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Headline: Graduate Yip can now train full times

# GRADUATE YIP CAN NOW TRAIN FULL TIME

Para swim champ has yet to commit to Tokyo 2020, but juggling of schedules is finally over

May Chen

For as long as Yip Pin Xiu can remember, most of her time and energy have been channelled towards the pool in pursuit of becoming a better swimmer.

Only in the last two months has she, for the first time, felt like she can devote herself wholly to her quest in the water.

With her studies at the Singapore Management University (SMU) completed and following a much-needed break after the Paralympic Games last year, the 25-year-old can at least now say that the 2020 Tokyo Games have become a more realistic target.

"For once in my life, I can dedicate myself fully to training," Yip told The Straits Times yesterday, on the sidelines of her commencement ceremony at SMU.

"The year before I took time off school was really taxing. We were really stepping up training, we were travelling so much and it was just very hard to cope."

She graduated with a Bachelor of Social Science, having deferred her studies for a year before the Rio Games to focus on training.

Before that, Yip found herself shuttling between twice-daily training sessions at the OCBC Aquatic Centre and classes or meetings at SMU's campus in Dhoby Ghaut, a routine that quickly took a toll.

It also exhausted her mentally to be torn between studies and swimming – as if more effort spent on one came at the expense of the other.

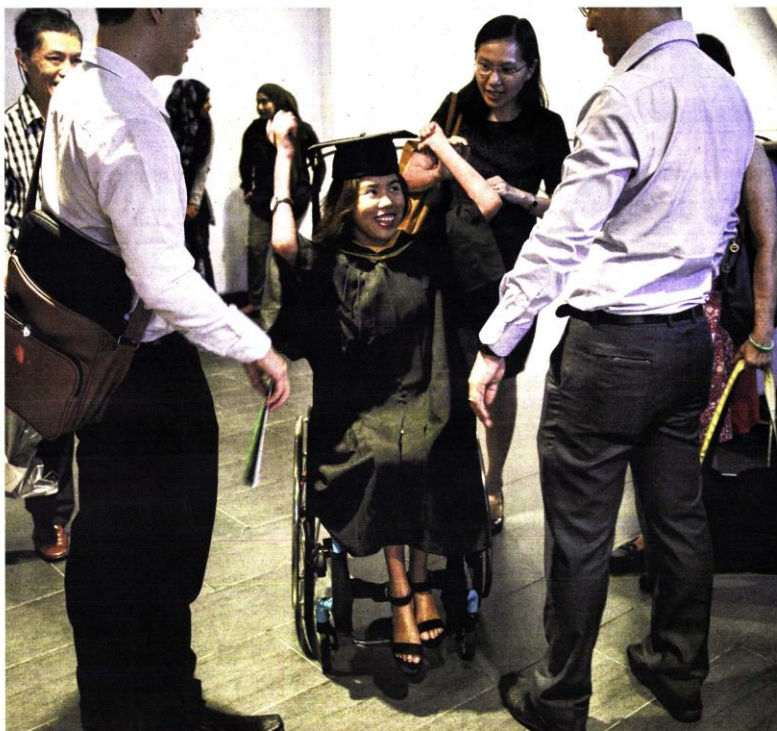
Said Yip, who has muscular dystrophy: "After Rio, I didn't think 2020 would be in the picture. I didn't know if I still had it in me."

"I was just so exhausted and felt like maybe I had reached my full potential."

After six months away from the intensive training that had defined her routine, especially in the two years leading up to the Rio Paralympics, Yip put on her training suit again in March under Ang Peng Siong's tutelage.

Just last week, she took part in her first meet since Rio at the Berlin leg of the World Para Swimming World Series.

What she rediscovered was the enjoyment swimming gives her, as well as the drive she still has to push herself further. So while the three-time Paralympic champion is



Yip Pin Xiu adjusting her mortar board before her commencement ceremony at SMU, having deferred her studies for a year to focus on training for the Rio Games. The three-time Paralympic champion will next compete in the Asean Para Games and World Championships. PHOTO: DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

hesitant to say for sure she is campaigning for another go at the pinnacle of her sport, she is at least training like she is.

Said Yip, who holds the world record in the 50m and 100m back-

stroke (S2): "Berlin brought me back to reality and showed me that there's still a lot for me to work on. It showed me that I'm going to need time to build everything up again, and it's time to get working."

The Asean Para Games in Kuala Lumpur from Sept 17-23 beckon first, but it is the World Championships in Mexico City that begin at the end of that month that excite her most.

She said: "Three years (until Tokyo 2020) is a long time, but I'm training like I'm going to be there. I'm not holding back."

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