



By TAN MING WAI

OVER the years, Malaysian divers have evolved from being just athletes who make up the numbers at the SEA Games to world-record beaters.

First, the divers started winning medals at the Asian and Commonwealth Games, and then the World Championships and Olympics.

However, the ultimate goal was always to produce an overall champion.

This year, one diver came to the fore to realise the nation's long-awaited dream.

She is Cheong Jun Hoong (*pic*).

Cheong, 27, won the 10m platform individual gold, beating two top Chinese divers – Si Yajie and Ren Qian, the Olympics gold and silver medallists – at the World Championships in Budapest, Hungary.

What made the feat more spectacular was that Cheong is actually a springboard specialist.

Cheong made the switch because she was undergoing rehabilitation for a back injury, so coach Yang Zhuliang entered her for the event because platform diving does not put too much stress on the joints and back.

One spectacular dive

In the final, Cheong took charge after the third dive and held her nerve over the next two attempts.

She scored 80.00 points in her fifth and final dive for a 397.50 total.

“It shocked me. Even though I was in front, I didn’t expect to beat the Chinese divers who are so consistent. I never expected to finish first,” she said.

Cheong also had a bronze to show from the meet’s 10m platform synchro event with Pandelega Rinong. The duo had also delivered the country’s first silver in diving at the Rio Olympics in 2016.

Despite basking in glory, Cheong has vowed to “start all over again” and “keep winning”.

“My victory in Budapest will count for nothing. It’s in the past,” she said. “Being champion once doesn’t mean you are the winner forever.

“It will take a lot more hard work to become a champion again. It’s back to zero but I hope to continue winning.”



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