

Combining brains and brawn

By **REBECCA RAJAENDRAM**
educate@thestar.com.my

IT'S been a long journey for the national athletes who extended their studies by another year so they could compete in the international arena.

The 15 athletes from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) received their scrolls during the university's 42nd convocation ceremony recently.

For national pole vaulter Chuah Yu Tian, 25, the effort has not been wasted as she graduated with a CGPA of 3.5 with a Bachelor of Science majoring in Petroleum Chemistry.

She extended her course in order to compete in the 2017 SEA Games, where she won the silver medal.

Her idol and national pole vaulter Roslinda Samsu graduated from UPM after almost nine years.

"It's not easy seeing all your friends graduate. I was a bit slower than them," she laments, adding that she did full credits for the first three years.

It was tough to balance studying and training, she adds, as she needed to attend training in Bukit Jalil every day. After finishing her classes in the morning, she headed for training until 7pm and returned to her hostel on campus by 9pm to finish her academic work.

She says she can work in the oil and gas field if she quits athletics. She will now focus on her training



Prof Aini (third from left) shares a light moment with Chuah (third from right) and (from left) Muhammad Erwan, Ahmad Luth, Nursyafazliyah and Nur Nadira at the UPM convocation ceremony.

as she plans on competing in the next SEA Games to beat her personal best of 3.8m.

Likewise, national netball team captain Nursyafazliyah Mohd Ali, 25, also has no regrets extending her course by a year.

The Bachelor in Education graduate who majored in Physical Education, says this is because she competed at the recent 2017 SEA Games, with the team winning the gold medal.

This, she adds, was the first time in 16 years Malaysia won the gold medal in the sport.

Nursyafazliyah explains that she had to postpone her practical training at SMK Bukit Jalil where she taught Physical Education to

students in Forms Two, Three and Four.

Her "celebrity status" followed her to the school where, she says, the students were eager to pick up netball skills from her.

"I focus 100% during training and when I'm in class or lectures. This way, I don't have to do a lot of revision because I can absorb what is said in class," she says, adding that her CGPA is 3.4.

Her strategy worked as she received the Razlan Putra medal for her academic and athletic excellence.

Nursyafazliyah will most likely continue with a Master's in sports science.

Melaka native Muhammad

Erwan Berhan says his football skills were first noticed when he was in Form Six.

"I continued playing football when I entered UPM for my Bachelor in Education (Physical Education)."

Enrolling in this course was a natural progression for him as he studied sports science in Form Six.

"It was hard to juggle between studying and training but if we manage our time properly, we can do it."

"I also had to make sure I got enough rest as it is important for athletes," he adds the 25-year-old who was part of the Malaysian team sent to the 29th World University Games in Taipei last year.

Muhammad Erwan says that he has received offers from several universities to pursue his Master's and play football for them, but he is still considering his options.

"While I'm still young, I want to focus on football but when I'm older, maybe I will become a teacher."

Long distance runner Ahmad Luth Hamizan, who represented Malaysia in the SEA Games in 2011, 2015 and 2017, also received his scroll with the other athletes at the ceremony.

"I'm proud that I have graduated," he adds.

When it comes to keeping up with his training and studies, the 26-year-old explains that it is all up to willpower. "Long distance run-

ning requires daily training and commitment," he says.

He is thankful to his family, UPM and the National Sports Council, for his academic and athletic success.

He is now pursuing his Master's in Sports Science at the same university.

Ahmad Luth plans to compete in the 2019 SEA Games in the Philippines and the 2020 Olympics.

Nur Nadira Natalia Mohd Manshahar, 25, never considered playing women's rugby until she entered UPM. Now, the Bachelor in Education graduate who majored in Physical Education, has completed her studies. She has been part of the Malaysia women's team in the international arena by competing in the Asia Rugby Sevens Trophy 2018 in Brunei.

"I want to become a rugby coach now that I have finished my studies," she says.

UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris who congratulated the athletes, says they excelled both in academics and sports at the highest level.

"These athletes have become ambassadors not only for sportsmen but for the general population to excel in multi-domains," she says.

Prof Aini says the athletes are a special group, who sacrificed their time competing for the country knowing that their studies would be delayed. A total of 6,973 graduates received their scrolls.