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Nurul our golden girl

FOR the first time, the national anthem was played at the Langkawi International Shooting range yesterday as golden girl Nurul Huda Baharin stood proud and tall on the podium after receiving the gold medal from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The gold means a lot to this Kedah-born lass, who was involved a motor accident, which nearly had her sidelined.

But she showed what determination and courage was all about when she brushed aside the challenge posed by the other seasoned competitors from Canada, England and Australia in the air rifle individual to take the gold, Malaysia's first in shooting.

Along the way, the 25-year-old Nurul bettered the Commonwealth Games record when she amassed a total of 494.8 points in the final.

In the qualifying rounds, Nurul also set a record of 394 points, erasing the old mark of 391, which was held by second placed Sharon Bowes of Canada.

Cool and composed in the qualifying rounds Nurul led second-placed Sharon by two points. England's Louise Minett was third with 391 points.

In the final series, Nurul started with a disappointing 8.8, Sharon shot an excellent 10.5 with Louise getting a 10.0.

The fans who had gathered in numbers at the 10m range were totally dismayed by Nurul's score in the very first detail.

But when the gutsy policewoman shot a 10.4 in the second detail and continued with excellent scores of 10.3, 10.8, 10.6, 10.2, 10.5, 10.0, 9.2 and 10.0, the crowd knew that she won the gold.

There were shouts of "Malaysia boleh!" and the Malaysian contingent sang Barisan kita to the thunderous applause and cheers from the fans.

"When I started the event, I knew I had a chance of winning the gold if I shoot my best but I never thought that I would break the record," she said.

"The record has come as a bonus to me and I dedicate my victory to all Malaysians and the people who have supported me throughout my career."

When asked whether the bad score in the first detail of the final rattled her, Nurul said that it did but she managed to recover in time.

"When I took the first shot I was not really prepared," she said.

"So, I checked myself and started concentrating on my remaining shots and it came off well."

Malaysia won a surprise silver, the fourth in shooting, through full bore rifle shooter Zainal Mohamed Din.

Another Malaysian Hasli Amir Hassan did well to finish fourth in the rapid fire pistol.

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