

Paralympians homecoming: The medallists



Above: Rio Paralympics medallists Yip Pin Xiu (left) and Theresa Goh sharing a light moment at a press conference yesterday.
 ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

Left: Paralympic double gold medalist Yip showing her medals to her nieces Shernice Ang, four, and Chew Xiu Wen, 10, after arriving yesterday morning at Changi Airport Terminal 3.
 ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

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If you truly feel very inspired by what our para-athletes have been doing, step up to the plate not just for the awards system, step up to the plate to support para-sports because at all levels of development, support is needed.



TEO-KOH SOCK MIANG, Singapore National Paralympic Council chairman, urging all to play their part in promoting para-sports.

IT'S NOT JUST THE MONEY

Rewards aside, Yip and Goh call for wider support in areas like training & development

Chua Siang Yee

Their feats at the recent Paralympics have re-ignited the debate on whether para-athletes deserve the same prize money as their able-bodied counterparts.

While Yip Pin Xiu and Theresa Goh are thankful for those who have supported them and would welcome parity on that front, they said the ultimate goal is for their achievements to be recognised in the same bracket as Olympic athletes.

Yip, with three Paralympic golds (two earned this year and one in 2008), said: "Some people say it's (the Paralympics and) not as competitive but they don't see the value behind the sport, like how training

is as tough, (or) that we work as hard. They just look at the result. "But...we put in the same amount of effort. We're close to a bunch of other Team Singapore athletes and we know nobody trains less than each other."

Under the Singapore National Paralympic Council's (SNPC) Athlete's Achievement Award Programme, a gold medal at the Paralympics comes with a \$200,000 award, while a bronze medal is rewarded with \$50,000.

The Singapore National Olympic Council's Multi-Million Dollar Award Programme awards \$1 million for an Olympic gold and \$250,000 for a bronze. Both programmes are funded by the Tote Board and Singapore Pools.

However, Yip said prize money

was never on her mind when she won gold medals in the 100m backstroke S2 and 50 backstroke S2 events in Rio.

"I didn't even think about it before the Paralympics," she said. Goh, whose bronze in the 100m breaststroke SB4 final was her first after four Paralympics, said: "Equality will be nice, being treated equally, who wouldn't want that? It sucks when you see you're being treated differently from your able-bodied counterparts but it's life... but the prize money is just one part of it."

"There's so much more than just the reward at the end of your hard work. There's being there for the athlete when they're trying to get there and not just being there when they've achieved everything."

SNPC chairman Teo-Koh Sock Miang said she is grateful for the Tote Board and Singapore Pools for funding the programme and con-

firming that discussions are ongoing to increase the prize money.

But she also called on those who believe there should be equality between Olympians and Paralympians to step up.

"If everybody out there keeps saying we should be equal, then step up to the plate. Corporations need to step up to the plate and not say everything is government,"

Teo-Koh said. "If you truly feel very inspired by what our para-athletes have been doing, step up to the plate - not just for the awards system, step up to the plate to support para-sports because at all levels of development, support is needed."

"My challenge to everyone out there who says there's got to be equality - what I (say) to them is, 'What is your role in all of this? Shouldn't you yourself step forward and offer your support?'"

siangyee@sph.com.sg

Holiday next, as Goh decides on Tokyo 2020

Finalising her itinerary for a holiday to Ireland and England is next on Paralympic bronze medalist Theresa Goh's to-do list.

But the 29-year-old has an even bigger decision to make in the next three months - whether to hang up her goggles.

Goh, who won her first Paralympic medal in four outings, said: "Definitely there's that desire to chase as best an outcome as possible but there's also the importance of knowing when to walk away, I feel like currently I (will) not have any regrets if I walk away. They always say, end on a high, right?"

She joked that she will be at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics - as a spectator at the very least, because her parents want to

watch the Games. It is 10 days since her bronze medal in the 100m breaststroke SB4, but Goh said she is still processing her feat.

"I'm still waiting for someone to pinch me and wake me up. I still can't believe it's (happened)."

The future is slightly clearer for good friend and training partner Yip Pin Xiu, 24.

The three-time Paralympic champion said: "As of now, I'm not sure if I'm (heading) to Tokyo, but I know I still want to be swimming competitively for a couple more years."

"It's painful but there's so much joy in it."

Chua Siang Yee