary school.

The 18-year-old said: "At the start, I felt it was very boring but bo pian (Hokkien for no choice), they (his parents) forced me so I just continued."

It took him about three years to really take an interest in shooting when "I saw my scores going up, it motivated me and slowly I picked up interest."

Even then, the teenager opted for the air rifle instead of following in the footsteps of his parents as he wanted to do something different.

But four-time Games champion Gai Bin does not mind as he only wanted his children – Tianrui and daughter Tianyue, 26 – to try the sport. As coaches, the couple firmly believe that the sport can play a significant role in building one's character and developing traits such as self-control.

Gai Bin, 53, who also has three golds from the 2010 Commonwealth Games, explained: "During training and competitions, you need to concentrate and you have to control every part of your body. If you can't do that, or if one small part of your body moves, then you can end up shooting badly."

He noted his son has mellowed since picking up the sport. The once playful and impatient Tianrui used to be triggered by incidents such as an accidental bump by strangers but he now shrugs them off.

"When I took up shooting, I



calmed myself down, I can control myself better," said the Institute of Technical Education College Central student, who is proud of his father's achievements. "During my studies, I also focus better in class and in school; I've changed a lot. I'm more patient with my friends, I can tolerate more things."

After rising steadily through the ranks in the national team, Tianrui made his Games debut in Vietnam, where he competed alongside his father for the first time.

It will be Gai Bin's eighth appearance at the regional event. Tianrui won a silver in the mixed team 10m air rifle with Fernel Tan and finished sixth in the individual event while Gai Sr was seventh in the 50m pistol. Both have other events on their schedule.

But the duo said the Games will not be any different from other overseas competitions as they view each other as teammates rather than family when they are competing.

"At home sometimes we will share some of our experiences with each other but we won't talk too much because he has his own coach," said Gai Bin. "It's his first time at the SEA Games so he will

slowly learn from the experience."

## ADELE AND FERNEL TAN

They share the same fashion sense, both enjoy sushi and pasta, and even have matching charms on their shooting tripods. Such is the bond between sisters, who also have the same birthday, but that ends at the shooting range.

Adele, 23, and Fernel, 20, who both compete in the 10m air rifle, have gone head-to-head countless times in competitions and selection trials, but they do not hold back despite how close they are.

"When there is a need to, we will be competitive, especially in competitions. It's our responsibility as athletes to do our best," said Adele, a second-year undergraduate at the National University of Singapore. "We don't let go of our own abilities (just because we're sisters) but we also don't hate each other."

There is no animosity when one beats the other – they joke that they will beat the other in the next competition.

They credit the support of the community around them, including their family members, coaches



and schools, for encouraging healthy competition instead of pitting them against each other.

The biggest challenge of being siblings in the sport? Finding enough space in the car for their luggage when they travel for overseas competitions.

Adele, who clinched two bronze medals at the 2019 SEA Games, said: "Everyone thinks that our friends and family will compare and there's only one gold medalist but since we were young, our parents weren't like that. If she wins, it probably just means that she was better on the day and I probably have some stuff to improve on."

The sisters may share similar interests, but their shooting styles are quite different – Adele tends to be more intuitive, while Fernel prefers taking more time to shoot. Last year, as Adele was preparing for the Tokyo Olympics, Fernel agreed to be her companion during practice for a month-long training camp that saw them housed at the Singapore Sports School.

The only time they could leave the school was on weekends, when they would go to Safra Yishun to compete. When boredom crept in, they kept themselves entertained

with online shopping and watching Hong Kong period drama series.

Fernel made her Games debut in Hanoi, bagging a silver in the mixed team event yesterday after partnering Adele and Natanya Tan to a women's team bronze.

She had said earlier: "Handling the pressure is one of my top goals; I feel like if I'm able to handle it, that can bring me far in other competitions."

## MARTINA AND MARAT VELOSO

Marat remembers the moment that inspired him to pursue the sport of shooting. It was 2014, he was 11 and on the edge of his seat as he watched his older sister Martina competing in the final of the ISSF World Cup in Munich.

On that fateful day, Martina's final shot saw her beat the Czech Republic's 2008 Olympic champion Katerina Emmons for the gold – a milestone for the 14-year-old.

Recalling that moment, Marat, 19, said: "I was feeling nervous and anxious because I really wanted her to win a competition, so I was emotionally involved even though I wasn't actually there."

"The fact that she was a World Cup champion at the age of 14 sparked my interest because shooting is a sport where age does not matter. I was kind of interested in shooting because of how competitive it is and that even shooters who are still young and in their teens could still be world champions and win many international competitions."

Eight years on, Marat and Martina are competing at the Hanoi SEA Games, where Marat is making his debut while Martina is featuring in her third Games.

Growing up in a sports-mad household – all five Veloso children are named after tennis players – the duo dabbled in a variety of sports from a young age.

Both siblings hold junior black belts in taekwondo, while Marat was also a competitive swimmer and Martina tried synchronised swimming for a while.

But shooting won out in the end. Having been in the sport for about a decade, Martina, a first-year communications undergraduate at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, often shares lessons she has picked up over the course of her career with her brother, like dealing with competing in high-level competitions as a newer shooter.

She is also the first person Marat, a third-year engineering student at Nanyang Polytechnic, goes to if he needs any advice.

"It's nice to have a sibling in the same sport and at a high level – I'm able to teach him some things that I learnt along the way and he's also able to relate to some of them," said Martina, a two-gold Commonwealth Games champion.

With both of them having the same pet event, the 22-year-old mainly shares advice on the mental aspect of the sport, such as how to manage expectations.

She is also aware of the pressure Marat feels to live up to her achievements and frequently reminds him that the most important thing is for him to enjoy the sport.

Marat, who has been working with his coach and sports psychologist, said: "I really want to do well so both of us can have good performances and everyone can think that these Veloso siblings are really good. Ever since I started shooting, everyone already has had high expectations of me because I am Martina's brother."

"It's hard dealing with this pressure because it's always there, I just... focus on the things that I can focus on and are in my control."

One of their memorable moments from being in the same sport was at last September's Singapore Cup, where they rewrote their national men's and women's 50m rifle three positions records.

Their friendly competition extends to the family too, with Marat determined to beat Martina at being the favourite among their three younger siblings – Monica, Michaela and Mikhael, who are 10, eight and four respectively.

Martina said: "He is very domesticated – he knows how to change diapers and stuff because my mum couldn't do everything. I'm surprised they do not like him more than they like me... I think it's more for him like he wants to beat me but I'm like, 'No, you cannot', but I'm looking forward to the day he does. It'll be a good thing to celebrate."

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