



Home in Focus • Trading punches,
raising standards in Bedok | **B4 & B5**

Home In Focus



Team member Leah Warden says getting opportunities to spar overseas or locally has been of great help to her. "It's nice to train in an environment where everyone wants to help one another, where there are no egos."

PACKING A PUNCH

Budding group aims to raise standard of women's boxing in S'pore and bring home nation's first SEA Games gold medal in the sport



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Twice a week, in a corner of Bedok Sports Hall, some 18 women are put through their paces, executing crosses and jabs while doing footwork drills, as they come together for 75 minutes of cardio-packed intensive training.

Ranging in age from 16 to 35 and including a chef, a teacher and a paralegal, these women are part of the Singapore Women's Boxing Development Team, which represents the cream of the crop of female boxers in Singapore.

As the women focus on training, former national boxer Leona Hui glances over at them now and then, occasionally jumping in to serve as a sparring partner or to comment on their techniques.

In early 2020, Ms Hui, who works as both an events manager and a boxing coach, sought to start a casual outlet for women boxers from various gyms around the island to come together to train or meet up on an ad hoc basis.

An open call led to a good turnout of about 20 women. But after two sessions, Singapore was put under lockdown as the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and the programme was put on hold.

In September 2021, Ms Hui restarted the programme, and it saw some 40 women participating in a training session with former national boxer Muhamad Ridhwan Ahmad. She decided to take the programme a step further and created the developmental team for local female boxers.

"The aim was also to consolidate talent from all corners of the island, so that we could not only train together but also adopt similar strategies to take Singapore women's boxing forward," says Ms Hui, 36.

This meant that the women training together could be exposed to one another's boxing styles, and it became easier for them to find

sparring partners within similar weight classes.

Ms Hui's idea also arose from her years as an athlete, when she did not have a female figure or support group in the sport that she could lean on for mental and emotional support in the male-dominated world of competitive boxing.

Mr Ridhwan, 35, formally joined the group as their coach, and after the programme gained momentum, the Singapore Boxing Federation adopted it, helping with promotion and funding of certain aspects of training.

The lack of opportunities to spar with a diverse pool of boxers was also something Ms Hui wanted to address when she started the team.

Together with Mr Ridhwan's gym, Legends Fight Sport, she held Singapore's first and only all-women boxing championship, Legacy Women's Boxing Championship, and flew in athletes from Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia to fight against the women from the developmental team.

Essentially, the Singapore boxers still train at their home gyms, but come to train together at bi-weekly sessions.

The group's immediate goal is to raise the standard of women's boxing in Singapore, and it aims to eventually bring back the Republic's first SEA Games gold medal in the sport, a feat which the men's team has not achieved so far.

For now, Ms Hui and Mr Ridhwan continue to keep their eyes peeled for talent. They have organised the second edition of the Legacy Women's Boxing Championship, which will take place at Wisma Geylang Serai on Nov 26 and feature around 10 boxers from the developmental team against opponents from Indonesia and Malaysia.

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Above: Team member Hailey Cheong (in red) in a match against Indonesian boxer Ratu Laili Atika at the Legacy Women's Boxing Championship in June. Athletes from Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia were flown in for the tournament.

Right: Training together has allowed the women to be exposed to one another's boxing styles, and it has become easier for them to find sparring partners within similar weight classes.



SCAN TO WATCH
Meet the Singaporean women aiming for boxing glory

<https://st.sg/sbboxing>





Left: Members of the Singapore Women's Boxing Development Team training at Bedok Sports Hall. Twice a week, they come together for 75 minutes of cardio-packed intensive training. ST PHOTOS: KLIA CHEE SIONG



Former national boxer Muhammad Ridhwan Ahmad with team member Hailey Cheong during the Legacy Women's Boxing Championship in June. Mr Ridhwan, who joined the development team as its coach last year, says he believes it "has got a lot of potential".



Ms Hailey Cheong setting the timer on her phone for a sparring session. The members range in age from 16 to 35 and include a chef, a teacher and a paralegal.



Above: Retired national boxer Leona Hui demonstrating techniques during a training session. She started the developmental team with the aim of consolidating "talent from all corners of the island, so that we could not only train together but also adopt similar strategies to take Singapore women's boxing forward".



Left: Outside of her boxing life, Ms Leah Warden studies physiotherapy at the Singapore Institute of Technology. She is seen here practising what she learnt during a lesson in school. She joined the boxing developmental team after being spotted at a competition last December.