

470 DUO BEAT ODDS FOR UNLIKELY GOLD

Just-recovered Yokoyama & debutante Teo now fired up for Asiad and Tokyo Olympics

Lester Wong

They very nearly did not make the start line, so imagine the disbelief from sailors Yukie Yokoyama and Cheryl Teo when they were crowned the SEA Games women's 470 champions in Langkawi on Sunday.

One month ago, Yokoyama partially tore the cartilage in her right shoulder, and was advised by doctors to give the biennial Games a miss.

But the National University of Singapore environmental studies undergraduate underwent rehabilitation and was able to resume training with Teo only a week before flying off for the Games.

"I was quite bummed out at the time, but I got a lot of support from SSI (Singapore Sports Institute) and NYSI (National Youth Sports Institute) in terms of strength and conditioning during my rehabilitation," said the 2012 Optimist junior world champion.

"My right shoulder really needs to work for me to sail. It's not strong right now, but the range is getting there."

Given the unlikely nature of their victory, it is no wonder that in a video posted on the Singapore Sail-

ing Federation's Facebook page, all Yokoyama could offer when asked how she felt was "no words", before offering two: "Very happy."

She later told *The Straits Times*: "It's all quite overwhelming now. The (deciding) race was very intense. We were the underdogs, against the defending champions Malaysia."

"They've been training full time the last two years while we've had to juggle studies with sailing, so to win is really quite unexpected."

Yokoyama, 20, and Teo, 17, began the day with a slim one-point lead over Malaysians Nuraisyah Jamil and Norashikin Sayed, and the 10th and deciding race was again a closely fought affair.

Thailand finished first on the day, but the Singaporean pair secured the gold by virtue of finishing second, ahead of their Malaysian rivals in third.

Said Teo, who was making her SEA Games debut: "We were very scared before the results were announced because we didn't know who actually won."

"We totally just broke down and cried. The whole race, it was just too intense."

But it is full steam ahead now for Yokoyama and Teo, a second-year Ngee Ann Polytechnic business and social enterprise student, who have been sailing as a pair in the 470 class since August last year.

The two announced in June that they would be taking a year off



Sailors Cheryl Teo (left) and Yukie Yokoyama rejoice after winning the women's 470 title in Langkawi. Their win took hours to sink in, as they were underdogs against Malaysia. PHOTO COURTESY OF SINGAPORE SAILING FEDERATION

school, starting from this month, as they work towards their ultimate goal of qualifying for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

"Our aim for now is the Asian Games next year, and after that, Tokyo 2020," said Teo, who first met Yokoyama in 2015, when both were searching for a new partner. "So you'll see us together for the next few years."

Their gold was the second from sailing at these Games.

Singapore's sailors also picked up a silver and bronze in the women's

420 and men's 420 events respectively yesterday.

Evangeline Tan and Jodie Lai fell just short of the gold won by Yokoyama and former partner Samantha Neubronner at the last Games, while 16-year-olds Koh Yi Nian and Wong Riji managed a creditable bronze after transitioning to the 420 class just four months ago.

SEA Games sailing continues today with the men's and women's RS:One finals.

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GETTING BETTER SLOWLY

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ELISA YUKIE YOKOYAMA, on her untimely shoulder injury.