

# Paulists go for bronze

## Women bank on Lee Wei-Lee Fong to deliver medal

By LIM TEIK HUAT

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia cannot field their Chinese import, Yao Linjing, in the Manchester Commonwealth Games table tennis tournament but she will still exert a heavy influence over the national women's squad, comprising Beh Lee Wei, Beh Lee Fong, Ng Sock Khim and Chiu Soo Jin.

After finding out that Linjing is unable to represent Malaysia because of her citizenship status, the Table Tennis Association of Malaysia (TTAM) did the next best thing by roping her in as the women's team coach.

The players are already familiar with her as a teammate. Now with her guidance and experience as a coach, the TTAM believe this could help the women paddlers make a breakthrough in a tough competition and win a first-ever table tennis medal for Malaysia in Manchester.

Table tennis has been staging its own Commonwealth Championships since 1971 but this is the first time that it has been included in Games programme. The competition will be held at the Indoor Tennis Centre in Manchester.

Seven gold medals are at stake in the men and women's categories - team, singles, doubles and mixed doubles events.

Another medal will be contested under the Elite Athletics with a Disability (EAD) - women's wheelchair singles, which will be included for the first time and will count towards the overall medal standings.

However, Malaysia are only competing in the women's competition. The TTAM did not recommend the men's team to take part in the Games because they had not produced impressive results in international competitions over the last two years.

Team manager Han Kee Juan said that they were only targeting the women's paddlers to win a bronze medal.

The three gold medals at stake in the women's competition are expected to be scooped up by Singapore, who have three China-born players - world number nine Li Jiawei, Sydney Olympic Games semi-finalist Jing Junghong and Zhang Xueling. The only Singapore-born player in the team is Tan Pacy Fern.

In the last Commonwealth Championships in New Delhi last year, Malaysia had Linjing playing the first singles but they still lost 0-3 to Singapore in the final. Malaysia were also beaten by a similar margin when both teams clashed in the 2000 South-East Asian Championships in Kuala Lumpur.

"If Linjing were eligible to play, we could have a better medal forecast and eye at least two bronze medals. Without her, it will be hard for our women to match the overall strength of Singapore or even India in the team event. Our best chance of winning a medal is in the women's doubles event through Lee Wei-Lee Fong," said Kee Juan.

However, he admitted that much would depend on the luck of the draw.

"If we get a good draw and do not meet the top



NO MORE RIVALRY ... Beh Lee Wei (left) and sister Lee Fong are out to help each other in the Manchester Commonwealth Games.

Singapore pair of Jiawei-Junghong in the early stages, then we have a good chance of advancing to the semi-finals. But it is going to be an uphill task to overcome them if we meet them. As for Sock Khim-Soo Jin, it will be hard for them to make any headway in the competition," he said.

In the individual women's singles competition, it will be hard for the players to make their presence felt. The four Malaysian representatives have yet to beat Jiawei and Junghong in competition. The main contenders are expected to come from a legion of China-born players who will represent Singapore, Canada, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and Australia.

The team's preparations have also been boosted by the presence of North Korean coach Jo Namphung. He was brought in by the TTAM in February this year as a consultant to advise on the tactical aspects and also to develop young talent.

"However, Linjing is in direct contact with the players. We are looking at keeping her as a coach on the long-term as we want to groom our current batch of players to be strong medal contenders for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne," said Kee Juan.

"Table tennis is very likely to be included in Melbourne and our players are still available to play as they are still young."

The players left yesterday for Ho Chi Minh City to take part in the Vietnam Open scheduled for July 18-21. It will be their final tune-up for the Commonwealth Games. The team will be leaving for Manchester on July 25.

## Beh sisters aim for memorable debut

KUALA LUMPUR: Paddlers Beh Lee Fong and Beh Lee Wei are ready to cast aside their sibling rivalries and concentrate on their quest to win Malaysia's first-ever medal in Commonwealth Games table tennis.

The 22-year-old Lee Fong, the elder of the two sisters, said that they had always been involved in friendly competition to outdo each other since they started representing the country in their early teens.

"We will always try to see who can survive longer whenever we compete in any foreign or local competitions," said Lee Fong.

"If my younger sister does well, I always tell myself that I will beat her the next time. We always want to be the first to break our good results to our parents. But for the Commonwealth Games, we will be helping each other. This is the first time we are combining with each other for a major assignment."

It is this passion and determination that can help the Kedah-born duo to reach their target of winning a medal in Manchester.

The 19-year-old Lee Wei, who is the current national champion, said that they hoped to make a memorable debut in the Commonwealth Games.

"This is the first time that we have a chance to win a medal in the Commonwealth Games because the sport is making its debut," said Lee Wei. "Although table tennis is likely to be included in the next Games in Melbourne, I am not sure whether both of us will still be playing together. This is the best time for us to aim for a medal."

Stiff competition in the Games women's events is expected to come from the Singaporeans and Indians.

Singapore, boosted by their China-born players Li Jiawei and Jing Junghong, will be the hot favourites to win all three gold medals. Jiawei is the current world number nine while Junghong almost gave Singapore a first-ever medal in the Olympics in Sydney two years ago. She lost in the playoff for the bronze medal.

"In the women's doubles event, they will be playing together and will be the main hurdle to our hopes to win a medal. If we can avoid any of the Singapore pairs in the early rounds, we stand a very good chance of advancing to the semi-finals," said Lee Wei. "If Lee Wei-Lee Fong reach the semi-finals, they are already assured of a medal because there is no playoff for the bronze between the losing semi-finalists."

Manchester 2002  
The 27th Commonwealth Games

Table Tennis  
Team, singles and doubles.

Manager: Han Kee Juan  
Coaches: Yao Linjing  
Players: Beh Lee Fong, Beh Lee Wei,  
Ng Sock Khim, Chiu Soo Jin.

Sport makes Commonwealth Games debut  
Best medal prospect: Beh Lee Fong-Beh Lee Wei in the doubles

### BEH LEE WEI

Age: 19  
Occupation: Full-time trainee  
Best moment: Winning a silver in the women's doubles with Yao Linjing and helping the women's team to another silver in the 2000 South-East Asia Championships in KL.  
Worst moment: Losing to the third ranked player from Thailand in the last 16 stage of the women's singles event in the same competition.

Achievements: Women's team silver and women's doubles bronze in the 2001 Commonwealth Championships in New Delhi; women's team and women's doubles bronze in the 2001 KL SEA Games, women's team and women's doubles silver in the 2000 South-East Asia Championships in KL.  
Target: To advance as far as possible in the individual competition and also win a medal.

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### BEH LEE FONG

Age: 22  
Occupation: Full-time trainee  
Best moment: Winning the bronze medal in the 2000 KL SEA Games.  
Worst moment: Failing to win the national title from her younger sister.

Achievements: Women's team silver in the 2000 South-East Asian Championships in Kuala Lumpur; women's team and women's doubles bronze in the 2001 KL SEA Games.  
Target: To win a medal from the women's doubles event.

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