



At 14, Goh Jia Yi is one of Singapore shooting's youngest SEA Games gold medallists. She won the women's 10m individual air rifle title yesterday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



AT THE GAMES

By JONATHAN WONG

VIENTIANE: Goh Jia Yi turned around, wondering what all the commotion was about. She had just fired what was her 10th round in the South-east Asia Games women's 10m air rifle shoot-off.

"I thought that was the end of it," she later admitted. Little did she realise that an 11th shot would be needed.

After all, she had trailed leader Chotphibunsin Thanyalak of Thailand by a point going into the final round and looked set to settle for the silver medal.

The crowd, silent as the digital screen in front of them flashed 9.4, the 19-year-old Thai's score, then erupted in whistles as Jia Yi's 10.4 appeared within seconds.

The Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) student, who shot 392 in the first round to sit second behind Chotphibunsin's 394, was about to stage an unlikely comeback by sending the match into a sudden-death shoot-off for the gold medal.

The other six shooters were ushered off the front row, leaving the two performers to play out the final piece of drama.

The Thai, who finished 40th in the same event at the Beijing Olympics, looked nervous, shuffling her feet as she tried to compose herself.

Jia Yi, with a poise beyond her 14 years, sought comfort in a shooter's meticulous pre-shoot ritual. "I just went back to my routine and tried not to think too much," she said.

And with two shrugs of her shoulders to relax herself, she fired a 10.7 to beat her Thai opponent's 10.3 and clinch the gold medal in her first SEA Games.

Compatriot Haw Siew Peng, who finished fourth and was the first to embrace Jia Yi, said: "We were all so stressed!"

Jia Yi's homemaker mother, Mabel Tan, 48, learnt of her daughter's achievement after a friend sent her an SMS following a 3pm radio news report.

TRIPLE BULL'S EYE

Air rifle specialists kick off harvest by reaping three golds on first day



(From left) Zhang Jin, Jonathan Koh and Ong Jun Hong retained Singapore's gold in the men's 10m air rifle team event yesterday. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

In a phone interview, she said: "I'm very, very happy. We didn't expect that she would make it. She SMSed me to say she got second in the preliminaries, and I did not expect her to catch up.

"We did not set any target for the Games for her. I just told her that she has to treasure the opportunity given to her by the association and to do her best."

Jia Yi's results also delighted Singapore Shooting Association president Chng Seng Mok, who said: "Our long-term goal is to look at higher-level

competitions for her, like the Asian Games.

"But ultimately, it has to be the Olympics. Jia Yi is a good candidate, seeing how she won the gold at this young age and with such short experience."

It was almost a double gold for Jia Yi, as she and teammates Haw and Aqilah Sudhir lost on the slimmest of margins to Thailand and Malaysia in the team event.

All three nations were tied on a combined score of 1,167 but the Thais clinched the tie-breaker based on their 72

inner 10s. Malaysia (63) took the silver while the Singapore trio (62) finished third.

Earlier in the day, the main contingent of Singapore officials, led by Deputy Prime Minister and Singapore National Olympic Council president Teo Chee Hean, celebrated Singapore's first shooting gold of the Laos Games when the trio of Ong Jun Hong, Jonathan Koh and Zhang Jin fired a total of 1,755 to pip Thailand (1,752) and Vietnam (1,744).

Asked about the tension, DPM Teo said: "This is what shooting is about. You have to put yourself under pressure and still be very cool.

"I take my hat off to the shooters."

Completing a great day for Singapore's shooters, Zhang, 21, took home the country's third gold at the range with a winning score of 690.6 - just 0.1 ahead of teammate Koh, the 19-year-old defending champion from the Korat Games.

While delighted at the individual accolade, Zhang was especially proud of his teammates. He said: "Winning the first one as a team is much more special. We all worked hard together for that."

The day's results had Chng beaming. He said: "I'm delighted with their performance, especially how young they are and the experience of winning in such events will only help.

"It's a good start for us."

However, he said the SSA would continue to build on the results, noting: "If we are looking at the long term, I am not satisfied. We can't sit on our laurels if we are aiming for higher competitions.

"(The results) show we have depth but that doesn't mean we have reached the end, there's still a lot more to do."

He also wants to further develop the association's youth development programme to include other disciplines as it features only the air rifle and air pistol at the moment.

In the men's 25m standard pistol, Singapore's Gai Bin shot 566 and took silver, losing to Thai Karndee Prakarn (567).

The trio of Gai, Poh Lip Meng and On Shaw Ming finished third in the team event with a score of 1,668. Thailand (1,677) and Vietnam (1,669) took the gold and silver respectively.

jonwong@sph.com.sg