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Team bronze, but Gai's frustrated

With 10m air pistol postponed owing to controversy, he'll be in 2 events today

By Terrence Voon

BANGKOK - THE first day of the South-east Asia Games shooting competition threw up a bronze medal for Singapore - and a large dose of controversy.

The Republic's Gai Bin, Ho Hung Yi and Poh Lip Meng had come in third in the men's 10-metre air-pistol team event after shooting a combined total of 1,718 points.

But it could have been a silver for them, and a gold for hosts Thailand, had a protest against Vietnamese shooter Hoang Xuan Vinh been successful.

Vietnam had won the gold on countback after tying with Thailand on 1,722 points.

However, four countries - Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Laos - later claimed Hoang had fired a blank shot during the morning's qualification shoot.

Such a shot is against the rules and would have cost the shooter 10 points, and his country the gold medal.



ALMOST A SILVER: The 10m air pistol shooting team of (above, from left) Poh Lip Meng, Gai Bin and Ho Hung Yi failed in their appeal to penalise the gold-winning Vietnam team. Gai (next picture) also had his individual final postponed owing to the lengthy appeal process. -- PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO, EDWIN KOO

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SHOOTING

Men's 10m air rifle qualification, final

(individual/team): Zhang Jin, Ong Jun Hong, Jonathan Koh

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Unfortunately, range officials failed to spot the alleged infringement immediately. Other shooters and team officials also did not report the matter right away.

The protest, and the subsequent appeal, were turned down by the air pistol jury after a lengthy four-hour wait that frustrated athletes and spectators alike.

The delay also forced the event's individual final - featuring the top eight shooters from the team event - to be postponed by a day.

This drew the ire of Singapore's Gai, who will also be shooting in the men's 50m free pistol event today.

In the individual 10m air pistol event, he is ranked second with 575 points - four points behind leader Tran Quoc Cuong of Vietnam. Ho is sixth on 572, while Poh finished ninth with 571.

'This is not fair for shooters like me, who have to take part in two events. The day will be packed and we will be very tired,' said Gai.

'Why couldn't a decision have been made in an hour or two, like other competitions?'

But a spokesman for the air pistol jury told The Straits Times that such delays were 'normal'.

'We need the time to investigate properly and find out all the details,' he said.

It was a day to forget for Gai, who was already suffering from the ill-effects of flu.

He spent the afternoon wandering around the shooting range at the Sports Authority of Thailand's compound, not knowing when his final would be held.

He was also in the stands when his wife and teammate Fan Xiaoping missed out on a bronze medal in the final of the women's 25m pistol event by the slimmest of margins.

Going into her last series of shots in third position, the former Asian Games champion was beaten to the bronze by Thailand's Butcha Warinya.

Butcha ended with a total of 764.2, while Fan had 763.3.

'Xiaoping performed below her normal training scores,' said Singapore team manager Lim Meng Kiaw.

'She has not competed at the international level for over 10 years, and that affected her.'

While the furore over the misfired round raged on at the pistol range all day, Singapore's trap specialists were calmly shooting up a storm a mere stone's throw away.

In their opening qualification shoot, the men's trio of Lee Wung Yew, Choo Choon Seng and Mohd Zain Amat fired a total of 198 out of 225 shots.

They lead the team standings by 10 points, ahead of second-placed Malaysia.

Said Lim: 'If they continue to shoot the way they shot today, we have a good chance at our first gold medal.'

Vietnam were the biggest winners in the shooting competition yesterday, netting three gold medals. Malaysia and Myanmar have one each.

Shooting has started ahead of the Games' opening ceremony on Dec 6, because regional shooters will be flying to Kuwait next month to take part in an Olympic qualification event.

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