



TAKING CONTROL

You are responsible for the good things, and the bad things. If you want something, you have to do something about it.



YIP PIN XIU, para swimmer, on the lessons her former coach Ang Peng Siong taught her.

Yip Pin Xiu receiving the ST Star of the Month award for September from managing director of F&N Foods Jennifer See (left) and ST sports editor Lee Yulin yesterday. She won the 50m and 100m backstroke S2 at the World Para Swimming Championships. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

September winner: Yip Pin Xiu (para swimming)

BACK ON A HIGH, YIP WANTS MORE

World champ aims to go faster and retain titles at Paralympics in Tokyo next year

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Yip Pin Xiu sits in her wheelchair in pretty sandals, her feet so tiny that she has to shop in the tweens' section in the mall.

Her size 1 feet, indirectly caused by Charcot-Marie-Tooth – an inherited disorder that causes nerve damage and weakens the muscles progressively – however, are no measure of what the para swimmer has achieved in her career.

Once a painfully shy child who “didn’t have friends” from Primary 1 to 4, Yip is now a confident woman who has won three Paralympic golds, holds two world records and recently added Nominated Member of Parliament to her curriculum vitae.

But a crisis of confidence hit the 27-year-old this year, after disappointing results at the World Para Swimming World Series meets in Melbourne and Singapore in February and May.

“I felt very low... as an athlete I tied myself to my performance and if I didn’t do well, it was difficult because it was so much of who I was and that’s very unhealthy,” she said. After parting ways with her coach

of eight months, Han Jun, Yip worked with former national swimmer Mark Chay and rediscovered her mojo just in time for the World Para Swimming Championships in London last month. She won the 50m and 100m backstroke S2 to end a nine-year drought at the world meet.

After winning the 50m freestyle S3 gold and the 50m backstroke silver in 2010 in the Netherlands, she finished second in the backstroke in 2013 and did not earn a medal in 2015. She did not compete in 2017.

Yip said: “For those nine years, I was still training very hard. When I won I felt like I was back on top of the world, back on the right track as my end goal is still the Tokyo Paralympics.”

For her achievements in London, Yip was named The Straits Times Star of the Month for September.

ST sports editor Lee Yulin said: “Pin Xiu is a shining example of an athlete who continually seeks to break new ground. Her winning two gold medals at the world championships nine years after her first one is testament not just to her longevity but also to her spirit.”

Yip does not blame anyone for those lean years, explaining that she split with Han because he was

more of a developmental coach and not a good match for her.

Yip, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy aged two, cited the lessons that her former coach Ang Peng Siong taught her.

She said: “Since I was young, Uncle Siong always said not to blame anybody. You are responsible for the good things, and the bad things. If you want something, you have to do something about it.”

Yip is in discussions to finalise her coaching team ahead of the Tokyo Games, where she aims to go faster and retain her two titles.

She is already looking ahead to the 2024 Paralympics in Paris, but is undecided on whether to continue till 2028.

Muscular dystrophy can cause progressive weakness and loss of muscle mass and Yip, who was reclassified from S3 to S2 in 2015 – the lower the number, the more severe the impairment – does not know what the future holds for her.

But the woman who once ate alone during recess because “people didn’t want to talk to me”, has weathered so much more.

She said: “I do not think about my condition. If I do I will go down a deep hole. I choose to believe that it won’t get worse. I do whatever I can, try to be independent and don’t let people tell me what I can or cannot do.”

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