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Azheem, Mun Yee slay dragons

MALAYSIA'S Mohamed Azheen Bahari and Leong Mun Yee rewrote the script at the National Aquatics Centre yesterday as both the 17-year-olds upstaged the favourites to clinch gold in the men's 10m platform and the women's 3m springboard events respectively.

Azheem, produced a scintillating performance to pushed world junior championships silver medallist Yeoh Ken Ne into second place while Mun Yee finally landed her first gold after three Sea Games by upstaging compatriot Rosatimah Muhammad who got the bronze.

It was hard to pick who, between the two, was the star of the day as both had, in winning, slayed dragons.

For Azheem, it was the first time he had beaten Yeoh in competition while for Mun Yee, the gold went a long way in erasing the disappointment of two years ago in Brunei where she was favourite but returned with two silver medals instead.

"I am glad to have finally won a gold. I came home empty-handed from Jakarta (1997) and with two silver medals from Brunei. I knew I had a chance to finally land the gold here after the morning session," said a thrilled Mun Yee.

"I forced myself to keep cool and concentrate and now that I have won the gold, I am looking forward to the remaining events," she added.

It was only appropriate that Mun Yee, who accumulated a total of 472.12 points, was presented the gold medal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

It was also the 68th gold medal won by the Malaysian contingent and this means the previous best haul of 67, achieved in the 1989 Sea Games, is no longer the benchmark.

Sheila Mae Perez of the Philippines took the silver with a score of 458.49 while Rosatimah managed 432.27 for the bronze.

While Mun Yee soaked in the accolades, Azheem was involved in a titanic battle with Yeoh.

Azheem went into the final six dives just 2.34 points ahead of Yeoh and he knew he had to maintain his concentration if he was to deny his teammate the gold.

"I didn't feel nervous and just focused on my dives. My coaches are always telling me this and I am glad that I listened to them," said Azheem.

In fact, his ability to keep cool was what won him the gold.

Yeoh went into his ninth dive trailing Azheem by 11.46 points and with just two dives remaining, needed a perfect ninth.

He attempted a back 3 1/2 somersault but his entry was bad and Azheem seized the chance to widen his lead to 29.10 points and there was no turning back.

His final dive brought his total to 610.17 points while Yeoh finished with 564.93. Indonesia's Husaini Noor took the bronze with 542.67.

"This is the first time that I have scored above 600 points and this will motivate me to do well in the synchronised diving event," said Azheem.

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