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Day 2: RP Wins Three Golds

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Palembang—Women power charged the Philippine drive that generated three gold medals but steeplechaser Rene Herrera had the last say Saturday for Filipino athletes in the 26th Southeast Asian Games being held here, Jakarta and West Java.

Two others captured silvers and five bronze medals in a relatively productive start which brings hope for a country that sent 538 athletes for 39 sports in the biennial meet that will run up to November 22.

Marestella Torres, pushing herself to the limits to extend a career which obtained the first feather in 2005, cleared 6.71m in the third of six attempts in long jump at the Jakabaring Sports City for the gold medal and erased a Games' standard she herself posted in the 2009 edition of the SEAG in Laos.

In Jakarta, Rani Ann Ortega, Francesca Camille Alarilla and Ma. Carla Janice Lagman obliterated the frustrations of the taekwondo world championships in Russia edging a newly crowned world titlist team from Vietnam by a mere half point in a much-talked about head-to-head in women's poomsae.

Filipino coach Rocky Samson surmised that other countries did not bother to field an entry because of the class of the Philippine and Vietnam trios.

“Wala yatang nag-enter kasi pinag-uusapan na ang paghaharap ng Philippines at Vietnam,” said Samson adding that it was more a battle for national pride than just the gold medal.

At sundown, Camille Manalo secured the third gold medal for the Philippines despite the wrongful entry in the official 2011 SEAG website which indicated that she won only a bronze.

“Someone made a mistake, we cannot be wrong because we hold the gold medal and our national anthem was played in the awarding rites,” said Samson as she escorted the UAAP Season 73 athlete of the year back to the hotel after beating to a pulp Vietnamese Thanh Thao Nguyen, 8-3 in the finale of the under 62 kgs division.

Herrera, the defending champion of the 3,000m steeplechase banked the fourth gold of the Philippines clocking 8:52.31 to beat Indonesian Mohamad A. Q. (8:55.99) and Vietnam's Nguyen Dang Duc Ba (8:57.88).

Following Herrera's win at around 8 p.m., organizers decided to postpone the final of the men's shot put where Eleazar Sunang is entered owing to the heavy rains.

In the case of Torres, there was no confusion and she was a class by herself.

"Hindi ko inaasahan dahil bago nagpunta dito mga 6.30m something lang ang tinatalon ko," Torres said of her wonder leap that reset the norm from 6.68m. Indonesian Maria Londa claimed silver (6.47m) while newcomer Filipina Katherine Khay Santos had bronze (6.25m).

Other contributors to the cause of improving the country's fifth place finish last time in the 11-nation cast are mountain bike rider Joey Barba, the poomsae mixed pair of Vidal Marvin Gabriel and Shaneen Ched Sia, Orencio James de los Santos and Erica Samonte.

Defying the slippery downhill 1.5 km. course in West Java, Barba (2:32.44) managed silver behind Indonesian Pornomo (2:31.45) while Gabriel and Sia pulled off a surprise runner up finish to a Vietnam counterpart for RP's second silver.

Young and promising, Gabriel also notched a bronze in men's singles poomsae, an identical result for de los Santos in the form event of karate-do, individual kata and Samonte in the under-50 kgs category of kumite, the sparring version of the sport.

Late in the evening, Loralie Sermona raised the total number of bronze to five by placing third in the women's hammer throw at Jakabaring.

The day's output of ten medals is nearly 50 per cent of the day's target for the Filipinos who had entries in only 21 disciplines out of the 43 that offered gold medals.

In the medal picture, Indonesia moved in blazing pace taking 21 of the 44 gold medals for first place, Singapore was second with 8, Thailand and Vietnam both have 5 while the Philippines was running fifth with three and Malaysia sixth with two.

"Not so bad but I know we can be better," said deputy chief of mission Romeo Magat who was joined here Saturday by Julian Camacho, the deputy chief of mission in charge of operations in Jakarta and West Java, for the Southeast Asian Games Federation Council meeting.

Also attending the SEAGF meeting is Philippine Olympic Committee President Jose Cojuangco Jr., who will fly to Jakarta to monitor the progress of the campaign there on Monday.

Filipino athletes in other disciplines also moved forward such as the men's badminton team, who are now in the quarter final round after whipping Myanmar, 3-1, in Jakarta, the Blu Girls of softball who showered Thailand, 10-1, and English billiards bet Luis Saberdo who dumped Indonesian Adhi Brajafalachi, 3-1.

Swimmers Banjo Borja (400 IM and 200 breast), Jose Joaquin Gonzales (400IM), Jasmine Alkhaldi (200 free) and Dhil Anderson Lee (50 butterfly) all qualified for the finals of their events on Saturday night.




Ageless Nathaniel "Tac" Padilla failed to defend his 25m standard pistol title winding up sixth while worse were Emerito Concepcion (12th) and Jayson Valdez (11th) in the 10m air rifle event also at the Jakabaring shooting range.

Perhaps the most bitter of the results for Team Philippines is the highly controversial loss of jin Jeffrey Figueroa in the under 74 kgs class against an Indonesian, booed not cheered, by the motley crowd from different competing member countries who felt the Filipino was the dominant fighter.

"Breaks," was all Samson could politely comment on the Figueroa verdict.

The men's softball team was no match for Indonesia, 2-4, Felix Taoro was equally inefficient against Nay Thway Oo of Myanmar in English billiards, 0-3, while Racquel Luzarez did not figure in the medal race of individual women's kata of karate-do.

Medal Tally for 26th SEA Games Jakarta-Palembang 2011

	 Gold	 Silver	 Bronze	Overall Medal
Indonesia	21	14	7	42
Singapore	8	7	8	23
Thailand	5	7	9	21
Vietnam	5	6	9	20
Philippines	3	2	5	10
Malaysia	2	5	6	13
Myanmar	0	3	2	5
Lao PDR	0	0	4	4
Cambodia	0	0	1	1
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	0	0
Timor Leste	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	44	44	51	139