

Switch in event a golden move

Coach entered Jun Hoong for platform to take strain off her back

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PETALING JAYA: The 10m platform is not Cheong Jun Hoong's usual event, which is the 3m springboard, and she was not even ranked.

But, as she was undergoing rehabilitation for a back injury, coach Yang Zhuliang entered her for it because platform diving does not put too much stress on the joints and back.

As a result of that switch, Malaysia now has its first-ever diving world champion.

"I've got goosebumps now," said Jun Hoong, who took a few moments to compose herself before she could articulate her feelings.

The 28-year-old notched a sensational upset in the women's 10m platform final at the World Aquatics Championships in Budapest, Hungary, on Wednesday by beating the two top-ranked divers – China's Si Yajie and Ren Qian – for the gold medal.

"I really don't know what happened, but I really thank God for watching over me because after so many years of competing, I have an indescribable feeling right now.

"And a world champion, my God. It's unexpected and unbelievable!"



Name: Cheong Jun Hoong
Date of birth: April 16, 1990
Place of birth: Batu Gajah, Perak
Weight: 46kg
Height: 153cm
Coach: Yang Zhuliang
World ranking: She does not have any ranking because she has not competed in this category for some time

Ren and Si were the gold and silver medallists respectively at last year's Rio Olympics.

Their credentials mattered little to Jun Hoong, who already had a bronze to show from the meet's 10m platform synchro event with Pandelega Rinong on Sunday.

In the individual final, Jun Hoong 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. She then had to wait for her Chinese rivals to complete their final dives.

Ren, the world No. 2, could only manage 76.80 points in the final round. Her 391.95 total saw her settling for bronze.

Si, the world No. 1, produced a

JUN HOONG'S WORLD-CLASS CHALLENGERS



SI YAJIE
Age: 16
World ranking: No. 1

Notable achievements:
Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics
- 10m platform individual silver
Barcelona 2013 World Championships
- 10m platform individual gold
Kazan 2015 World Championships
- 10m platform mixed synchro gold



REN QIAN
Age: 18
World ranking: No. 2

Notable achievements:
Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympics
- 10m platform individual gold
Kazan 2015 World Championships
- 10m platform synchro silver

higher final round score of 81.60 points but it wasn't good enough to beat Jun Hoong's 397.50 total. The winner of the 2013 world meet in Barcelona, Spain, had to concede defeat with a score of 396.00.

Jun Hoong had qualified for the 12-diver final in seventh spot earlier in the day.

As she stood proudly on the winners' podium, tears welled up in her eyes as *NegaraKu* played for the first time at the Danube Arena.

Jun Hoong admitted that it took a while before the reality of her achievement hit her.

"After the first few dives, I didn't even look at the scoreboard because I really, really needed to focus on every dive," she said.

"It was not until after the last

dive, when I climbed up, that I saw my previous ranking as first. 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 also said that she would not have regretted it if she had lost.

"I just wanted to focus and do my best in every round," she said.

"With the short amount of training, no thanks to my back injury, this success is the result of all my sacrifices.

"I am very blessed and truly grateful to those who have supported me ... my coach, family and friends who never gave up on me."

Pandelega, who claimed bronze in the 2015 edition in Kazan, Russia, finished ninth with 322.40 points.