

SREEKARTHIKA IS CHESS QUEEN

13-year-old dethrones 11-time champ Gong
en route to winning S'pore women's crown

Melvyn Teoh

Sreekarthika Velmurugan's love for chess began with a game of snakes and ladders.

While playing the board game with her father nearly a decade ago, she got bored and after flipping it over, discovered a chess board on the other side.

Her father Velmurugan Gurusamy Pandian took the opportunity to teach his young daughter the game.

His efforts paid off on Feb 14,

when 13-year-old Sreekarthika won her first major title at the Singapore National Chess Championships, where she was crowned the women's chess champion.

In the process, she dethroned woman grandmaster and 2019 SEA Games gold medallist (women rapid) Gong Qianyun, 40, who won the title 10 times in a row and 11 in all.

The teenager said: "I think I played well and was quite strong overall, this is my best result as I was fourth (in the women's category) last year.

"I'm really happy to beat Qianyun (in round 7) because I know she's really strong, and I've played her a lot of times and I lost every time."

Woman Fide master Sreekarthika, topped the 12-strong field with seven points in nine rounds, posting six wins, two draws and a loss.

The Singapore permanent resident, who moved here from Tamil Nadu, India, when she was one, took home \$2,000 for winning the women's category and \$3,000 for finishing third overall in the Open category.

Her third-placed finish is also the highest for a woman player in the Open category since the competition combined the gender events in 2021.

Sreekarthika entered the final round at the Asian Civilisations



Sreekarthika Velmurugan topped the 12-woman field with seven points from nine rounds. She had six wins, two draws and a loss. ST PHOTO: JASEL POH

Museum on Feb 14 needing just a draw to be crowned women's champion, but faced a motivated Fang Kun.

Woman candidate master Fang, 21, needed a win to take it to tie-breaks as she was one point behind Sreekarthika, and held an advantage throughout their four-hour match.

But, as the game progressed, time pressure struck and Fang

made a decisive blunder on move 58 for Sreekarthika to claim the victory four moves later.

Singapore Chess Federation chief executive Kevin Goh told *The Sunday Times* that he was initially uncertain about Sreekarthika's abilities, but has since changed his mind after seeing her performance at the championships.

He said: "She will be turning 14 this year and, to be able to secure a

national championship in this particular field is an impressive achievement, and bodes well for the future of our national development programmes."

Sreekarthika is among the emerging talents in Singapore chess. They include Siddharth Jagadeesh, 18, who obtained the grandmaster title in 2024, and youngsters such as international master Jayden Wong, 19, and Fide master Goh Zi Han, 16.

Looking ahead, the GIG International School grade 7 student aims to attain her woman grandmaster title by the end of 2026 and hopes to become a grandmaster by the time she turns 18.

In the Open category on Feb 14, grandmaster Tin Jingyao claimed his third consecutive national title, and eighth overall, to pocket the \$5,000 top prize.

Tin, a final year computing student at the National University of Singapore, said: "This year, some of my main competition didn't participate (Siddharth has a broken foot), so maybe it was a bit more relaxed this year.

"But still, there were some challenging games, especially in the last round, I was in some trouble and I didn't even realise it."

melvyn@teoh@sph.com.sg