

DIVING

Yiwei, Zhiayi to step up

EARLY CHOICE: Duo to be thrown into the deep end to stake claim for Rio

AJITPAL SINGH

ajitpalsingh@nst.com.my

BACK-UP divers Chew Yiwei and Loh Zhiayi will be groomed to replace their seniors for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Yiwei, however, may have to step in sooner following Yeoh Ken Nee's retirement. The veteran badge goodbye in superb fashion at the London Olympics by becoming the first Malaysian to qualify for a diving final at Olympic level in the 3m springboard.

Besides Ken Nee, the other capable elite divers are Bryan Nickson Lomas and naturalised Malaysian Huang Qiang.

Yiwei, 17, showed he was a good diver by winning the men's springboard at the Southeast Asia Aquatics Championships in Singapore in June. He also clinched two gold medals for Selangor at last month's Malaysia Games in Pahang.

Zhiayi, meanwhile, is likely to replace Leong Mun Yee as partner to London Olympics bronze medalist Pandelega Rinong in the women's 10m platform synchro event.

Depending on their progress in training, they are likely to pair up for the first time at next year's World Championships in Barcelona.

Zhiayi, 15, made her mark with two titles for the Federal Territories in the platform individual and also with Nur Dhabitah, a national back-up diver, in synchro at the Malaysia Games.

It will definitely be a tall order for Zhiayi to emulate Mun Yee's suc-

cessful partnership with Pandelega. The pair recorded several significant firsts for Malaysia with their best effort being earning Malaysia's first world meet medal, a bronze, at the 2009 edition in Rome.

Pandelega-Mun Yee also bagged silver medals at the New Delhi Commonwealth Games two years

ago and at this year's World Series. They were also the first local pairing to win a World Grand Prix title at the German Open last year.

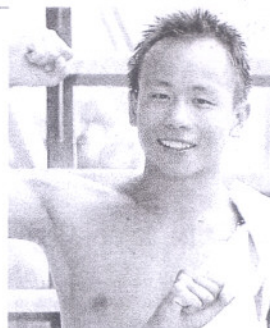
Mun Yee is eager to stay on and has informed coach Yang Zhuliang that she wants to continue until the next Olympics.

Amateur Swimming Union of Malaysia secretary Edwin Chong

said Mun Yee needs to concentrate on studies.

"Mun Yee is still in her first year as she has deferred her semester since 2005 due to national team commitments. It is better that she completes her degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia first," said Edwin.

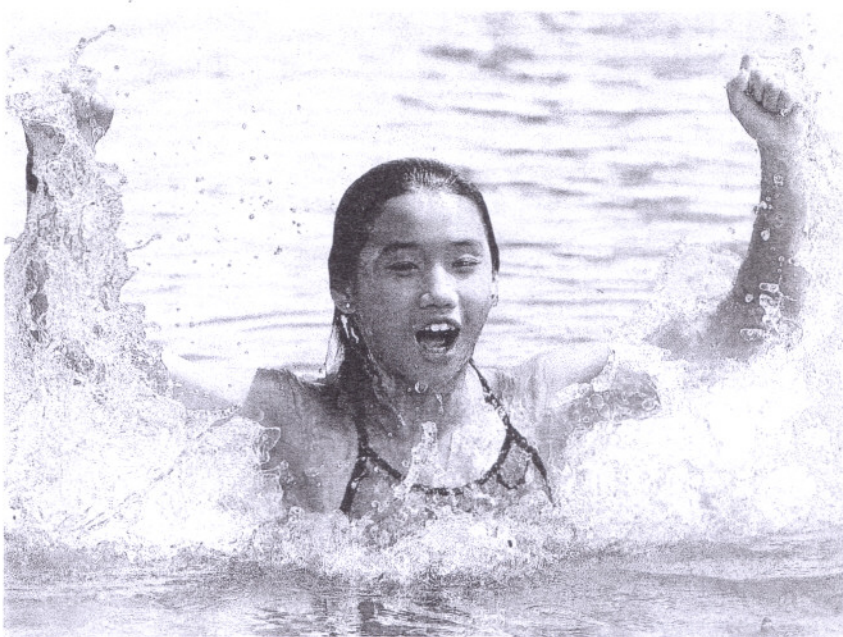
"If she wants to come back, we will see how she fits in when qual-



Chew Yiwei

ification for the Rio Olympics begins a year before that. We will groom Zhiayi to partner Pandelega for the world meet next year."

Zhiayi, a member of the back-up squad bound for the World Junior Championships in Adelaide in October, however, may start partnering Pandelega at the Asian Championships in Dubai in November.



Loh Zhiayi is expected to replace **Leong Mun Yee** as partner of **Pandelega Rinong**.