

21 SEP 1998

Games-Boxing (Review)

MALAYSIA: NO MORE THE WHIPPING BOYS

By: Azhar Ghazali

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- England, taking home four gold and two bronze medals from boxing bouts, have surprised many by taking over the title of Commonwealth Games boxing power house from Canada.

But at the 16th Commonwealth Games boxing competitions which ended yesterday the major talking point among officials of competing countries was the strong show of the Malaysian boxers whom many never bothered to take note before the Games began.

Arriving at an almost empty Malawati Stadium in Shah Alam for Day 1 on Sept 12, the foreigners were given an early hint of boxing's poor appeal in Malaysia.

So will be the standard of the game, they thought initially.

But a strong performance by the seven Malaysian boxers - Sapok Biki, Adnan Yusoh, Rakib Ahmad, B Muruguthevan, Benny Thomas Vivian, Samsuddin Maidin and Andrew Kanis - caught their attention.

But, it was not just the foreigners who were surprised. Malaysians watching them were also pleasantly surprised and immediately smelled chances of creating upsets and touching gold.

And, the Malaysian team did. Sapok, who was always carrying a portrait of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for luck and source of determination, created history when he became the first Malaysian to enter the final and eventually win the gold medal for the 48kg category.

Like coach Abdullah Siok, many thought team mate Adnan should have also joined him. "I thought the Malaysian should have won," said Canada's team manager Taylor Gordon to comment on Adnan's contest against Richard Sunee of Mauritius in the 48kg category semifinals.

Good previews on Malaysia were also given by England team manager Ian Irwin, who felt that the Malaysian boxers had done remarkably well given their international rankings. Similar views were also expressed by many others watching the Malaysians in action.

Inspired by the historical achievement and the tremendous support to given to Sapok in the finals, Malaysian Amateur Boxing Federation (MABF) president Tan Sri Isa Abdul Samad saw the rise of a new horizon for boxing.

"We understand why the sport was not popular for so long. It's because we have not produced results. Now, we have and I hope now it's time for things to change," said the Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar.

Coach Adun Pasu Mokhtar was quick to declare that Malaysia are no more the "punching bag" for the lower weight categories. "We've shown that we have the capability and we aim to improve and grow stronger," said Adun, who hoped to continue taking his charges to Thailand to strengthen the Malaysian team.

While Malaysia seek to chart a better future, Canada have to respond quickly to reclaim their lost status. It has been a long time that they have been second in the boxing competitions at the Commonwealth Games.

The only consolation for Canada, who registered a 3-3-2 medal tally, was the superb performance of Michael Strange, who became the first Canadian to collect back-to-back Commonwealth Games boxing gold medals.

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 fast footwork. But, the overall performance of Canada at the Kuala Lumpur Games has been strange.

So was Malaysia. Strange but true, Malaysia are no longer the whipping boys of boxing.

-- Bernama

AZG DSR