

SPORT

From near right: Gavriel Lai celebrates scoring the third goal for St Joseph's Institution with teammates Aidan Irfan and Ethan Lim during the 3-0 victory over Meridian Secondary School in the C Division boys' football final at the National Stadium on Aug 14. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH



School sports

SJI SEND OFF SCHOLARSHIPS WITH WIN

Gavriel, Aidan due to depart for Spain's Rayo Alcobendas as part of UTR project

Lin Tianbao

St Joseph's Institution (SJI) wingers Gavriel Lai and Aidan Irfan received the perfect farewell gift on Aug 14, ahead of their stints abroad as national project Unleash The Roar! (UTR) scholarship recipients.

At the National Stadium, their team eased past Meridian Secondary School 3-0 to clinch their first C Division boys' football title since the school restarted the sport in 2012.

The win comes just four days before the duo are due to depart for

Spain's Rayo Alcobendas, having been named among the nine recipients of the second batch of UTR scholarships.

Gavriel, who contributed a goal and an assist, called the win "one of the best goodbyes", while Aidan, whose cross led to a goal, added: "It's really nice to win before flying off, and I'm really grateful to my friends and school."

The pair have been influential this season, with Gavriel notching eight goals and Aidan adding another seven. Besides them, Zhou Luye and Keanu Song have both scored nine times.

While Gavriel took some knocks

in the late stages of the final, his effort in the last minute was enough to seal the victory for SJI, who had taken the lead 18 minutes in, when Jamus Low rifled the ball home after Aidan's cross was half-cleared.

They doubled their advantage three minutes into the second half, with Gavriel beating his man and setting up Luye for the finish.

SJI goalkeeper Colin Chew made a superb one-on-one save to keep their clean sheet intact in the 49th minute, before Gavriel then smashed a rebound off the bar past Meridian's Evan Lee 11 minutes later.

Said Gavriel: "While I could've been more clinical, scoring and assisting once was pretty good."

"I expected all my teammates to work our butts off, and I knew if I kept on pushing, I would get a goal

eventually. I wanted to (support) them too."

"Near the end of the game... I was hurting but I pushed through to the end, and of course, it was worth it."

SJI captain Scott Reid credited their success to their goalscoring outlets and defensive solidity.

The team conceded a solitary goal in nine games – in the 2-1 preliminary-round win over St Gabriel's Secondary on July 11 – and Scott said their determination to shut out opponents after that was evident.

"That goal motivated us to become better, and to keep our defence tighter and stronger," he explained.

Teacher-in-charge Loqman Al-faiz added: "This is a bunch of talented individuals, but not just that, they're united and very dedicated."

From the beginning of the year, they were committed to perform."

While Meridian settled for silver, captain Wayne Cheong said it was a "great opportunity for growth".

He added: "Although the results weren't what we hoped for, I believe that with more discipline and focus, we can achieve even greater success in the future."

They still had reasons to celebrate though, as the school retained their girls' title with a 3-1 win against a combined team comprising players from Boon Lay Secondary, Methodist Girls' School and Westwood Secondary. It is their third straight championship.

Winger Nayli Elvira, midfielder Nur Risyah Rizyqa and striker Amber Lee netted for Meridian, while Aria Romano converted a late consolation goal.

Said skipper Nayli: "We killed the game in the first half."

"In our games, we always give 200 per cent, and we kept our cool throughout."

Coach Fabio da Silva highlighted the fact that all his teams made the final in 2024 – they also claimed the boys and girls' titles in the B Division – and added: "The girls more than deserved it today, they were very confident."

The combined teams' co-captains Esther Lau, Zarra Nazneen and Surah Raudah were proud of their second place, having lost 6-0 to the same opponents in the preliminary round.

Esther added: "We really worked hard today, and everyone did their best."

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Probe into cyber bullying of gender-row boxer Khelif

PARIS – France has launched a cyber bullying probe following a complaint by Algerian Olympic boxing champion Imane Khelif, who was at the centre of a gender controversy at the Paris Olympic Games, prosecutors said on Aug 14.

The investigation was opened on Aug 13 into "cyber harassment" following the high-profile gender row at the Games, the Paris public prosecutor's office told AFP.

The athlete's lawyer Nabil Boudi said last week that Khelif had filed a legal complaint for online harassment, calling it a "fight for justice".

It was reported that the Algerian's lawsuit has also named Tesla and X owner Elon Musk as well as famous British author J.K. Rowling after both had criticised her participation in Paris.

"The investigation will determine who was behind this misogynist, racist and sexist campaign, but will also have to concern itself with those who fed the online lynching," Boudi said at the time.

Khelif won the women's 66kg final against China's Yang Liu in a unanimous points decision, despite the pressure and distraction of having been the focus of intense scrutiny in the French capital during the Olympics.

Together with Chinese Taipei's Lin Yu-ting, who won the 57kg women's final, Khelif was disqualified from the 2023 world championships after they failed gender-

eligibility testing.

The International Boxing Association (IBA), which organises that event, said that its tests revealed that both boxers have the male XY chromosome in them.

The IBA's Russian president Umar Kremlev has also targeted both athletes, claiming that Khelif and Lin had undergone "genetic testing that shows that these are men".

However, they were cleared by the International Olympic Committee to compete in Paris, setting the stage for one of the biggest controversies of the Games.

Their victories in each round leading to their gold-medal wins also sparked further outcry and renewed questions over whether athletes with differences of sex de-

ONLINE LYNCHING

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NABIL BOUDI, lawyer of Algerian boxer Imane Khelif, whose lawsuit also reportedly named Tesla and X owner Elon Musk as well as British author J.K. Rowling.

velopment should compete in women's competitions.

But Khelif has insisted that she is "a woman like any other".

"I was born a woman, lived a woman and competed as a woman," she told reporters about her eligibility.

Back home, she received a hero's welcome at Algiers airport on Aug 12. The crowd who were present cheered her with chants of "Tahia Imane" (Long live Imane).

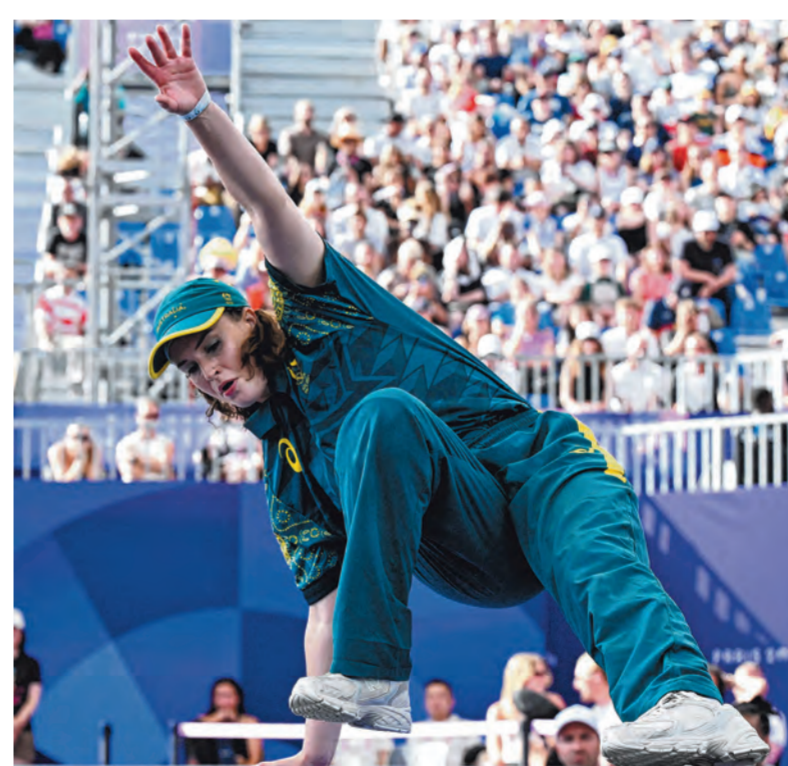
Khelif also said she wanted "to thank the Algerian people who supported me in this ordeal and gave me strength".

Similarly, the Chinese Taipei government and public have thrown their support behind Lin, turning out in large crowds for organised watch parties in her hometown of New Taipei City during her bouts in Paris.

To welcome the athletes flying home on Aug 13 on a chartered plane by home carrier Eva Airways, President Lai Ching-te "ordered that three F-16 fighter jets be sent to escort the flight home".

According to footage released by the Defence Ministry, the jets coasted alongside the green-tailed commercial plane, occasionally releasing celebratory flares into the morning sky.

The athletes also got a hero's welcome on land, with fans swarming Lin at the airport for autographs and wifies. AFP



B-girl Rachael "Raygun" Gunn in action during the breaking competition at the Paris Olympics. Her performances have been widely ridiculed. PHOTO: REUTERS

Australian Olympians defend 'Raygun'

SYDNEY – Australia's Olympians returned home on Aug 14 and mounted a resolute defence of their breaking colleague against "awful" critics, comics and keyboard warriors.

The athletes, fresh from winning a national record 18 golds and a second-best ever haul of 53 medals overall, were asked about absent colleague, b-girl Rachael "Raygun" Gunn, who is reportedly on holiday in Europe.

After winning no votes from Paris judges, the 36-year-old Gunn has been mocked and ridiculed for her allegedly lacklustre breakdancing skills.

Commentators have questioned how Gunn qualified for the Games, with some of her more ill-tempered critics calling her a national embarrassment.

Her kangaroo-imitating moves and slightly passe green Australian Olympic tracksuit have also

been parodied by late-night US television host Jimmy Fallon.

In one of the more light-hearted jibes about Gunn's performance, New Zealand comedian Jemaine Clement joked: "I've been to Australia. That was their best dancer."

But two gold-winning canoeist Jessica Fox was among those to rush to Gunn's defence on Aug 14. "It is devastating for her," Fox told local media in Sydney.

"To see the toll... she is human and it is massive what she has been through over the last week. She has definitely been feeling it. There is a human behind all that, and people are so quick to be awful. She doesn't deserve that."

Before the Games, Gunn – a university researcher with a doctorate in cultural studies – had appeared at dance events for children, detailing her improbable path to Paris, promoting breaking and encouraging a new generation to pursue Olympic-sized dreams.

Swimmer Zac Stubblety-Cook – who won silver and bronze in Paris – said that criticism targeting Gunn was "disappointing", according to the Sydney Morning Herald, while cyclist Matthew Glaetzer – who won two bronzes – said no Olympian "should be spoken negatively about".

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also praised her.

"She had a crack and the Olympics is all about participation and having a go, doing your best and representing your country. She did all of that," Mr Albanese told Nova radio.

"I think some of the criticism that she's copped, there's been a bit of a pile on, which I think is really unfair. Good on her for having a go and wearing a trackie while you're doing it. I mean, how Australian is that?" AFP