

All systems in the right place

ON Saturday, Malaysian diver Cheong Jun Hoong was last among the 12 finalists in the women's 1m springboard final at the World Aquatics Championships in Budapest, Hungary.

In April, she had suffered back muscle spasms during the Diving World Series campaign and was only cleared to compete in Budapest a few days before the start of the world meet.

On Sunday, she partnered Pandelega Rinong in the 10m platform synchro and emerged third among the 12 finalists.

This was despite the fact that Jun Hoong was still undergoing rehabilitation for a back injury and had only a short amount of training.

The bronze medal was hard-earned.

Head coach Yang Zhuliang made a strategic move by fielding her in the 10m platform individual instead of her usual 3m springboard individual and synchro disciplines.

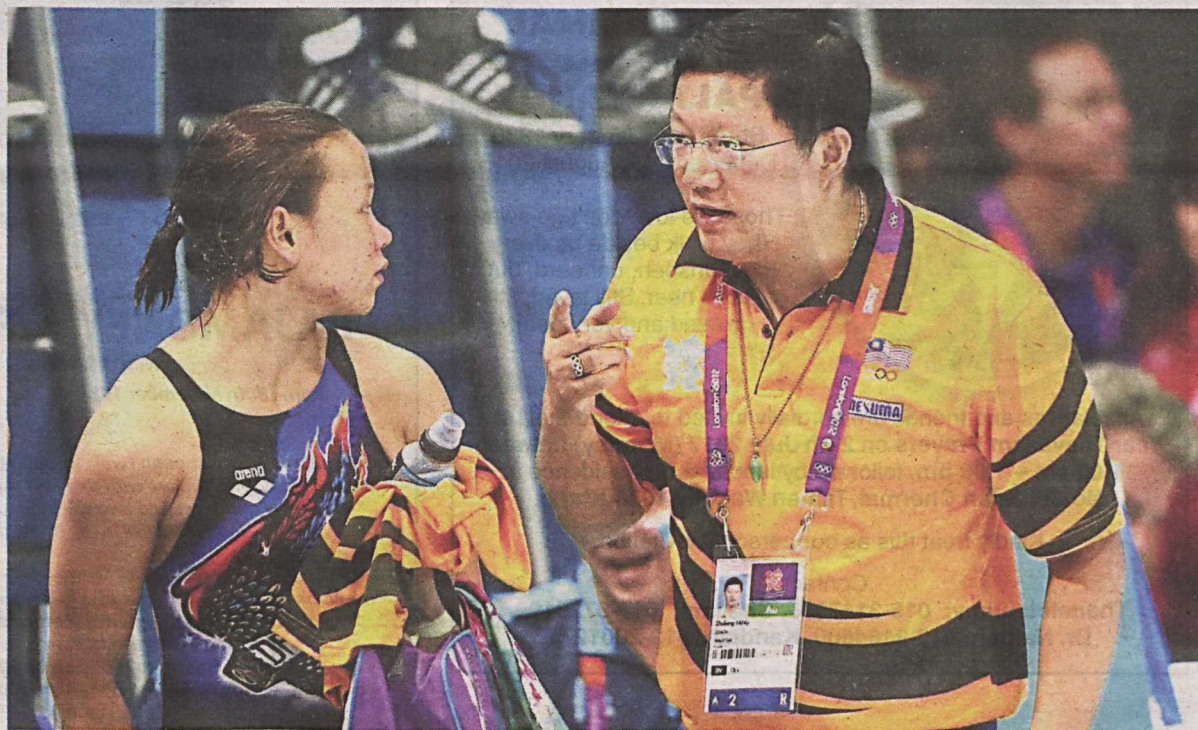
Diving off a platform is less stressful on the joints and back but the 10m platform is not Jun Hoong's usual event, and she was not even ranked.

On Thursday, she managed to qualify for the 12-diver final, taking seventh place. At the final, she was leading after the third dive and avoided looking at the scoreboard.

After her last dive, she was happy to see that she was ranked first but did not expect to beat the Chinese divers who had yet to complete their final dives.

Jun Hoong scored 80.00 points for her final dive, with China's world No. 1 Si Yajie scoring 81.60 points, and China's world No. 2 Ren Qian with 76.80 points.

When all scores were tallied for the five dives, Si totalled 391.95 points, Ren 396.00 points and Jun Hoong 397.50 points! What a turnaround from zero on Saturday to hero on Thursday.



Dedicated to their sport: Yang Zhuliang (right) briefing Pandelega Rinong during a diving meet in 2012.

The win will remain as one of the greatest gold medals in sport that Malaysia has ever won. Diving is one sport over which China is dominant while the rest of the world plays second fiddle.

So how did Malaysia snatch the gold from China?

It has to start with Jun Hoong and the sacrifices she made. The last time she was with her family was almost six months ago during Chinese New Year holidays.

Although she will be back in Malaysia on July 24, she will only be home after the SEA Games next month, as she will be in training.

Such sacrifices and training alone do not guarantee success, and all competitors desire to win. So how did Jun Hoong win?

It must have been through "focus, focus, focus" just like people in real estate would tell you that it

is "location, location, location".

She just did her best without being distracted by the performance of others. In my book, anyone who continues to do his or her best is a champion.

The second major factor is the ecosystem, which can be attributed mainly to the Amateur Swimming Union of Malaysia. Unlike other sport associations, their officials are not in the limelight.

These silent heroes deserve our salute.

Thirdly, it is the dedicated coach, Yang Zhuliang, who first came to Malaysia in 2001 but migrated to Australia in 2005 after he was given citizenship there.

He was persuaded to return here in 2009 and was granted permanent resident status in Malaysia in 2013.

In 2012, one of the divers under his charge, Pandelega, made history

by bagging a bronze medal in the women's 10m platform event at the London Olympics.

And at the 2016 Rio Olympics, Pandelega and Jun Hoong won the silver medal in the 10m synchronized platform.

China may have just lost the 10m platform individual gold for women to Malaysia at the World Aquatics Championships, but it could take pride that the coach is from there.

The National Sports Council and National Sports Institute also deserve credit for their foresight and support.

The unexpected and lucky break by Jun Hoong could only happen when all systems are in place.

Malaysia Boleh!