

READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

Pandelela-Jun Hoong can beat China's star divers, says coach Zhuliang

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NATIONAL coach Yang Zhuliang believes Pandelela Rinong-Cheong Jun Hoong are ready to dethrone China's top divers and win Malaysia's first ever world title in the Budapest edition in Hungary on July 19-30.

Zhuliang is on a personal mission to prepare Pandelela Rinong-Jun Hoong for the assault as he felt the Malaysian pair were better than eventual champions Chen Roulin-Liu Huixia at the Olympics Games in Rio last August.

He claimed that the China pair had muffed their second dive but they still managed to earn good points in Rio.

"Everyone was surprised as Pandelela-Jun Hoong were flawless on their second dive compared to the China pair but both earned the same points. The coaches from other countries were surprised with the decision," said Zhuliang yesterday.

"Roulin-Huixia eventually won the gold ahead of silver medallists Pandelela-Jun Hoong. We have learnt our lesson and we do not want to harp on it. The only way to do better than China is to be flawless in our routines.

"We are not sure whether Roulin and Huixia will pair up for the world



Pandelela Rinong (left) and Cheong Jun Hoong will be competing in the World Aquatics Championships in Budapest in July.

meet as I heard the former has retired. But China have many good divers and even their second best can win world titles.

"It is time for our divers to step up and beat China at the World Championships. I think we have won enough silver and bronze medals.

Pandelela-Jun Hoong are our best bets to win Malaysia's first world title."

He hopes the pair can raise the bar and win the event at the World Series.

"After Chinese New Year, we will regroup in China for training to work towards the new season. The juniors will learn a full set of dives while the seniors will work on their weaknesses," he said.

Pandelela will only focus on the platform synchro in the four-leg World Series starting in Beijing on March 3-5 as she did not qualify for the individual discipline this time.

"She has more time to work on her combination with Jun Hoong. The world meet and the Kuala Lumpur Sea Games in August are top priorities for the year.

"If we can win at the World Series, it will give a good impression to the judges at the World Championships," Zhuliang added.

Malaysian divers finished on the podium on three occasions in the world meet. Pandelela-Leong Mun Yee won bronze in Rome (2009) and in Barcelona (2013) in the platform synchro event.

Pandelela clinched bronze in the platform individual at the 2015 Kazan edition.

China have not lost in the women's platform synchro event at the world championships since 2001.