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Nazmizan and Nicol get top honours

SPRINTER Nazmizan Mohamed, who ended Malaysia's 36-year wait for a Sea Games sprint double, and Nicol David, the first Malaysian and Asian squash player to qualify for the semi-finals of the World Championships, were crowned 2003 Sportsman and Sportswoman of The Year respectively in Subang Jaya last night.

The recognition, which comes with prize money of RM10,000 each, caps a memorable year for the duo as they defied the odds and obstacles to shine in their respective events.

There was, however, heartache for the BA of Malaysia as both their nominees, single's shuttlers Wong Choong Hann and Wong Mew Choo failed to gain the votes of the selection panel.

While Nazmizan's feat in winning the 100m and 200m in the Sea Games was adjudged worthy of his being crowned Sportsman of The Year, Mew Choo's feat in ending the nation's 26-year wait in winning the women's singles title in the same Games, was deemed not enough.

Like Nicol, Choong Hann shone in the World Championships last year, finishing with a silver medal, the first Malaysian to do so and, in fact, the first Malaysian to reach the semi-final as well, but the votes went Nazmizan's way.

In fact, Nazmizan was surprised with his win as he expected the crown to go to either Choong Hann or swimmer Alex Lim Keng Liat.

While Choong Hann won silver at the World Championships, Alex became the first Malaysian to qualify for a final in the World Championships and qualified for the Olympics on merit.

"I did not expect to win as I believe both Choong Hann and Keng Liat were the better athletes last year," said Nazmizan. "However, the award will spur me to greater heights and my immediate priority is to qualify for the Olympic Games."

"Although I'm aware that certain parties have criticised my winning time in the 100m, I take the criticism positively. This will only spur me to train harder and improve on my time."

Nicol, however, could not be contacted as she is currently in the United States for the Texas Open which begins tomorrow.

"We are very happy that Nicol was selected as the Sportswoman of The Year," said SRA of Malaysia executive director Col (Rtd) Wong Ah Jit.

"She is, as far as we are concerned, the most consistent woman athlete to represent the country."

There was cheer for the Malaysian Tenpin Bowling Congress as their men's and women's team made a clean sweep of the Best Team titles.

Both teams emerged victorious in the World Tenpin Team Cup in Odense, Denmark last year, and in the World Championships in Kuala Lumpur in September, the women's team repeated the feat.

The selection panel also honoured former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad with the Sports Personality Award.

Meanwhile, newly appointed Sports Minister Datuk Azalina Othman Said heaped more cheer on the occasion when she announced a new incentive scheme for Olympic qualification.

Under the scheme, individual athletes will receive a one-time payment of RM5,000 while team athletes will receive RM1,500 each. However, they will only be paid after the Olympics.

In addition to that, athletes will also be paid a monthly allowance.

From the time they qualify until the time they compete, individual athletes will be paid RM1,000 per month. While for teams with fewer than five members, each athlete will receive RM800 each. Teams of more than five will get RM500 each.

Roll of Honour - Sportsman of The Year: Nazmizan Mohamed (athletics, RM10,000).

Sportswoman of The Year: Nicol David (squash, RM10,000).

Sports Personality: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Sports Leadership Award: Datuk Peter Vellapan (Asian Football Confederation secretary).

Best Men's Team: Bowling (Azidi Ameran, Zulmazran Zulkifli, Jonathan Lim, Alex Liew, Lim Tow Chuang, Beng Heng)

Best Women's Team: Bowling (Sarah Yap, Choy Poh Lai, Wendy Chai, Sharon Chai, Lai Kin Ngoh, Shalin Zulkifli)

Special Awards: The late Durbara Singh (tennis), Loh Beng Hooi (karate), Abdul Majid Muda (weightlifting).