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Free us of this fear syndrome

Randhir Singh

TO say that Rashid Sidek is a player with a weak mind would not be wrong. Since the day he broke into the badminton scene, he has appeared insecure and vulnerable whenever faced with pressure.

But Rashid is not the only one susceptible to this malaise. It is a bane among Malaysian sportsmen and women, and international success, or the lack of it, over the years can testify to this unexplainable affliction.

Last Sunday, when Rashid announced his withdrawal from the Thomas Cup squad, speculation was that he was worried about his thigh injury.

But in a meeting with BAM officials the next day, he admitted he was not ready and lacked the confidence to beat the players he was expected to face in Hong Kong - Indonesia's Joko Suprianto, Denmark's Peter Rasmussen and China's Dong Jiong.

BA of Malaysia (BAM) general manager Phua Tai Neng confirmed yesterday that Rashid had spoken of his unreadiness and expressed doubt he could beat his opponents, perceived as the potential third singles for their teams.

"He did not mention anything about injury to us," said Phua.

BAM secretary Datuk Al-Amin Majid, chief coach Morten Frost and Nusa Mahsuri chief coach Misbun Sidek, Rashid's coach, were present at the meeting.

It was this that prompted Frost to say that Rashid `chickened out'.

No one likes to be called a `chicken', or coward, but the fact that the normally cool Frost was brutally frank has brought into focus the mental preparation of not only the shuttlers, but the other athletes in training for the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games.

There are four elements necessary for a sportsman to be champion - physical, mental, technical and tactical. Rashid appeared to be ready in all but mental.

Quite clearly, the mental aspect is a problem in the case of Rashid as National Sports Council's head of medical unit, Dr Ramlan Aziz, had certified him injury free.

The question now is whether the training programme of badminton and the other sports have a provision for mental training? Whether sufficient attention is given to what is called the `last frontier in a sportsman's preparation in pursuit of excellence'?

Another question is whether NSC, who have undertaken the responsibility of preparing all the athletes for the Commonwealth Games, have paid sufficient attention to this and do they have enough mental trainers to go around?

If this can happen to an experienced hand like Rashid, what about the younger trainees?

Our boxers and rugby players, for example, will be facing the giants when they compete in the Games. Physically, their opponents will be towering over them.

Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said he failed to understand why this problem tends to surface each time the badminton team prepare for a major outing, and that at a critical point.

"I don't know why such things has to happen. Why now when we are in the final stage of preparation?" asked Muhyiddin in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"We should not easily give up. This has been the message from our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. And here we have Rashid giving up

even before trying."

Muhyiddin said he will leave it to the BAM to decide on Rashid's future.  
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