Sailors’ Doha medals will help fund future SMU athletes

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THEY made their mark last month in the waters off Doha, Qatar. Now, two national sailors are making history at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

Asian Games medal-winners Renfred Tay and Koh Seng Leong are setting up the first scholarship for student athletes at a local university.

They have each pledged $5,000 towards the new SMU Sports Scholarship. This is the first time that current students in a local university are giving back to the university to help future cohorts, according to SMU.

The two first-year undergraduates, both 21, are hoping more will come forward, from students and alumni to corporations – and not just at SMU.

“We’ve been told this has never been done before. So, we hope it’s an example for other sportsmen from other universities to help give back to their alma mater,” said Mr Tay.

As medal-winners, the duo have already given back 20 per cent of their incentive winnings for the development of the sport, which is the practice at the Singapore Sailing Federation.

However, Mr Tay, who earned $80,000 for being part of the Keelboat team that struck gold, and Mr Koh, who earned $125,000 for his silver in the Laser Radial category, wanted to do more for students juggling studies and sports.

“After giving back to the sport, next is contributing at the school and parental level. We need their support on a daily basis. We can’t cope with our studies if the system is too rigid, and SMU has been supportive,” said Mr Koh from Sydney, where he is training.

The pair got the idea for a scholarship after a chat with a staff member from the varsity’s Office of Student Life. Singapore Sailing president Low Teo Ping also encouraged his charges when they talked to him about it.

“I could see they wanted to do something catalytic,” he said.

The new scholarship seems to fit the bill. Worth $2,000, it will be awarded each year to one outstanding sportsperson in his or her freshmen year. SMU has promised to source for more contributions from other athletes to enlarge the pool for the fund.

“It has been SMU’s long-standing belief in nurturing a diversity of talents and giving them the opportunity to have a university education,” said SMU president Howard Hunter, who will formally receive his students’ donation today.

“They’ve all done us proud, and I commend Renfred and Seng Leong for carrying on this fine tradition in their generous contributions, even as students.”

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