

BY AFTAR SINGH

KUALA LUMPUR: Perak's Jaya Kumar will face his baptism of fire in a national-level wushu competition when he competes in the national championships, which begin today at the Kuala Lumpur Badminton Stadium in Cheras.

The 17-year-old Jaya comes into the championships as the Perak champion in changquan (free hand) and jianshu (sword). The Pasir Putih Secondary School student won the two events in the state championships in Ipoh last

Baptism of fire awaits Jaya at national wushu meet

month.

"I was competing in the state championships for the first time. But I surprised everyone, including myself, when I chalked up the highest points in changquan and jianshu," said Jaya, who took up the Chinese-dominated sport three years ago.

Jaya added that he took a liking to wushu when he was in primary school but there was no one to help him get into it.

"But in secondary school, I was lucky there was a volunteer coach who trained student at the school. At first, I felt awkward participating in a sport associated to the Chinese," he said.

"But after few lessons I grew to enjoy it and went into the sport seriously. And all my efforts paid off when I win the two gold medals in the Perak championships last month."

Jaya, who now trains regu-

larly for two hours daily with classmates, added that he was aware that he was unlikely to win a medal in the national championships but would not stop him from giving his best.

"I have nothing to lose in my first national level competition. I will be up against much better exponents and I hope to pick up a few points, which can help me improve on my skills," he said.

Perak coach Chan Chee Kheong said that Jaya had the

ability to give his rival a run for their money even though he had no experience at all in a national-level championships.

"He is a talented exponent and I believe he will progress to become a national exponent," said Chee Kheong.

Meanwhile, Sarawak will start as the favourites to win the overall title for the third consecutive time. They emerged as the champions with a haul of 13-9-5 medals in

the championships in Genting Highlands last year.

Sarawak's chief coach James Ting Ing Seek, however, said that they would have a tough task retaining the title.

"One of our top exponents, Choo (Hong Wee), who won three gold in the championships last year, will not be around this time. He has to skip the championships because of his examinations at the Inti College," said James.

"Besides that we expect to face strong challenges from Johor and Malacca, who have some good exponents."