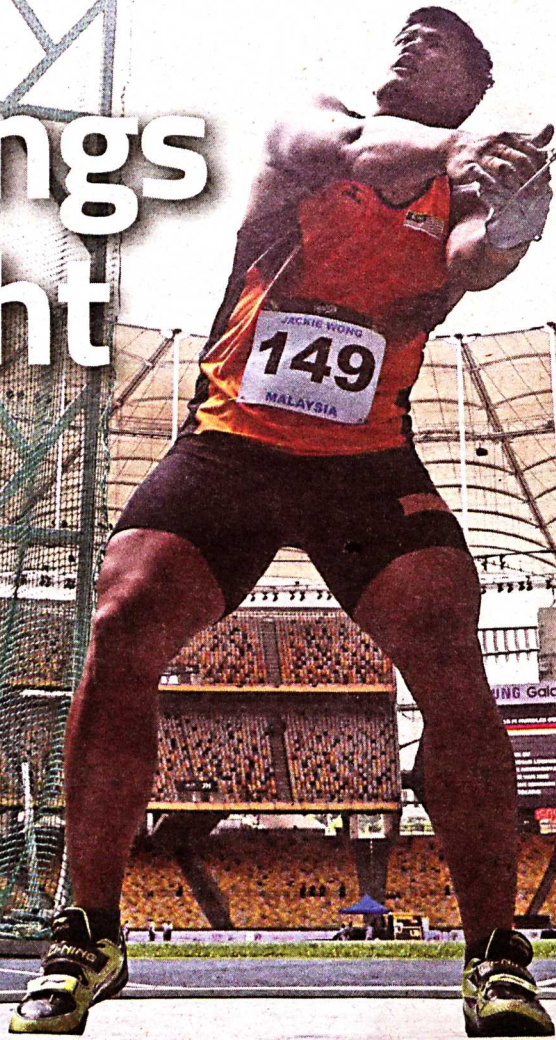


TRIBUTE TO OUR CHAMPIONS

Two Wongs
get it right

Strength and balance: With his win, Jackie also ended Malaysia's 16-year gold medal drought in the men's hammer throw event. — IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

JACKIE Wong Siew Cheer and Grace Wong Xiu Mei are no relatives but the two Wongs have a lot in common.

They are both from Sarikei, Sarawak, and they both love the hammer event. They both train under the same Chinese women coach, Gu Yuan, and they both had a long training stint in Mokpo, South Korea, this year.

Jackie and Grace were also the superstars of the Kuala Lumpur SEA Games after setting new Games record in the men's and women's hammer.

Malaysia emerged as the new powerhouse in the men's and women's hammer.

For the first time in SEA Games history since its inception in 1959, two Malaysian athletes broke the Games record in both the men's and women's hammer.

Jackie hurled the hammer to a new distance of 65.90m to win the gold in the men's event at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

His efforts erased the previous SEA Games record of 65.63m set by Caleb Stuart of the Philippines in Singapore two years ago.

Jackie also bettered his national record of 65.34m he set in the South Korean Open Championships in Jeongseon in June.

Jackie also ended Malaysia's 16-year gold medal drought in the men's hammer throw. Wong Tee Kui was the last to win the gold in the 2001 KL SEA Games.

Grace is only 17 and she smashed the SEA Games record in the women's hammer throw with

an effort of 59.24m.

For Grace, it was a matter of keeping the family tradition going. Wong Tee Kui is her uncle.

Tee Kui, her father's younger brother, won the gold 16 years ago, the last of his five SEA Games gold medals.

The Form Four student of Bukit Jalil Sport School (BJSS) upstaged defending champions Mingkamon Koomphon of Thailand and SEA Games record holder to shatter the record by more than two metres.

Her 59.24m was well ahead of the old record of 56.57m set in Singapore two years ago.

The 25-year-old Jackie said it was a dream come true for him to break the SEA Games record and win his first-ever gold in the Games.

"I was happy that my parents (Wong Ling Bui and mother Tiong Mee Lang) flew from Sarikei to watch me in action at the stadium," said Jackie, a bronze medalist in the last three SEA Games in Palembang (2011), Myanmar (2013) and Singapore (2015).

"It was the best moment of my athletics career as I am now the top men's

hammer thrower in the South-East Asian region.

"But I cannot be satisfied with my achievements.

"The sky is the limit. I will continue to train much harder to accomplish better results in competitions next year.

"My intensive training in Mokpo twice in February and last month has paid off. I hope to continue my training there under coach Gu

Yuan," said Jackie, who hopes to feature in the Asian Games in Jakarta next year.

"There will be no break for me as I will

continue training in preparation for the South Korea International Throws meet in Seoul (from Sept 2-3)," said Jackie, who treats Grace like his little sister.

Grace said she had not gone to school for a few months because she was busy training and competing in the SEA Games.

"I have no complaints as I am the youngest Malaysian woman hammer thrower to hold the SEA Games.

"It feels good. But I will be a lot more happier if my mother was

alive to watch me win the gold and break the Games record."

Mum Lina Awaru, who was from Papua New Guinea, died in April due to illness.

Her father Wong Tee Ing is a logging businessman in Sarawak.

"I must thank my uncle (Tee Kui) for his support and for motivating me for the SEA Games. I was confident of breaking the SEA Games record as I hold the national record of 60.99m set in South Korea in April," said Grace.

"I must also thank coach Gu Yuan as she never took a break for the last six months to train us. She is also like a mother figure to me," said Grace.

Gu said she was happy that Malaysia had dominated the hammer event in the SEA Games.

"It is just the beginning for Jackie and Grace.

"I want them to retain the golds in the next SEA Games in the Philippines in 2019," she added.

Malaysia did well to surpass the six gold medals targeted in track and field events at the Games.

Malaysia won eight golds and broke three SEA Games records.

Muhd Hakimi Ismail rewrote his SEA Games record with a jump of 16.77m to win the gold.

He improved on his previous SEA Games and national record by one centimetre, erasing his old mark of 16.76m he did in Singapore in 2015.

The other Malaysian who won gold were Khairul Hafiz Jantan in the men's 100m, Rayzam Shah Wan Sofian in the men's 110m hurdles, Muhd Irfan Shamsuddin in the men's discus, Nauraj Singh Randhawa in the men's high jump and Elaine Goh Ling Yin in the women's 10,000m walk.



Feeling good: Grace smiling widely for her victory. She has her uncle and coach to thank for her success in the KL Games. — IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star