



DATUK LEE CHONG WEI

Inspirational world champion shuttler

by Jane Bee

Datuk Lee Chong Wei is simply phenomenal. He is a world champion that puts Malaysia on the world map through his victories, while rivals think of him as a worthy opponent with the 'it' factor that pumps up enthusiasm and excitement in any badminton game. His name is synonymous with badminton and be it coffeshop talk or on upcoming tournament, Chong Wei is the man on everyone's ship.

But, he is not only a world champion. Chong Wei is a hero – a man who is capable of getting Malaysians to put aside their differences and be united through badminton. The nation rejoiced and roared with joy and pride whenever he clinched victory and continued to cheer him on when the table turned.

The little boy who grew to love badminton is now a man of influence in the world of sports as well as his own motherland.



Chong Wei with Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and her grandson, Mahathir Mokhzani

From zero....

The youngest of four children, Chong Wei's first love in sports was basketball. His mother, however, thought that he was getting too tanned from all the basketball games and disallowed him from playing the sport any further. And thus, the young lad decided to give up basketball to please his mother. His father, who was a keen badminton player, then introduced him to badminton. He was only 11 and yet he found himself loving badminton in no time.

Not long after picking up badminton, the young lad attracted a local coach who saw his talent and potential in the sport. He offered to coach Chong Wei, who accepted the offer. It marked the beginning of Chong Wei training vigorously every day after school in the quest to hone his skills in the sport.

He dreamed of playing badminton professionally in the future and little did he know that he was about to live that dream of his.

The birth of a world champion...

Chong Wei's life changed entirely when he was discovered by former national-player-

turned-coach, Datuk Misbun Sidek when he was 17. It was as if Misbun saw the latent talent possessed by Chong Wei – he has the natural agility, speed and athleticism needed to play badminton as well as perseverance and physical strength that are crucial in training and competitive sports. Misbun took him under his wings and drafted him into the national squad.

Chong Wei was mentored and coached by Misbun for seven years. Known as a tough coach, Lee underwent gruelling and strenuous training under Misbun. He used to dread Thursday – the day where he had to endure punishing physical training. On occasions, he was reduced to tears and banned from practice for throwing tantrums. Despite all the ruckus, Misbun would always remain composed, ignored Chong Wei and went home with his racquets.

Fast forward years later, Chong Wei admitted that it was Misbun's role behind the scene that inspired and transformed him from just an ordinary aspiring player to promising national player and later, world number one. He remembers vividly one of his first meetings with Misbun, where he was asked what he wanted to achieve in his career. Money, was what Lee answered.

But Misbun pressed on and when Chong Wei was thrown the same question the third time, he revealed his dream to be the best player in the national team.

"He then told me to give everything in training and that he would take care of the rest," said Chong Wei. And both Misbun and Chong Wei certainly hold on to the end of their bargain.

The breakthrough, the ups and downs...

Chong Wei made his foray into the international badminton arena in 2002. He made it to the final of the 2003 Malaysia Open, but he went down to China's then badminton star, Chen Hong. Chong Wei was more determined to bag a gold medal and his hard work and determination paid off in 2004 when he secured two titles in the Malaysian Open and Chinese Taipei Open in 2004. His first Olympic appearance was during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. However, it was cut short when he was defeated by Chen Hong in the second round, which ended his quest in bagging a medal.

Fired by the determination and desire to be successful, Chong Wei won another



bronze in the 2005 World Championships after losing to Taufik Hidayat in the semi final. It was his first appearance in the world meet, and audiences knew from that moment that they certainly expected to see more from Chong Wei.

The following year, he was crowned as the winner of the Swiss Open, Asian Badminton Championships and his third Malaysian Open title. He also won two gold medals for Malaysia in both the men's singles and mixed team badminton event in the 2006 Commonwealth Games. He topped the chart in the Badminton World Federation's world rankings twice in the same year.

At this point of time, it seemed like there was no stopping for Chong Wei. However, to be a hero and a champion means one would constantly have to face challenges one after another. It tests one's determination and perseverance- whether one is able to brace the storm and rise as a phoenix from the ashes.

Things slowly went downhill for Chong Wei when his participation in the World Championship 2006 fell short after a match with Bao Chun Lai from China. The same year, Chong Wei was on his way to Bukit Jalil when he was involved in an accident where he was hit by a vehicle that had lost control due to a tyre blowout. He was rushed to the hospital and received six stitches on his head.

Not only that, Chong Wei also failed to reach the final in the Malaysian Open in 2007 - the first time in the five years he had participated in the Malaysian Open. It was indeed a very slow year for Lee.

The setbacks, however, did not derail Chong Wei's determination and hunger for success. He immediately get back to his feet and created a history when he became the first Malaysian to reach the final of the men's singles and won a silver medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His success marked the end of Malaysia's Olympic drought since 1996. He continued to secure titles in the Philippines Open, Japan Open and French Open and won all the matches in the Sudirman Cup in June.

Not only that, he also achieved a ranking that stayed at the number one spot for 199 weeks, consecutively from Aug 21, 2008 to June 14, 2012. He was the third

Malaysian men's singles shuttler after Rashid Sidek and Roslin Hashim to enjoy such success. In fact, he was the longest to top the chart among the three national shuttler.

His performance at the 2012 London Olympic Games was a spectacular one. It was the one match where Malaysian put a halt to their daily life, with everyone gathered to watch how Chong Wei fought with all his might against Lin Dan from China in the final of the men's singles event. He was eventually defeated by his arch nemesis, Lin Dan. Chong Wei might lose the opportunity to bring home a gold medal and disappointing the country, but at least, he won the respect and the hearts of many Malaysians.

There was no sign of Chong Wei slowing down after the match at the London Olympics. He remained active and participated in a lot of tournaments such as the 2013 World Championship in China, Japan Open and Korean Open Superseries Premiere. He is the world champion and there's no stopping for Chong Wei at all.

Chong Wei may be a Malaysian but his passion for badminton, discipline and hunger for victory has earned him the respect of people from around the world. The recent doping case that allegedly involved Chong Wei saw many netizens rallying and voicing out their support for him. He was suspended from competition after being tested positive for the banned anti-inflammatory dexamethasone and could be barred for up to two years if found guilty.

Despite all that, sponsors, Malaysians, fans and rivals stood with him in times of troubles, holding on to the belief of Chong Wei's innocence. His arch nemesis, Lin Dan, was quoted as saying that Chong Wei was needed not only by Malaysians, but by the badminton world as well. And Lin Dan for one, is looking forward to Chong Wei's return to the badminton court where both can resume their Lee-Lin rivalry once again.

A husband and a father

In 2012, Chong Wei wedded his longtime sweetheart, former top shuttler from the Malaysian women's badminton squad, Datin Wong Mew Choo, in a grand wedding ceremony.

They first met each other at a national badminton camp in Kuala Lumpur in 2001.

At that time, both were just back-up shuttlers for the Malaysian squad. Chong Wei admitted that it was Mew Choo's patience that charmed his heart. From a nobody when they first met to where he is now, Chong Wei said Mew Choo never changed but instead, she waited patiently and always backed him.

Their love story, however, was not a fairy tale. Their relationship was an 'on-off' affair and marred by controversial rumours involving Chong Wei. When the couple announced that they had ended their courtship in 2009, there was speculation surrounding him where he was linked to South Korean player Hwang Hye-Youn and China's singles player Wang Lin. A year later, both of them reconciled and their bond became stronger than ever.

Their wedding was undoubtedly the nation's wedding of the year. Held on Nov 9 and 10, 2012 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention

Centre, the ceremony was attended by ministers, corporate leaders, family members and close friends.

The couple welcomed their bundle of joy, Kingston Lee, in April last year. Just like Chong Wei, Kingston shows that he shares his badminton superstar father's passion for the sport despite being a toddler.

The future...

He is a world champion, hero, husband and father, but he certainly hasn't shown signs of slowing down. Aware of his capability in changing and shaping the future of badminton, Chong Wei plans to spar for as long as he can and to motivate the young rising stars along the way.

Chong Wei is not done with badminton quite yet. That is to say, we can certainly expect to see more exciting things from him.



Chong Wei and runner-up Taufik Hidayat together with the prime minister's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek at the Proton Malaysian Open 2011