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## Malaysia's favourite daughters

Glen Peters

THE national women bowlers created history by winning the country's first ever women's gold medal in the World Bowling Championships - setting a championship record in the process - for the team title at the Pyramid Megalanes in Bandar Sunway yesterday.

Anchored by Asian champion Shalin Zulkifli, the women's team, which included Choy Poh Lai, Sharon Chai, Wendy Chai and Sarah Yap, knocked down a total 6,208 pins to beat overnight leaders Sweden by 97 pins for the title.

Up until yesterday, the national team's campaign had been disappointing, but the women rose to the occasion to break the record set by the South Koreans four years ago in Abu Dhabi by 25 pins.

The only other gold medal Malaysia had won in the tournament was back in 1979 when J.B. Khoo, Edward Lim and Allan Hooi won the men's trios team.

Credit must also be given to national coach Holloway Cheah, who from the very start, maintained that his team will rise from the ashes in the team events, although the keglers struggled in the earlier events and few gave them any hope of winning a medal, let alone gold.

The women started the day in fourth position, but shot into the lead after the fifth game with a 109-pin lead over Sweden, and then bowled consistently despite the tremendous pressure from a partisan home crowd to win the title.

Their fifth game score of 1,150 is another championship record.

Colombia clinched the bronze with a total 6,066, 187 pins behind Malaysia.

Shalin, who struggled in the previous events, scored a stunning 1,394 pins for an average of 232.33 to emerge the best performer among the 165 bowlers in the event.

Wendy Chai scored 1,324, which included the highest game score of 277, Choy Poh Lai scored 1,233, Sharon Chai 1,131 and Sarah Yap 1,126.

"We were impressive," joked Wendy after the win.

"Actually we never looked at the results, we just cheered each other on, concentrated on bowling well and kept on encouraging each other to make good shots. We did not worry ourselves about the result, we were more focused on the process."

Shalin said the team did not feel pressured yesterday, compared to the first day.

Shalin, who was in 54th position at one stage, has taken the last qualifying spot for the Masters by finishing 16th in the women's all-events ranking.

Debutante Sharon Chai, who made the five-woman team in place of the more experienced Lai Kin Ngoh, cut a forlorn figure throughout the tournament, but managed to raise her game in the team event.

"Kin Ngoh deserves credit for sacrificing her place to allow Sharon to play although she was initially picked. The left-handed players have been struggling in the tournament, and not everybody can bowl well all the time. She sacrificed her place with the team in mind," said Shalin.

"I think that is something to be commended."

Prior to the tournament, the keglers made a pledge to do well as a farewell present to outgoing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

And what a way to live up to that pledge.

RESULTS: 1 Malaysia 6,208, 2 Sweden 6,111, 3 Colombia 6,066, 4 Finland 6,021, 5 Denmark 5,996, 6 England 5,912, 7 Venezuela 5,888, 8 United States 5,885, 9 Japan 5,840, 10 Canada 5,829, 11 China 5,811, 12 South Korea 5,766, 13 France 5,740, 14 Taiwan 5,704, 15 Germany 5,687, 16 Philippines 5,685.