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## Fencing: National fencer Lau Ywen accepted into Stanford, hopes to represent university at NCAA championship



National fencer Lau Ywen has been accepted to Stanford University in the United States on academic merit. PHOTO: ST FILE

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SINGAPORE - National sabre fencer Lau Ywen had more to celebrate after clinching a seventh-placed finish at last month's Junior World Cup in Dormagen, Germany - her best result at a Junior World Cup.

It was during the tournament that the 17-year-old received news of her acceptance to Stanford University in the United States.

The school competes in Division 1 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship.

Ywen, who was admitted on academic merit, told The Straits Times she would accept the offer soon.

She said: "I was super excited... Stanford was my first choice of university as I feel that I can really fit in, with its extremely diverse community.

"I'm going to keep fencing for sure - I know a lot of other Singaporean athletes who continue to represent their country while overseas, like (swimmer) Joseph Schooling and (fellow fencer) Amita Berthier.

"Fencing is very important to me and education is as well, so I'm very happy for the opportunity to go to a good university and continue my fencing career."

Other Singapore athletes who are studying in the US include sprinter Zubin Muncherji (Indiana University) and diver Freida Lim (University of Georgia).

Ywen will complete her education at the United World College of South East Asia before enrolling in Stanford as a liberal arts undergraduate in September. Tuition fees for the four-year course are estimated to be over US\$48,000 (S\$64,000) annually, with additional expenses for room and board.

The 2017 SEA Games champion will continue to consult her coach David Chan on areas like competition tactics while she is overseas, although the details of this arrangement have yet to be discussed.

"I have great coaches and lovely team-mates in Singapore, but we're a small country that is still up and coming in the fencing circuit," said Ywen, who hopes to qualify for the Stanford fencing team and compete at the NCAA championships.

She is likely to spar with some familiar faces such as American junior fencers Maia Chamberlain, who won bronze in Dormagen, and Chloe Fox-Gitomer. Both represent Princeton University.

"America is one of the big leaders in fencing so I'll be able to fence with more people. A lot of them also do well at the Junior World Cups and at senior level, so I'll learn a lot from the fencers there," she added.

"Fencing with a great team at Stanford is a fantastic bonus and I'm very excited, I really can't wait to train with a strong team with great coaches."

The Stanford fencing team were 10th at last year's NCAA West Regional Championships, and had two representatives at the 2016 Olympic Games - women's epee fencer Vivian Kong and men's foilist Alexander Massialas, who won a silver and bronze medal at the Rio Games.

The squad's coaching roster includes Olympic champion George Pogosov, who represented the former Soviet Union and won gold with the men's sabre team in 1992. Pogosov also has a men's sabre team silver medal from the 1988 Olympic Games.

Fencing Singapore's vice-president (high performance) Yau Wee Sian believes Ywen will benefit from the "competitive environment and structured student-athlete lifestyle that would demand plenty of discipline".

He said: "We're confident that Ywen will be able to make the most of the opportunity before her to maximise her potential in fencing as well as achieve her academic goals."