



EARLY RISER: Theresa arrives at Farrer Park Swimming Complex at 7am to start her training, which takes place at least seven times a week for two hours.



RESISTANCE TRAINING: Theresa dragging a bucket underwater over a distance of 25m as part of resistance training. Born with spina bifida, a condition that affects her lower body, she will compete in the 50m and 100m freestyle events at the London Paralympics.

Against THE current



Nature appears to have handed them a raw deal, but Paralympic athletes Yip Pin Xiu and Theresa Goh are defying their physical limits to achieve goals few able-bodied people dare even dream of. **Photojournalist Kevin Lim reports**



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TILL THE POINT OF EXHAUSTION
 I like to feel that feeling of pushing, and know that I can push even more, until the point I'm really exhausted.
 - Paralympic swimmer Theresa Goh



SWIM BUDDIES: Pin Xiu and Theresa (above) are close friends and confide in each other.

MORE POWER: Theresa feels the strain of gym exercises tailored to build strength and power.

SINGAPORE had plenty to cheer about after winning two bronze medals at the recently concluded Olympics.

But four years ago in the Beijing Paralympics, Singapore won four medals for the first time, when swimmer Yip Pin Xiu brought home a gold medal in the 50m backstroke event and silver in the 50m freestyle event and rider Laurentia Tan won two bronze medals in equestrian.

They hope for a repeat of the good showing.

Bound for the London Paralympics from Aug 29 to Sept 9, Pin Xiu and fellow swimmer Theresa Goh are training at Farrer Park Swimming Complex at least seven times a week.

They are part of an eight-man Singapore contingent that includes Laurentia Tan, Gemma Rose Foo and Maximilian Tan for equestrian; Jovin Tan and Desiree Lim for sailing; and Nurulasyiqah Taha for Boccia.

The Paralympics, which parallels the Olympics every four years, is the top competition for disabled athletes since its introduction in Rome in 1960.

Theresa and Pin Xiu will compete in the 50m and 100m freestyle events, but not against each other as they are in different categories based on the severity of their disabilities.

Twenty-year-old Pin Xiu - who was born with muscular dystrophy, a disorder that sees her body progressively degenerate - will not be defending her crown in the 50m backstroke as the event is not listed in her category by the host country.

The freshman at Singapore Management University's School of Social Sciences will instead be competing in the 50m and 100m freestyle races using backstroke.

"I will be swimming backstroke because it's my fastest," says Pin Xiu, who is known as the "Helicopter" for the rotary

backward whipping of her arms in water.

According to Jiao Yang, who has been coaching the swimmers for eight years, competition has caught up, if not overtaken them, on the road to the Paralympics.

"After Pin Xiu's success in Beijing, she has been a benchmark for other competitors," says the 32-year-old, who hails from China's Heilongjiang province.

"China's Xia Jiangbo, who finished second runner-up to Pin Xiu in the last Paralympics, is in very good form. And Ukraine has two very promising swimmers who will compete against Pin Xiu."

Theresa - who was born with spina bifida, a condition that affects her lower body - has been running her own mental rehearsal of the upcoming competition.

"I go through every motion of it, from the start to the turn to the finish. You always have to rehearse a perfect race," says Theresa.

She finished fourth in the 100m breaststroke final in Beijing four years ago.

The 25-year-old has had to juggle her time between training and studying for a part-time degree in sports science in a private school since 2009.

But coach Jiao Yang is pleased with the girls' fighting spirit.

"I like that feeling of pushing, and know that I can push even more, until the point I'm really exhausted," says Theresa.

Adds Pin Xiu: "I'm just going to tell myself 'I've trained well for the day. I'm going to do my best' and put up a fight'."

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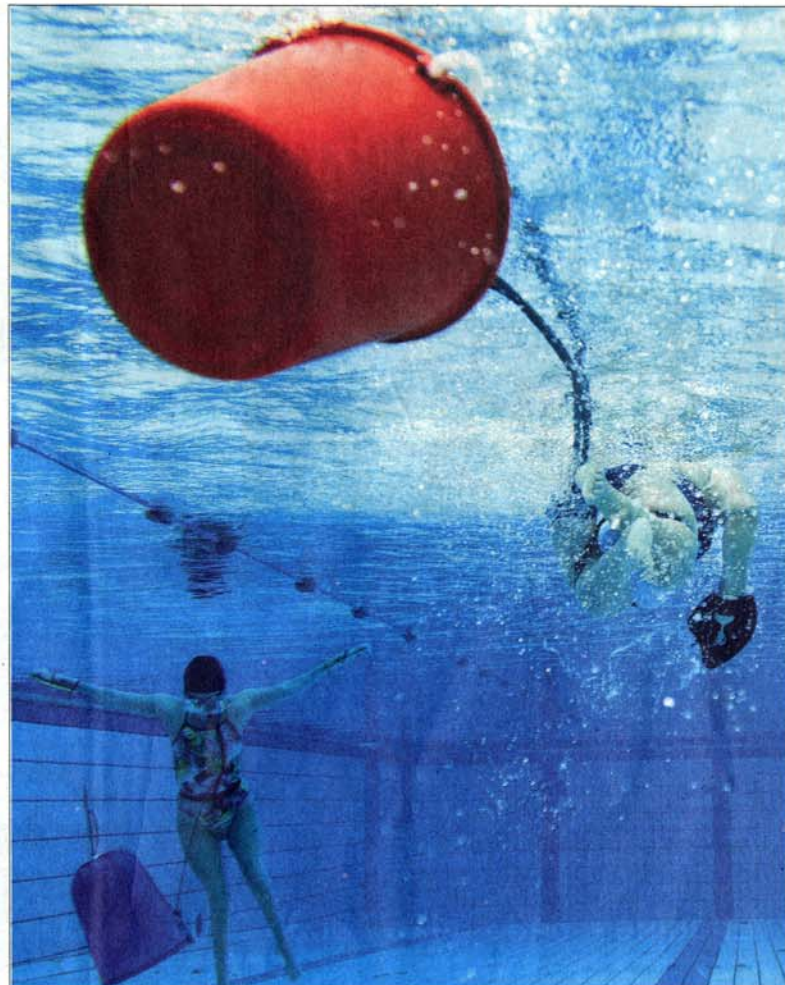
A LITTLE HELP: Pin Xiu has no problems putting on her nose clip (top) but needs her coach Jiao Yang to help with the swimming cap, as muscular dystrophy prevents her from doing tasks that require fine finger movements.

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FIGHTING SPIRIT
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 - Paralympic swimmer Pin Xiu
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GEARING FOR GOLD: Pin Xiu pushes off for her backstroke practice. In the 2008 Beijing Paralympics, she won a gold medal in the 50m backstroke event in 58.75 seconds, having clocked a world record of 57.92 seconds in the qualifying heats in her debut Paralympic outing. ST PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM



THE TOUGH GET GOING: Pin Xiu working out on the suspension trainer to build her muscles, while Theresa is set to do chin-ups under the watchful eye of her conditioning coach Scott Vanderput, 25.



STAYING POWER: As part of resistance training and to improve their power in the pool, Theresa (right) drags a bucket and Pin Xiu a parachute over a distance of 25m. They need to improve to keep up with the competition this year.