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This year's S-Cup was shrouded in a bit of mystery in the weeks leading up to the event, but with the fight card set, it looks to go down as yet another memorable S-Cup featuring S-Cup veterans Andy Souwer, Hiroki Shishido, Henri van Opstal and Bovy Sor Udomson while welcoming newcomers Hiroaki Suzuki, Kem Sitsongpeenong, Joachim Hansen and Gesias Cavalcante. Despite the omission of 2010 finalists Buakaw Banchemak and Toby Imada, this year's quarterfinal matchups of Suzuki vs Hansen, van Opstal vs Bovy, Cavalcante vs Shishido and Souwer vs Kem present highly competitive matchups and with them, a plethora of possible outcomes. This article will look to rank each fighter by his chances of winning this year's S-Cup.

1. **Andy Souwer** – With three S-Cup titles already under his belt, Shootboxing legend Andy Souwer is poised to win a 4th after a shocking upset loss to Toby Imada in the semifinals of the 2010 S-Cup. Since, Souwer is 3-0 in Shootboxing with wins over Yoshihiro Sato, Satoru Suzuki and Imada. Souwer has a very tough quarterfinal matchup in Kem Sitsongpeenong and the winner of that fight will be heavily favored to win his next two fights and claim this year's S-Cup title. I give Souwer the edge over Kem due to his overwhelming experience advantage under the Shootboxing ruleset. Souwer used his Shootboxing experience to his advantage when he fought Hinata in his Shootboxing debut back in 2010, choking him out in under a minute. While I don't think Souwer will be able to pull the same trick on Kem, though that's not to say he won't try, I do think he will be able to outpoint the Thai over 3 rounds.

2. **Kem Sitsongpeenong** – It's not very often that you see two quarterfinal opponents ranked as the top two fighters in a tournament, but that is the case with this year's S-Cup. The S-Cup marks the 6th tournament that Kem has been entered in over the last two years and he is looking for his 4th tournament win of those 6, having won this year's Toyota Marathon, last year's Thai Fight 67kg tournament and the 21st Isuzu Cup Tournament, despite a loss to Sudsakorn in the 2nd round. His 2 tournament losses came this year, first being upset by Davit Kyria in the Glory Final 16, then losing in the semifinals of IFMA World Muay Thai Championships to Vitaly Gurkov. I considered moving Kem down on this list due to his quarterfinal matchup, but I feel the talent gap between the top two and the rest of the field is big enough to warrant placing Kem at #2 as he definitely has the ability to beat Souwer.

3. **Hiroaki Suzuki** – Suzuki is, without a doubt, one of the hottest fighters in Shootboxing right now and is Shootboxing's hope for the future with Takaaki Umeno retiring and Hiroki Shishido nearing the end of his career. He has won 7 in a row, though it is interesting to note that 5 of his last 8 wins have come against MMA fighters and he faces another MMA fighter in Joachim Hansen in the quarterfinals. While there is no doubt that Suzuki packs very good power, he will be moving up from 65kg for this tournament and if his power doesn't carry, he will have trouble getting into the finals.

4. **Henri van Opstal** – There isn't much separating van Opstal and Suzuki at 3 and 4, but I guess I'm a bit sold on the hype and momentum Suzuki is carrying into the S-Cup. That being said, van Opstal carries a significant amount of hype and momentum himself, training under Andy Souwer and compiling a 5-0 record against Japanese opposition, with wins over Hinata, Akihiro Gono, Satoru Suzuki, Yuichiro Nagashima and Hiroki Nakajima. This is his 2nd S-Cup, making it to the semifinals in 2010 where he lost a decision to eventual champion Buakaw. His opening round matchup against Bovy could leave him a bit battered and bruised, but I fully expect him to advance to the semis, likely against Hiraoki Suzuki. While he is 5-0 against Japanese opposition, only his fight with Satoru Suzuki was one-sided and he didn't exactly fight each of them in the brightest moments of their respective careers, while Suzuki seems to be entering his prime.

5. **Hiroki Shishido** – I have a hard time believing anyone outside of the top 4 has a legitimate chance of winning the tournament, but as Toby Imada showed 2 years ago, anything is possible and even late replacement, journeyman MMA fighters can play spoiler. My spoiler for 2012 is

quite the opposite, as I am choosing longtime Shootboxing vet Shishido as my spoiler. Most people have written Shishido off due to his 2-6 record over his last 8 fights, despite a favorable quarterfinal matchup with Gesias Cavalcante. Most have looked solely at Shishido's losses and not at the quality of his opponents and his competitiveness despite nearing 15 years of activity. After passing the proverbial torch to Hiroaki Suzuki in a loss earlier this year, Shishido no longer holds Japan's hopes on his shoulders and his recent woes may actually help him here, as he has absolutely no pressure to perform on Saturday. The tough Kem-Souwer matchup on his half of the bracket could leave one of them limping their way into the semis and produce a perfect storm for a Shishido shocker.

6. **Gesias Cavalcante** – Had Cavalcante been selected in 2006 or even 2008, his participation would have created a lot more buzz and he would likely be considered one of the tournament favorites. Unfortunately for JZ, he is 5 years and a knee removed from his prime and his sole kickboxing fight was against Masato in 2007, where he lost by decision. Fortunately, he faces a faded Shishido in the quarters and trains out of Imperial Athletics, otherwise known as the Blackzillians, meaning he gets regular training with the likes of Tyrone Spong, Cosmo Alexandre and Daniel Ghita, along with a host of MMA stars. Like Shishido, he'll need a lot of help from the loser of Souwer-Kem to make it to the finals, should he win in the quarters.

7. **Joachim Hansen** – Hansen has been inactive for over a year and faces the hottest fighter in this tournament in Suzuki. While Hansen does have good striking, I don't feel as though he has the striking to compete with most of the other fighters in this tournament, especially defensively. While Hansen will be back at 70kg, facing a power puncher like Suzuki will make it hard for Hansen to survive three rounds. Even worse, Suzuki has faced 5 MMA fighters in his last 9 fights, going 5-0 and not conceding a single shoot point. Hansen has all of the odds stacked against him, but again, it's hard to forget Toby Imada in 2010.

8. **Bovy Sor Udomson** – There is no doubt that Bovy is an extremely entertaining fighter. However, there is also no doubt that Bovy is slowing down with each outing. Wins over Toby Imada and Gago Drago to end 2011 were promptly forgotten after a loss to Satoru Suzuki. Bovy's wild hooks still have the power to drop anyone, but connecting and not tiring himself out are his major concerns. He has an unfavorable quarterfinal matchup against the more technical van Opstal. However, I'm pulling for Bovy to make it to the semis simply because a fight between him and Suzuki has memorable slugfest written all over it.

Of the reserves, Andy Ristie has the best chance of making some noise and would probably even be considered a favorite should he be inserted into the tournament. I have no idea who is going to win Satoru Suzuki vs Akihiro Gono, but feel neither man will be a legitimate player

should he be inserted.