

21 SEP 2003

Sports-Bowling (Review)

WOMEN'S TEAM GOLD SAVES MALAYSIAN CAMP'S BLUSHES

By: Hamdan Saaid

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- If not for one gold medal bagged by the women's team, hosts Malaysia would have finished empty-handed in the 15th World Tenpin Bowling Championships which ended at Pyramid Megalanes in Bandar Sunway near here yesterday.

The women's victory in the team of five event, with just three days remaining in the tournament, saved the blushes for the Malaysian camp, who had hardly proved a threat to opponents from the opening day on Sept 11.

Except for a joint fourth finish in the men's doubles through Daniel Lim and Azidi Ameran, Malaysia's performance in the 10-day meet was far from convincing and lacked the "Malaysia Boleh" spirit.

Their early promise to deliver something as a token for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, who is retiring next month, was only realised on Thursday when the women bowlers fought tooth and nail to finish first.

The five bowlers, Shalin Zulkifli, Sarah Yap, Wendy Chai, Sharon Chai and Choy Poh Lai, shot to a world record feat of 6,208 pinfalls to win the gold, eclipsing the previous record of 6,183 created by South Korea in 1999.

It was not easy for them as they clawed back from fourth after the first block of three games on Wednesday to finally take the lead with just one game remaining.

It was also Malaysia's second gold ever in the championship's history after the men's trios team of J.B. Khoo, Edward Lim and Allan Hooi triumphed in Manila 24 years ago.

However, the recent trend shows that national bowlers play very well outside the country compared to performing before home fans.

If the tournament was held in neighbouring country Singapore, the Malaysian bowlers may have achieved more than their solitary gold at Pyramid Megalanes.

Indeed, Singapore was the medal hunting ground for Malaysia in the past two years with Wendy retaining her Singapore Open title, for two successive years, in January while Shalin bagged the Asian Bowling Tour Grand Slam title there eight months ago.

Shalin, one of the most successful Malaysian bowlers in history, also won the Malaysia and Philippines legs of the Asian Bowling Tour this season.

Not to be forgotten, Malaysia also wrested both the men's and women's titles in the World Tenpin Team Cup in Odense, Denmark, last February, a tournament played in a different format compared to the world meet.

Furthermore, it is very hard to believe that some of the Malaysian bowlers shot such low sub-150 scores in the world meet at Pyramid Megalanes, where they had been training intensively on a daily basis since early this year.

Apart from the doubles fourth place, the men's performance was also far from convincing as none of the six managed to enter the Masters Finals, comprising the top 16 bowlers.

The women, on the other hand, should indeed be proud of their three representatives -- Poh Lai, Wendy and Shalin.

As for the tournament itself, it is about time the World Tenpin Bowling Association considers quality above quantity as there were participants, especially from minnows bowling countries like Iraq, who knocked down less

than 100 pins a game.

The association ought to consider following other international sports federations like football's governing body FIFA which only allows the top 32 countries in the World Cup Finals.

A total of 588 bowlers from 65 countries took part in the 15th edition of the world championships, making it the third biggest participation in history since its inception in Helsinki, Finland in 1954.

If a qualifying round for every zone was set up, the association could be assured of top class world championships in the future.

Lest we forget, the World Championships will be splitting up the men and women from now on, the KL meet being the last that the two categories are being contested together.

However, this will certainly not guarantee a top class performance if the world body still makes the championship available for anyone.

On performance, European teams Sweden and England dominated this edition of the world meet with three golds each, with Sweden pipping top place with a mere extra bronze.

Sweden dominated the men's events with the three golds from the men's doubles (Tomas Leandersson and Anders Ohman), All-Events (Ohman) and men's team of five.

England meanwhile, took centre stage in the women's events with Zara Glover's gold medals in the singles, doubles (with Kirsten Penny) and All-Events showing her prowess ahead of local heroine Shalin.

-- BERNAMA
HRS AZZ EMK