

YIP READY TO BLOOM AFRESH IN MEXICO

Prospect of podium finish at world c'ships to be shaped by her form at Asean Para Games

Lester Wong

Paralympics champion Yip Pin Xiu has set her sights on a podium finish at next month's World Para Swimming Championships, and will use the preceding Asean Para Games (APG) as a final tune-up for the top-level meet.

The 25-year-old's most recent competition was last month's Berlin leg of the World Para Swimming World Series. She clocked 1min 3.13sec in the 50m backstroke (S2) and felt she needed to improve ahead of next month's APG in Kuala Lumpur.

"My target at the APG is to swim better times than I did in Germany, which was my first competition since (the Paralympics in) Rio," the three-time Paralympics gold medalist said.

Her Berlin time was four seconds off the world record (59.38sec) she set at last year's Rio Olympics.

Yip will head to the world championships as the world record holder for the 50m and 100m S2 backstroke (2:09.79sec) events, but her APG commitments, which will likely involve more events, have yet to be confirmed.

The world championships begin in Mexico City on Sep 30, a week after the APG closing ceremony.

Yip did not win a medal at the 2015 world championships in Glasgow. She won a silver in the 50m back (in the S3 category) at the 2013 edition in Montreal. At the 2010 meet in Eindhoven, she won gold in the 50m freestyle (S3).

Due to her muscular dystrophy, which leads to progressive weakening of the muscles, Yip was re-classified from an S3 swimmer to S2 in 2015. The lower the number, the more severe the impairment.

She won two Paralympic golds in Brazil to add to her historic gold - the first by a Singaporean - at the 2008 Beijing Paralympics.



Joseph Schooling and Yip Pin Xiu with Dr Nigel Taylor, group director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, alongside the orchid varieties that have been named after the two swimmers. PHOTO: DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Her achievements were recognised yesterday at a ceremony in the Singapore Botanic Gardens' Botany Centre. She and Olympic champion Joseph Schooling became the first two local athletes to have orchids - the *Dendrobium Yip Pin Xiu* and *Dendrobium Joseph Schooling* - named after them.

The pair are the second and third Singaporeans respectively to receive the honour under the celebrities naming programme, after singer Stefanie Sun in 2006.

Orchid naming is an honour typically extended to visiting heads of state. However, foreign athletes with orchids named after them include Swedish golf great Annika Sorenstam and American tennis star Serena Williams.

Said Yip: "I'm very honoured, because the orchid is Singapore's national flower and to have something so beautiful named after me is a true honour."

Schooling echoed Yip's sentiments and said: "It's a special feel-

ing and I'm really looking forward to seeing it grow.

"But I don't think I should even attempt to grow it by myself. I don't know the first thing about plants and I don't want to ruin such a beautiful thing."

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ST VIDEO
Schooling and Yip with their orchids. str.sg/4KZH