

Rio high for Johnathan

Shooter qualifies for Olympics after bagging 10m air pistol gold

By RAJES PAUL

KUALA LUMPUR: Johnathan Wong Guanjie is over the moon after booking an Olympic ticket.

The aerospace engineering student at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) became the first Malaysian shooter to qualify for the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro from Aug 5-21 after winning the men's 10m air pistol gold at the Asia Olympic Qualifying Championships at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi yesterday.

In a thrilling final, the 23-year-old Johnathan came out tops after collecting 198.70 points, just 0.40 points more than silver medallist Alanazi Atallah of Saudi Arabia. North Korea's Kim Jong-su bagged the bronze with a score of 176.90.

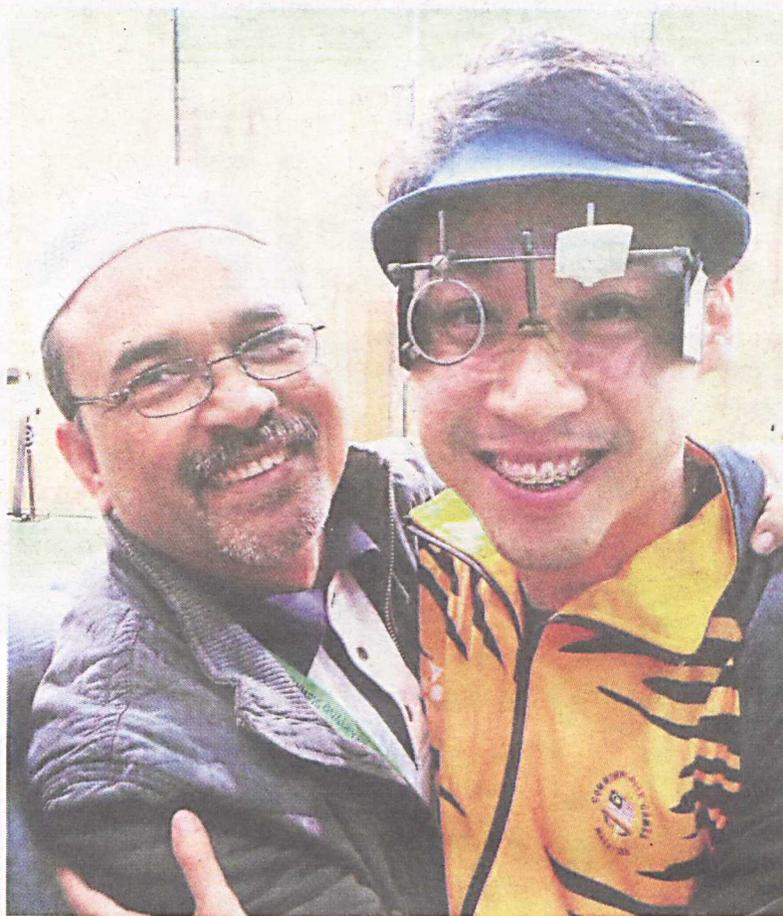
Johnathan had earlier made it to the top-eight final by virtue of finishing third in the 50-man field with a 578 total.

He will be the third Malaysian shooter to feature in the Olympics after Hasli Izwan Amir Hasan (2008 Beijing) and Nur Suryani Taibi (2012 London).

"I am floating on air right now. My Olympic dream has come true. I am glad that Malaysian shooting will have a representative in Rio," said Johnathan, who trains under coach and former international Hashim Desa.

"Only two tickets were up for grabs in my event. When I reached the final, the Olympic ticket was already in my hands.

"After that, my team-mates and coaches were cheering for me to get



I'm proud of you: Coach Hashim Desa (left) giving Johnathan Wong Guanjie a hug at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi yesterday.

the gold. They looked more nervous than me in the final. It was tense but I stayed steady in my last series to shoot 10.70 and 10.30 to nick the gold.

"This is my first final in an Asian-level tournament and I have won a gold and an Olympic ticket. I must thank all my team members for their support.

"I cannot wait to go back home and celebrate with my family. It will be a great Chinese New Year reunion dinner (on Feb 7) this time," he added.

Johnathan, who hails from Malacca, first shot into the limelight last year. He showed his potential by winning a silver in the 10m air pistol at the Singapore SEA Games in June.

In September, he broke his own national 10m air pistol record at the Tun Hanif Trophy in Subang with a 585 total in the qualifying rounds.

Johnathan again broke his national record, collecting 201.50 points in the final to win the 10m air pistol gold at the 39th South-East Asia Shooting (SEASA) Championships in Jakarta in December.

Johnathan said he would defer his studies to devote more time on training for the Games.

"I have been juggling between studies and shooting for some time. My semester break started two weeks ago so I was able to focus on the Olympic Qualifying Championships. Now that I have qualified for Rio, I will have to defer my studies," added Johnathan.

Besides Johnathan, five other Malaysians will also be competing in Rio.

They are divers Ooi Tze Liang (men's 3m springboard and 10m platform individual), Pandelega Rinong (women's 10m individual platform), Wendy Ng (women's 3m springboard discipline) and Nur Dhabitah Sabri (10m platform) and archer Khairul Anuar Mohamad.