Three sailing pairs remain buddies despite rivalry

BY JEANETTE WANG

WHAT do you get when you put six strapping young sailors together, each with a shot at Olympic glory?

They have been divided into three men’s 470 pairs, but only one pair will represent Singapore at next year’s Olympic Games in Beijing.

The reason is that Olympic rules allow a country to enter only one entry in each class.

Yet, there is no sign of animosity among them, nor displays of unscrupulous tactics to undermine each other.

Instead, teamwork is the key for Singapore’s three 470 pairs - Roy Tay and Chung Peiming (both 24), Xu Yuanzhen (22) and Terence Koh (19), and Teo Wee Chin (20) and Benjamin Tan (22).

The full-time sailors share everything—from racing strategies to hotel rooms, to playful jibes and secrets.

Just 10 minutes into the interview, and it was revealed that Koh was the messiest of them all, while Chung had introduced Teo to clubbing.

Said Tan: “On-water incidents happen all the time, but it’s important that we don’t bring them back on shore.”

At last month’s Isaf World Championships in Cascais, Portugal, the pairings of Tay and Chung, and Xu and Koh both qualified for next year’s Olympics, finishing 31st and 34th respectively among 112 boats.

Singapore was among the top 21 countries in the event and earned a Beijing slot.

Next week, Xu and Koh will race in the Qingdao International Regatta, an Olympic test event, along with Koh Seng Leong (Laser Men), Lo Man Yi (Laser Radial), and Toh Liying and Deborah Ong (470 Women).

Xu and Koh, who were 31st there last year, are targeting the top 20 this time. They are also hoping to gain valuable racing experience.

Selection trials, scheduled next year in Singapore and overseas, will decide which of the three pairs will sail in Qingdao.

Yesterday, the six men’s 470 sailors and eight other Olympic sailing squad members were cheered on by over 50 students and teachers from the PSB Academy at a well-wishing event at Plaza Singapura.

Ng Ser Miang, International Olympic Committee executive board member and Project 0812 chairman, was presented with the Olympic Sail flag, a symbol of the Olympic spirit, by PSB Academy’s management.

Project 0812 aims to deliver an Olympic medal for Singapore at either next year’s Beijing Games or the 2012 London Games.

Ng said he was “happy with the progress of Project 0812 so far”, and expressed his confidence in table tennis and badminton qualifying for the Olympics.