

A platform too high

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Jun Hoong in danger of missing Olympic boat to Tokyo

By LIM TEIK HUAT

KUALA LUMPUR: Cheong Jun Hoong is not one to shun a challenge. As an unfancied diver, she pulled off a stunning performance at the 2017 World Aquatics Championships to become Malaysia's first diving world champion, beating top Chinese divers in Budapest, Hungary.

Last Saturday, she showed sports and academics do mix when she finally graduated from Universiti Putra Malaysia after nine years, her degree delayed because of diving commitments.

But there is one mountain now that looks too high to climb – she's not likely to bring back another Olympic medal to add to the silver she won with Pandelega Rinong in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

In fact, national coach Christian Brooker does not think Jun Hoong can even challenge for an Olympic quota slot at the Diving World Cup in Tokyo next year.

Jun Hoong has been under rehabilitation since she skipped the Indonesia Asian Games in August last year to undergo operation for a serious knee injury.

The 29-year-old's last competition was in the final round of the Diving World Series in Kazan, Russia, in May last year where she partnered Pandelega to take bronze in the women's 10m platform synchro.

Jun Hoong had made her name in the platform event when she combined with Pandelega to win the Canadian round of the Diving World Series and also the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia.

The duo missed out on the gold in Rio but Brooker felt it would be a very big ask to expect Jun Hoong to come back strongly to fight in Tokyo.

"The World Cup meet in Tokyo next year will be the last meet to offer Olympic slots but I don't think Jun Hoong can be ready to compete strongly," said the Australian coach.

However, Brooker said they will not rule her out.

"We will still enter her. But if you are out for 18 months, there's no



Still recovering: Cheong Jun Hoong has been under rehabilitation since she skipped the Indonesia Asian Games in August last year to undergo operation for a serious knee injury.

way you can come back, especially for a platform diver.

"We have to wait and see how she copes with the pool training when she comes back eventually but we have better divers than her at the moment," said the Australian coach, who handles the national diving squad together with Chinese coach Li Rui.

Jun Hoong recently started gym training but it is not certain when she can resume pool training.

Three spots are at stake in each of the four synchro events (3m springboard and 10m platform) and another 18 slots for the four individual events (3m springboard and

10m platform) at the Tokyo qualifiers.

The 10m platform synchro looks to be Malaysia's best bet to get an Olympic medal, even possibly a gold.

Pandelega-Leong Mun Yee have already earned their Olympic slot for the nation in the women's event with their silver-medal splash at the world meet in Gwangju, South Korea, in July.

If Jun Hoong is unable to make it, it could pave the way for Mun Yee to make history as the first Malaysian to compete in five Olympics.

No Malaysian athlete has gone

for five Olympics. It could have been six but Mun Yee was not picked for Rio. She took part in four straight Olympics from 2000 in Sydney to 2012 in London.

She belongs to an exclusive club of four-time Olympians along with now retired shuttler Lee Chong Wei and sailor Dr Kevin Lim.

Four Malaysian divers have made the cut for the Olympics so far. Pandelega also earned a quota slot in the women's 10m platform individual while Nur Dhabitah Sabri and Wendy Ng Yan Yee secured the maximum two slots for Malaysia in the women's 3m springboard individual.