



Jun Yeng shows a recording of her sister's exploits on her mobile phone while Jun Meng and Leow look on at their house in Taman Galeri Sukma yesterday.
— Picture by Farhan Najib

Ipoh girl's leap to greatness

By John Bunyan

johnbunyan@mmail.com.my

IPOH — It was a magnificent diving effort that took Cheong Jun Meng by surprise.

His 26-year-old daughter Jun Hoong had placed her name among the sporting greats after she and Pandelega Rinong bagged the silver in the women's 10m platform synchronised event in the Rio, Olympics yesterday.

Cheong initially had other plans for Jun Hoong, who was almost given a boot from the national team following a knee injury in 2009.

"I've always wanted her to read law but after seeing her capabilities in diving, I did not have the heart to stop her," said Cheong, 54.

"She has proven not only to me but to the whole world that her passion is in diving. We are proud of her."

The vegetable trader said: "To be honest, I was not expecting her to win any medal as she was rather wobbly in the 3m springboard synchronised event and finished fifth."

"But she didn't give up and obtained good points in her second event, which earned her the silver medal."

She is the second Perak athlete to win an Olympic medal. Former national shuttler Cheah Soon Kit netted a silver in the 1996 Atlanta Games.

Jun Hoong's diving journey began when she was first introduced to the swimming pool at the age of four.

The Ipoh-born joined her two younger siblings Jun Nie and Jun Yeng as they went for swimming classes at the Perak Stadium public pool, which was just five minutes' walk from their home.

Former Perak diving coach Zhou Xi Yang saw Jun Hoong's potential when she was nine. The Chinese coach offered to train the SJKC Yuk Choy student.



Jun Hoong (second from left) during one of her diving practice sessions when she was 10.

Young Jun Hoong did well during training and won multiple competitions, en route to earning a place at the Bukit Jalil Sports School when she was 14.

There was no turning back. She nursed several injuries that almost cut short her sports career.

Jun Hoong had to skip the 2006 Doha Asian Games after a back injury.

In 2009, she tore a ligament in her knee and had to undergo minor surgery. Her mother Leow Lai Kuan, 50, said the National Sports Council (NSC) threatened to drop her from the team if she did not return to the pool quickly.

"But the national diving coach (Yang Zhuliang) knew of her potential and told NSC it would be a grave mistake to keep her out."

"In return, Jun Hoong told herself she will not quit."

In 2013, the Universiti Putra Malaysia mass communications undergraduate suffered from a dislocated wrist and was out of action for some time. She was left out of the World Championships in Kazan, Russia, last year after she injured both her heels while training in China. She only returned to training in February.

That, however, did not stop her from heading back to the springboard.

Jun Yeng, 23, said her "sister's hard work finally paid off".

"She was in Dongguan, China, for three months prior the Olympics. She said the training was tough but she did not give up and it has helped her win the silver medal."

"We stayed up to watch her dive. We know she felt the power of our love

from here."

Jun Yeng said she missed her sister as she only returns to Ipoh "once or twice a year" since she started studying in Kuala Lumpur.

"Whenever she returns, we maximise our time with her. There's so much of catching up to do."

Her other sister Jun Nie is 25.

Jun Hoong will next compete in the 3m springboard individual event.

Leow hopes her daughter would shine in that event.

"Deep down, we pray she wins. But we know the odds are against her as the competition is tough. As long as she gives best, that's what matters," she said.

RISE OF A CHAMPION

Name: Cheong Jun Hoong

Age: 26

Date of birth: April 14, 1990

Place of birth: Perak

Height: 153cm

Weight: 49kg

Olympic record:

London 2012

3m springboard synchro (eighth)

Rio 2016

10m platform synchronised

(Silver)

Major feat:

2016 Diving World Cup

(Silver - 10m platform synchro)

DID YOU KNOW?

Jun Hoong only returned to action in February after injuring both her heels while training in China last July.