

Still Lee-thal

SUNDAY STAR 12/03/2017 M5.53



Not to be denied: Lee Chong Wei beat Taiwan's Chau Tien-chen 10-21, 21-14, 21-9 in the semi-final of the All England in Birmingham yesterday. — AFP

Chong Wei reaches final with hard-fought win

By KNG ZHENG GUAN

PETALING JAYA: After all the pre-tournament drama – a knee injury and possibility of missing the All-England – Lee Chong Wei is now one step away from covering himself in glory.

The world No. 1 proved too good for Taiwan's world No. 9 Chou Tien-chen as he prevailed 10-21, 21-14, 21-9 in the semi-finals at the Barclaycard Arena in Birmingham yesterday.

Chong Wei is gunning for his fourth All-England title – having won it in 2010, 2011 and 2014. This is his 13th – and possibly last – All-England appearance.

Chong Wei's final opponent is guaranteed to be a shuttler from China – either nemesis Lin Dan or rising star and world No. 10 Shi Yuqi.

"I was not happy with the first game as I definitely didn't play well. Tien-chen deserves credit because he started strongly," said Chong Wei.

"After a pep talk by my coach (Tey) Seu Bock, I was more determined in the second game. Once I got my touches, I just pressed on.

"To be honest, I'm really glad that I made the decision to come for this year's All-England.

"I only had 10 days of preparation and I was doubtful about my own condition. I can't believe that I've made the final again."

It was only two weeks ago that the three-time Olympic silver medallist looked a major doubt for the All-England after injuring his knee during training.

But the Penangite, who has looked sharp all

week in Birmingham, was in devastating form when he swatted aside China's world No. 6 Tian Houwei 21-12, 21-15 in the quarter-finals on Friday.

Yesterday, Tien-chen won the early exchanges – taking a 12-6 and 17-10 lead before closing out the first game 21-10.

But Chong Wei, with a strong Malaysian crowd backing him, looked a different player in the second game as he dictated terms to take the game 21-14.

Tien-chen, who had battled for 68 minutes to subdue Thailand's Tanongsak Saensomboonsuk 21-19, 16-21, 21-8 in the quarter-finals, looked tired in the third game and began making too many mistakes.

Chong Wei capitalised on it to check into the final after 59 minutes.

Tien-chen has now lost to Chong Wei in all their six meetings.

In the women's singles semi-finals, Taiwan's world No. 1 Tai Tzu-ying lived up to her top billing after subduing world No. 3 Sung Ji-hyun of South Korea 11-21, 21-14, 21-14.

The World Superseries Finals winner will face Thailand's world No. 7 Ratchanok Intanon, who eliminated Japan's Akane Yamaguchi 22-20, 21-16, for the title.

Meanwhile, world No. 8 Chan Peng Soon-Goh Liu Ying kept alive Malaysia's challenge in the mixed doubles with a spirited 23-21, 21-14 quarter-final win over Chinese qualifiers Wang Yilyu-Huang Dongping on Friday.

The Olympic silver medallists, who are eyeing their first All-England title, are up against surprise package Yuta Watanabe-Arisa Higashino of Japan.