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## SINGAPORE SPORTS

# On the ropes for a cause

BOXING virtually disappeared from the face of Singapore sport in the mid 1990s.

In 1999, the sport was dealt a huge knock-out blow when the Singapore Amateur Boxing Association (Saba) lost its national sports association (NSA) status.

But the sport didn't stay down for the full count.

Nine years later, Saba pulled themselves together with a new management team in place, after Solomon Richard was elected president last September.

With a new sense of purpose, the NSA quickly got around to organising two national championships in the first quarter of this year.

Their effort uncovered three genuine contenders for the two spots to represent Singapore at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games here in August next year.

In March, Saba were reinstated as an NSA by the Singapore Sports Council. They're already hard at work targetting a return to the SEA Games this November in Laos, after a 16-year absence from the regional Games.

Women's boxing made its debut at the biennial SEA Games in the Philippines four years ago and Saba are banking on Michelle Thavesi to become the first female boxer to represent Singapore.

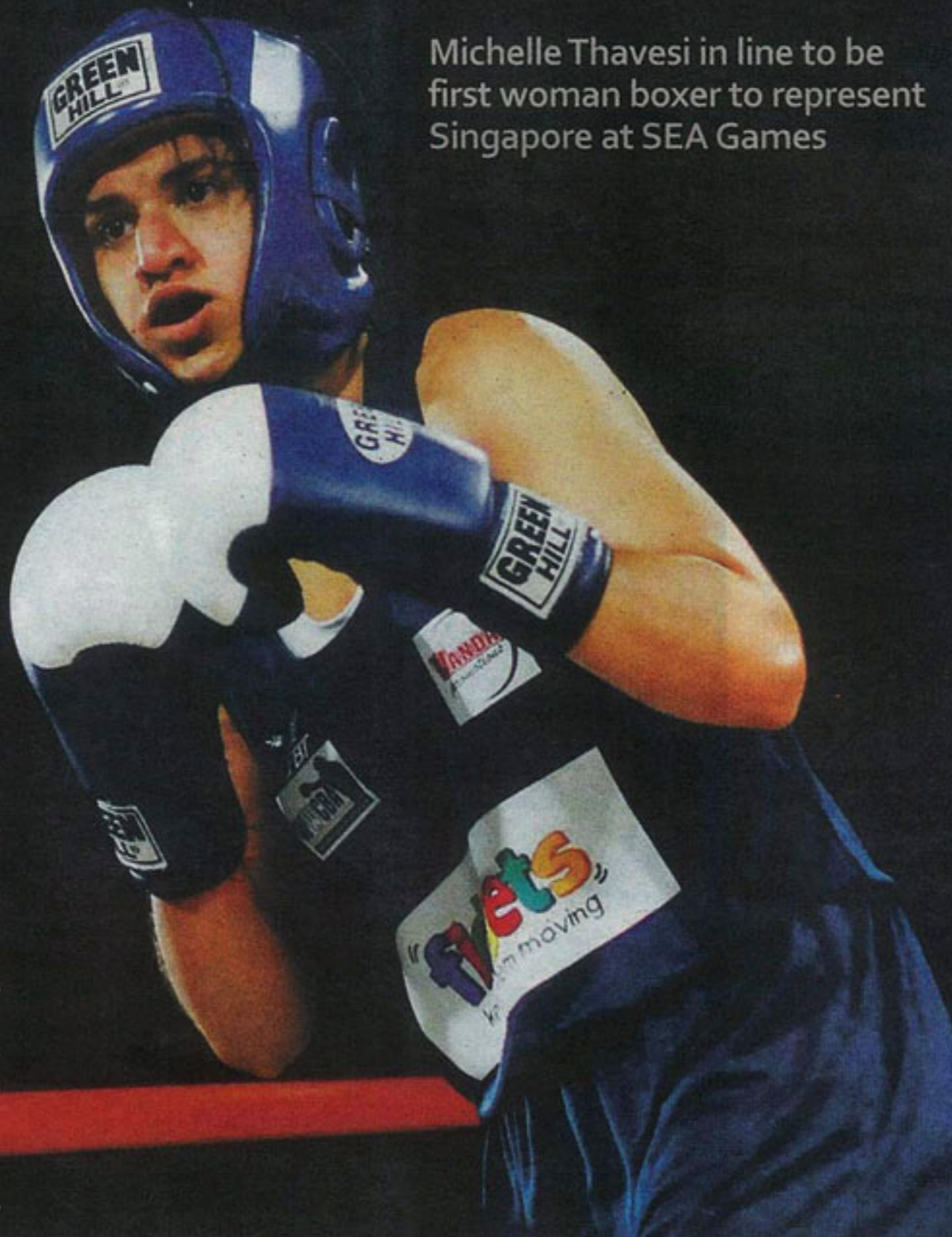
"In our last tournament in March, she really impressed," said Saba vice-president T Balasundram. "She boxed in two events on the same day, and that is not an easy thing for a boxer to do."

Balasundram, who along with fellow Saba vice-president and former Olympian Syed Abdul Kadir, is charged with overseeing the national squads, said Thavesi will be closely monitored for the SEA Games.

The 24-year-old recently made her international debut at the Arafura Games in Darwin.

**SHE NEEDS TO BOX AT A HIGHER LEVEL**  
Although she was outclassed there by

Michelle Thavesi in line to be first woman boxer to represent Singapore at SEA Games



Australian international Roxanne Walker in her opening bout in the under-57kg class, with the referee stopping the fight after only 20 seconds of the first round, she remains undaunted.

Said Thavesi, who took up the sport in 2006 to shed her 82kg frame: "Of course, I was disappointed to have lost, but it was also my first international tournament and Roxanne has a lot more fights under her belt than I have."

But the boxer's trainer and employer, Ian Mullane, isn't bothered by the loss in Darwin and said the purpose of the outing was to expose Thavesi to the higher standards of international competitions.

"Let's face it, she has no real competition in Singapore," said the 38-year-old, whose company Vanda Boxing introduced White Collar Boxing to Asia two years ago.

"And if Michelle does not get real competition, she'll be of no use to the country at the SEA Games or in any international competition."

To help her out in training, Mullane has brought in a former female national boxer from Italy, Francesca Giordano, who now works for a pharmaceutical company here.

"My training with Francesca is helping a lot because she doesn't back down and won't give me anything less than 100 per cent," said Thavesi.

"She helps me understand what to expect in an international competition."

Thavesi will get more outside exposure as Mullane intends to take her to Malaysia's first all-woman competition next month, the Indonesian National Championships in August and October's Asian Indoor Games in Vietnam.

"If she is to get nominated for the SEA Games and then do well in Laos, this is the only way she can do it," said Mullane.

"We also have plans for the Commonwealth Games and I don't mind the investment because Michelle gives a lot more from working for my company and has become like family to me."