

They just want to box

One eager to set boxing career alight, the other relishing a second wind

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THEIR reasons for getting into the ring are as different as night and day.

But at Hall 601 of Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre tomorrow night, Mohd Nor Rizan and David Alexis will both have one common goal.

Both Singaporeans will give it their all to tame their respective Thai opponents at Showdown in Singapore, the second boxing bonanza this year after the Black Tie Fight Night in June.

While the main event will see Dondon Sultan and Eddie Delic battling it out for the World Boxing Foundation world welterweight title, the undercard will feature Mohd Nor against Pornthep Kawponkanpim in a six-round bantamweight (51-54kg) fight, while Alexis will face off against Dennadai Sithdara in a four-round cruiserweight (80-85kg) bout.

On his professional debut at the Black Tie Fight Night, 28-year-old Mohd Nor overcame his inexperience to knock out Indonesia's Hendrik Borneo with a sweet right-handed hook in the third round of their featherweight bout.

Now Mohd Nor has gone down to bantamweight and he aims to be a contender



DEAD SERIOUS: Featuring on the undercard, Alexis (left) and Mohd Noh will fly the Singapore flag against two Thais.

DON WONG

THE SINGAPORE FIGHTERS

MOHD NOR RIZAN

Fight record: 1 win (KO)

Age: 28

Weight: 55kg

Height: 1.7m

DAVID ALEXIS

Fight record: 1 win (walkover)

Age: 38

Weight: 88kg

Height: 1.91m

for a major title within the next two years. Affectionately known as "Amy", Mohd Nor can't wait to jump into the ring after the pain of training.

He said: "I've been given this chance to box professionally at this stage of my life and I want to go as far as I can as fast as I can. I want to be a contender by the time I turn 30 and that's within two years. So I really can't wait for this fight to start."

Mohd Nor said a three-week training stint in Melbourne two months ago, where he sparred with world middleweight champion "King" Sam Soliman, has fast-tracked his progress.

"I've learnt to be more focused and

picked up a lot of lessons in Melbourne that has made me a better boxer. Sparring with Sam helped tremendously."

"Winning on Saturday is important because everyone will be looking at me and watching out for the result, even the guys in Australia," he added.

Alexis has a vastly different tale.

He missed out on gold at the 1993 SEA Games final and the bronze medallist became a target for jokes from colleagues and even friends.

Alexis is now bent proving how good a fighter he is. The 38-year-old veteran said: "It's important for me to prove myself. This is my second chance and I want to make full use of it."

"Even though I won bronze at the 1993 SEA Games in Singapore, everyone has been teasing me, till today, for losing in the semi-final.

"I'm sick and tired of being No 2 or No 3. I feel that I'm now better because I'm more mature. I'm no longer the kamikaze sort of fighter who goes into fights blindly."

Both boxers are under the charge of veteran coach Barry Pestana, who trains them at PowerFitness at Concourse. The 56-year-old trainer believes his charges have what it takes to "more than hold their own".

"Mohd Nor has learnt a fair amount during his Melbourne stint and will put up a really good fight," he said.

"For Alexis, he is coming back from a six-year layoff from boxing but he is fit.

"He has a good amateur background and he is a mature fighter who knows what to do. I'm confident both of them will be victorious and fly the Singapore flag high."

Ringside tickets sold out.

Remaining tickets priced at \$78, \$48 and \$28 still available at all Sistic counters or at www.sistic.com.sg. Ten per cent discount for bulk orders still apply.

TOMORROW: THE WEIGH IN

Mick Croucher, the man behind the World Boxing Foundation title bout, Singapore's biggest fight night since 1989.



NEW MAN: Once a Kenyan, Shaheen is now a Qatari, a world champion and rich beyond his dreams.

Arab states depend on foreign talent, too

DOHA – Oil and gas rich Gulf states believe the Asian Games is a crucial stepping stone to the 2008 Olympics, and they are depending on their controversial imported foreign legion to achieve the biggest strides.

Buying in talent has reached record levels in recent years, with Kenya proving to be the picking ground of choice for nations like Qatar and Bahrain.

But it's far from a new development. Qatar's Olympic medal breakthrough in 1992 was achieved by Somali-born Mohamed Suleiman, who made history with his 1,500m bronze, while, for the 2000 Games in Sydney, Qatar paid US\$1 million (\$1.5 million) to Bulgaria for eight weightlifters.

The country also offered the same

amount to Brazilian footballers Ailton, Leandro and Dede to switch to Qatar's colours in 2003.

Gulf nations have not been deterred from flashing their cash under the noses of would-be converts, but there have been clampdowns.

Last year, the IAAF ruled that athletes would have to wait three years, from the time they are granted citizenship, to when they can run for their new country.

Fifa, too, have acted, insisting upon a five-year residency qualification before a foreign player can represent his new homeland.

But, there is no sign of the talent drain ending.

Bahrain have also been quick to

mount raiding parties in Africa. In September, former Ethiopian Maryam Yusuf Jamal became the first Asian woman from outside China to bag a World Cup event, after she won the 1,500m in Athens.

All have seen the professional and financial rewards being enjoyed by Saif Saeed Shaheen, who used to be Kenya's Stephen Cherono and is now Qatari, a world champion and rich beyond his dreams, a result of his domination of the 3,000m steeplechase.

"In Kenya, there is nothing like this," said Shaheen, who picked up a US\$1 million bonus for his 2003 world title in Paris.

"Qatar is a country with a lot of opportunities." — AFP