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Games-Boxing (Wrap-up)

ENGLAND THE SURPRISE OVERALL WINNERS

By: Azhar Ghazali

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- Scoring four out of four on the final day of competition, England surprised many, especially traditional powerhouse Canada, to become the overall winners of the 16th Commonwealth Games boxing competition.

Ending the eight-day competition in style, Ian Irwin, England's team manager, was beaming with joy and showered praise on Chris Bessey (71kg), John Pearce (75kg), Courtney Fry (81kg) and Audley Harrison in the super heavyweight 91kg-plus category.

Like putting icing on the cake, Harrison closed the English performance and the tournament by ending the last bout of the Games with a super knockout. He merely took 65 seconds to finish off Michael Macaque of Mauritius.

"I must say this (overall performance) is a remarkable achievement," Irwin told Bernama when commenting on England's unexpected achievement to overtake Canada as the new power of Commonwealth boxing.

Apart from the four gold medals, England also took home two bronze medals bringing their total to six. Gary Jones and Andrew McLean delivered the bronze after qualifying for the semifinals of the 48kg and 60kg categories respectively.

Irwin noted that it would be a hard act to follow when the Games resumed in Manchester four years from now. However, looking on the bright side, England would have the crowd support to spur them to greater heights in England.

Indeed, it was the homeground advantage that provided Malaysia the fire to register historic achievements by the day during the week-long competition.

This was evident today. Spurred by a capacity crowd and his idol Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Sapok Biki produced the fight of his life to score a sensational victory over hot favourite Moses Kinyua.

The Kenyan camp chose not to accept the 13-19 point defeat, claiming that they were robbed by poor judging.

"We do not accept this defeat. But, we will not file a protest because it is useless. It will just be rejected. In our minds and hearts, Kinyua is the winner," said coach Albert Mitato.

Boldly predicting 10 golds at the draw, Kenya had only two silvers and a bronze to show for all their big talk and pre-competition targets.

Canada, long regarded as the "Cuba" of the Commonwealth boxing world, entered today's finals with six potential gold winners. However, only Michael Strange (63.5 kg), Jeremy Molitor (67kg) and Mark Simmons (91kg) delivered.

Perhaps, the only consoling point is the record feat of Strange, who became the first Canadian to collect back-to-back Commonwealth Games boxing gold medal.

Winning the 60kg category in Victoria four years ago, Strange took on bigger fighters in Kuala Lumpur to win the 63.5kg and was never in danger of losing in all his bouts with his superb defence and quick feet.

Like Malaysia, little boxing nations such as Mauritius and Tanzania also had their share of sparkling gold.

It added colour to the competition and perhaps signalled that the days of the super powers are ending and a new Cuba is emerging.

-- BERNAMA

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