

Shooting silver and a promise to 'sir'



Mehuli Ghosh after shooting a bullseye to tie with the eventual winner, Martina Lindsay Veloso of Singapore. (Reuters)

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Calcutta: The shot at gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the Commonwealth Games was down to two competitors. Martina Lindsay Veloso of Singapore had just scored 10.4 in her final shot and nothing less than a bulls-eye would give her rival a chance. Mehuli Ghosh hit exactly that: a 10.9.

The crowd erupted as Mehuli pumped a fist, kept her rifle down, took off her blinder and stepped back from her position. Thousands of miles away, in New Town, her coach Joydeep Karmakar yelled at the TV: "*Hoyni* (It's not over)!"

Martina and Mehuli were tied at 247.2, a new Games record, and the gold was to be decided by a shoot-off.

Joydeep, who himself missed an Olympic medal at the London Games by a whisker, knew it would be tough for his ward. "It's not easy to quickly regain position. The body has to be aligned with the target and weight distributed between outstretched legs for perfect balance. This is achieved over several shots," he told Metro within minutes of Mehuli finishing second.

When she called, the first word Mehuli uttered to her coach was "sorry".

"She told me, '*Jani tumi*

rege gyachho (I know you are upset)'. I told her I was about to break the TV," Joydeep said.

Mehuli had been misled by her name overtaking Martina's on the scoreboard. "She missed the rank '1' against both names and the term 's-off' to the right," Joydeep said.

Mehuli scored 9.9 to Martina's 10.3 in the shoot-off. "If only I were there, I would have shouted out to her about the tie," the disappointed coach said.

But he had regained his composure quickly enough not to make his ward feel any more miserable about missing the gold. "What hap-

pened was because of inexperience. She is just 17. Girls her age chat and have fun after school while she is hard at practice," he said. "Mehuli has promised me she will make up for the loss."

As the nation woke up to the Baidyabati girl's feat, mother Mitali spoke of the two-hour journey, with four changes of transport, she makes almost daily to reach Joydeep's academy at The Newtown School.

"This has been her routine since she was 14," she said.

To let her focus on shooting, Mitali had even allowed her daughter to skip the board exam this year.