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SPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Rachel must wait to fulfil dream

Schoolgirl betters SEA Games silver mark, but cannot qualify for the Thailand edition

By Hoe Pei Shan

HER winning score of 379 at yesterday's B Division Girls' 10m air-pistol in the Schools National Shooting Championships would have won her the silver medal in the last South-east Asia Games.



SHOOTING STAR: Rachel Tan racks up 379 points out of a possible 400 to return the highest girls' score for all divisions in the school championships. -- PHOTO: ALBERT SIM

Rachel Tan's feat surpassed the 2005 SEA Games second-placed score of 377.

It also placed her within reach of the women's 10m air-pistol national record of 385 set by Fan Xiao Ping two months ago.

But the 16-year-old will have to wait a while before fulfilling her dream of donning national colours as she is unable to qualify for this year's SEA Games in Thailand.

Said Lim Meng Kiaw, Singapore Shooting Association's high performance manager: 'To qualify, a shooter's average score from one local and one international meet must meet or better the bronze-medal mark of the previous games.'

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'But this year's World Cup circuit has already ended, so she has no means of qualifying.

'But we will be inviting her to join the national team and groom her for future competitions.'

The Fuhua Secondary student's 379 points out of a possible 400 at the Yishun Safra shooting range was a personal best.

It was also the highest girls' score across all divisions in the 11-year history of the championships.

It smashed the 2005 A Division mark of 365, and beat closest rival Alice Li of Raffles Girls' School (Secondary) by 16 points.

Amazingly, the bespectacled teenager accomplished her feat with a 35-cm titanium rod in her back.

It followed surgery to correct her scoliosis - lateral curvature in the spine - two years ago.

She started shooting with an air rifle at 13, but switched to the air pistol after surgery, to minimise stress on her back.

She said yesterday: 'The doctor told me it would take two years of recovery. But I resumed shooting just six weeks after surgery because that's where my passion lies.

'Initially, there were stabs of pain during training and I would have to sit down, but I learnt to bear with it. I told myself that my efforts would pay off, and now they have.'

She ended the day with a second title, teaming up with Ang Li Qing and Chang Li Feng to give Fuhua their maiden B Division girls' team title with a total of 1,086 points.

Fuhua coach Li Jie, a former China national shooter, said: 'Rachel is a natural shooter. She has a very good feel of the pistol and incredible patience.

'She was only shooting about 330 last year, but has since shown vast improvement to average 360 points now.

'She has the potential to compete in the Olympics if she trains hard.'

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