

Chui gets the kick again

Sabahan's swimming desire rekindled after meeting Marilyn

By TAN MING WAI

PETALING JAYA: Incheon Asian Games-bound Chui Lai Kwan has revealed that she almost quit international swimming two years ago.

The 24-year-old freestyle sprinter recalled how difficult it was for her to cope as an independent swimmer after leaving the national set-up in late 2011, having fallen out with the Amateur Swimming Union of Malaysia (Asum).

Although the Sabahan managed to keep it going for a while, she eventually lost the desire to continue competing at the highest level.

"After quitting the national team, I continued to train on my own and take part in local competitions," recalled the 2007 Korat SEA Games gold medallist.

"I was able to maintain my performance and continue clocking good times. But, several months later, I realised that without proper guidance, there was no way I was going to improve.

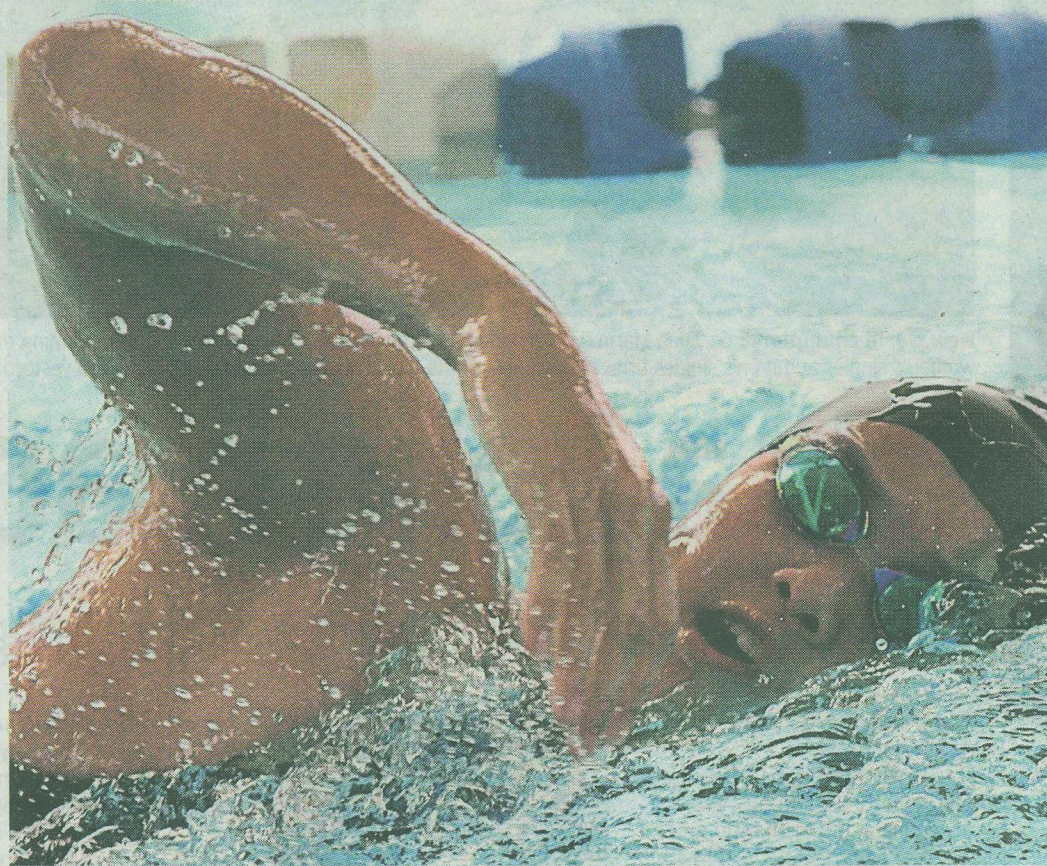
"I lost my ambition and drive but I couldn't quit swimming completely because I needed the sports scholarship to continue my studies.

"At that time, I was planning to just swim for my university (Universiti Putra Malaysia) until graduation. The idea of donning the national colours again faded."

Then, in the middle of 2012, Lai Kwan met her 'saviour' - Marilyn Chua, who is no stranger to the national swimming scene after having represented Malaysia at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

"I met Marilyn during a national age-group competition and she offered to coach me. Without hesitation, I accepted and it has turned out very well," said Lai Kwan.

"Under her guidance, I have improved tremen-



Back in form: A rejuvenated Chui Lai Kwan is aiming to compete in the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016.

dously as her programme suits me. As a sprinter herself, she knew exactly the areas that I needed to work on."

The rejuvenated Lai Kwan did not take long to return to her old self.

She made the cut for the 2013 World Championships in 50m freestyle, only to have her "late" qualification rejected by Asum.

But that hasn't stopped Lai Kwan, a national record holder for three events, from continuing to prove her worth.

At the recent Glasgow Commonwealth Games, she emerged as the top performer after rewriting her own three-year-old national record en route to reaching the semi-finals of the 50m freestyle.

She clocked 26.00 to improve on the previous mark of 26.02, which was set at the 2011 Shenzhen University Games.

Lai Kwan almost secured a double but narrowly missed out on her own 100m freestyle national mark by 0.01 second after posting 56.60 in the heats.

With things back in order now, Lai Kwan has set her sights on competing at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

"I have competed in all major meets, except for Olympics," she said.

"At 24, there are not many years left in my swimming career and I have made qualifying for the 2016 Olympics my ultimate goal."