

HE'S A FIGHTER

By R Velu

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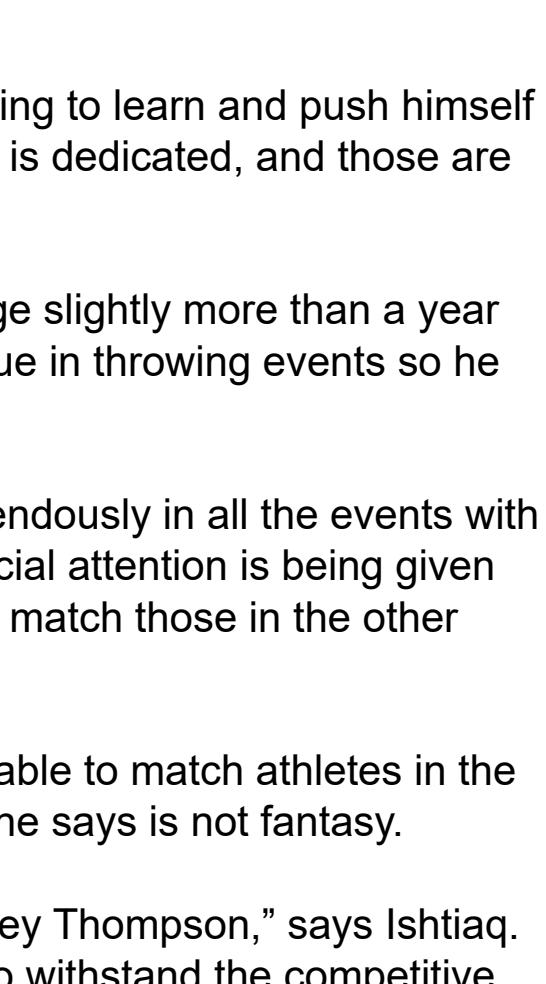
TO MANY the name Hanafiah Nasir may mean nothing...yet. In athletics, the 23-year-old newcomer is being hailed as the candidate likely to break the eight-year-old national decathlon record.

In just his first year of competition last season, Hanafiah established himself as the undisputed national champion by winning the National and then the Malaysian AAU decathlon titles.

He is set to crack the 6,000-point barrier at the National decathlon meet in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia next week. Then he's going for J V Jayan's national record of 6,237 set in 1973 in Singapore. This he hopes to achieve at the MAAU championship.

At his rate of progress and his willingness to learn and push himself during training, the two targets are well within reach.

"In fact, he wanted to beat the 6000-point mark at the 1980 MAAU meet" says his coach Ishtiaq Mobarak (right), the national 110m hurdles record holder. "I had set him a target of only 5,800 and he cleared that."



That was only his third decathlon competition and he scored 5,819 points. His breakdown by event: 100m 11.6, long jump 6.71m, shot put 9.89m, high jump 1.92m, 400m 53.3, 110m hurdles 15.4, discus 30.70m, pole vault 2.60m, javelin 43.40m, and 1,500m 5:32.8

Two months earlier he had won the National decathlon title knocking off defending champion Lee Wai Yin and just before that was the South Zone meet in Malacca.

Hanafiah's personal best in the 10 events are 11.2, 7.04m, 11.0m, 1.92m, 53.0, 15.4, 35.0m, 2.80, 48.70m, 5:12.9. These were achieved during training and the question is whether he can repeat such performances in a tight two-day schedule. If he does, he would not only break the national record but will also be a stronger challenger in the South East Asia Games (SEA) in December 1981 in Manila.

Champions aren't made overnight and Hanafiah knows that but he has one quality, just like national sprint triple champion Rabuan Pit, that'll take him far... Determination.

As Ishtiaq himself says "he's a fighter, and is willing to learn and push himself as an athlete. As an athlete he is exemplary and is dedicated, and those are the qualities champions are made of."

When Hanafiah first came under Ishtiaq's tutelage slightly more than a year ago he knew little of running style or the technique in throwing events so he just stood and used sheer brute force.

All that has changed and he has improved tremendously in all the events with the exception of pole vault and the 1,500m. Special attention is being given to these two to bring his performance level up to match those in the other events.

Ishtiaq says that his protege should one day be able to match athletes in the SEA Games region if not at Asian level and this he says is not fantasy.

"He may not be built like Olympic champion, Daley Thompson," says Ishtiaq. "But he has a physique that should enable him to withstand the competitive demands at Asian level."

For the moment, Hanafiah, who packs 160 pounds in a 6-foot frame is seriously preparing for his attack on the 6000-point barrier at the Merdeka Stadium in Kuala Lumpur on April 16th — 17th, 1981.

Six days a week he is at the Kuala Lumpur Sports Centre at Kampung Pandan. Long after other athletes have gone home, he's still going through his paces, his fancy bead choker gleaming

In the dark. For company he has three decathletes under Ishtiaq's group.

At the end, he's still raring to go, until Ishtiaq himself has to put his foot down and say "that's enough" for the day. "It's this kind of enthusiasm and dedication that we want in athletes," says Ishtiaq. "Some athletes have to be pushed and cajoled into training but not Hanafiah."

Hanafiah himself wouldn't have been all that interested in Decathlon if it hadn't been for an incident at Merdeka Stadium four years ago. Then residing in Malacca, he came all the way to watch the 1977 Sea Games in Kuala Lumpur.

While watching, a friend spotted Lee Wai Yin competing in the Decathlon and said to Hanafiah: "that guy is much smaller than you and yet he is competing in such a taxing event. Why don't you have a go at it?"

That remark said, half in jest, started Hanafiah thinking and by the time the Athletics programme had ended, he had decided to take it up. But he didn't go into decathlon straight away.

He started out with the high jump and long jump and was shortlisted for the Asean trophy training squad. But he failed to make the final team.

When the national decathlon and pentathlon championship was introduced last year (1980), he grabbed the chance, winning the zone meet at Melaka, then the national title, and the MAAU decathlon crown.

Finding that he was an all-around athlete without any outstanding performance in any particular event — except the 110m hurdles where he is second behind Lee Wai Yin — Hanafiah decided to concentrate on the decathlon.

Already Hanafiah is thinking of this December's SEA Games in Manila. But he isn't going to clutch at any shadows now. "My first target is to get more than 6,000 points," he says.

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ATHLETICS

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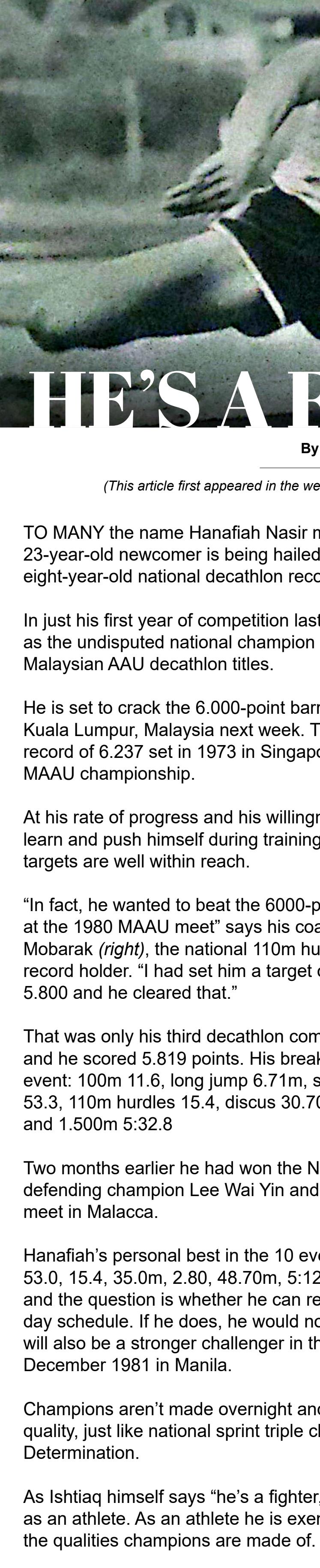
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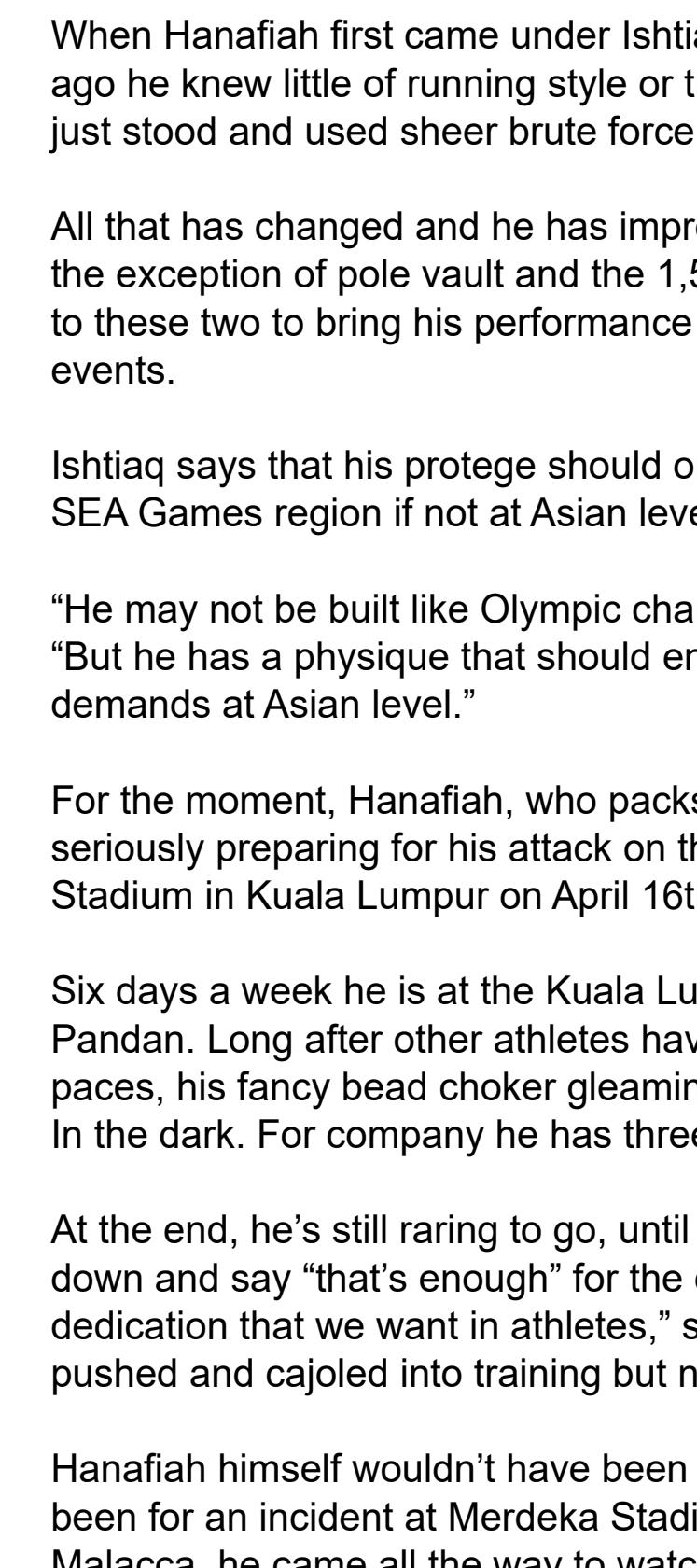
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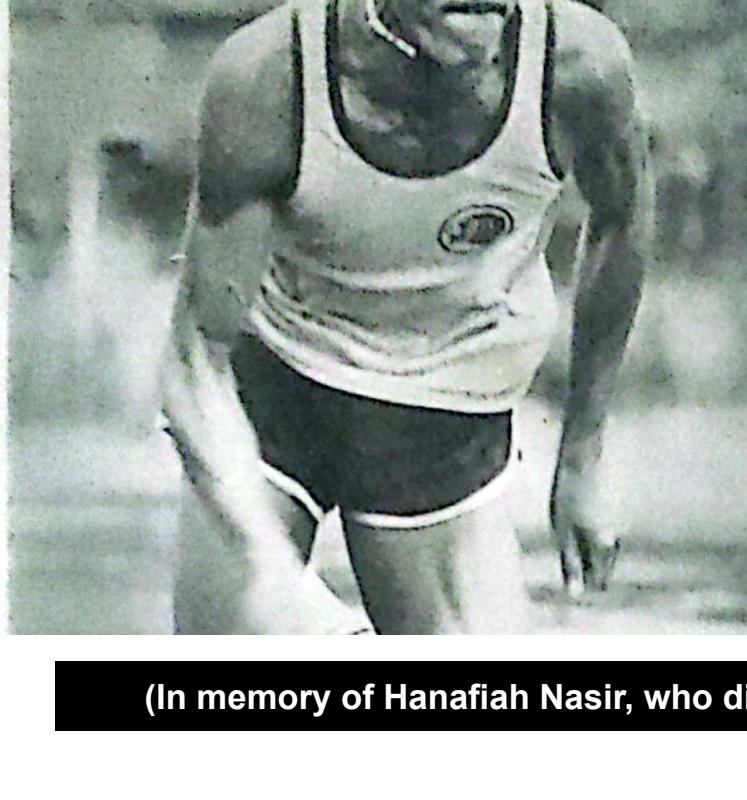
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