



September winner: Yip Pin Xiu

CHAMP STILL GETS GOOSEBUMPS

Swimmer is soaking up Rio experience after overcoming doubts to win golds

May Chen

Yip Pin Xiu is reminiscing about Rio de Janeiro, more than a month after the Paralympic cauldron has been doused, and holding up her arm for you.

Holding it up, so you can see that her hair still stands and she still gets goosebumps, because it all still “feels like yesterday”.

That first gold from Rio, in the 100m backstroke (S2), will be remembered as the one swim that set two world records.

In 2min 7.09sec, Yip shaved more than two seconds off her own mark of 2:09.79 while setting a new 50m record with a split of 59.38sec.

It set the tone, pushing already high expectations further north.

That second gold, coming later through the 50m backstroke (S2), will be remembered as a performance that made Yip the first Singaporean to win multiple golds at a single Paralympics.

Expectations turned to euphoria in the knowledge that after single-mindedly pursuing a goal for four years, she had reached it with that last touch of the wall.

Yip is The Straits Times' Star of the Month for September, an award that is an extension of ST's Athlete of the Year accolade launched in 2008. Both are backed by F&N's 100Plus.

But behind the emotions of victo-

ry and a sweet-natured smile that this 24-year-old always readily supplies, few would know that this champion had actually been struggling with confidence.

The six nights in between the 100m and 50m events, in particular, were spent sleepless. I have one gold now – but I want two, Yip thought then.

Moments before wheeling onto the pool deck for the 50m event, she even turned to best friend and team-mate Theresa Goh in the call room for assurance: “Will I win gold? Tell me I will win gold.”

Said Yip: “Everyone thought I was confident, but at the same time I had doubts.”

With world-record swims within the last year, at last year's Asean Para Games on home soil and the European Championships in Portugal, form was on Yip's side but pressure was also weighing her down.

She said: “Having a target on my back was stressful. My confidence was not sky-high.”

“I was putting on a strong front for myself. I didn't want to say that I wasn't feeling confident because I was afraid that if I said it, my brain would subconsciously take it in and I know how powerful the brain is.”

“If I let my brain believe that I can't do it, even if I'm physically ready, I won't be able to swim a good race.”

So, after making her life all about

Yip Pin Xiu, The Straits Times' Star of the Month for September, receiving her award at Pan Pacific Orchard. The 24-year-old is flanked by Jennifer See, general manager of F&N Foods Singapore, and ST sports editor Lee Yulin (far right). Yip was recognised for winning two golds at the Rio Paralympics and inspiring Singaporeans.
ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH



mind over body, Yip – whose muscular dystrophy condition means her muscles weaken and waste away over time – simply let her body do the talking this time.

Said ST sports editor Lee Yulin: “Pin Xiu has been recognised not

just because she won two golds and set two world records at the Paralympics. The award is also an acknowledgement of how she continues to blaze a trail, not just for the country's disabled athletes but for all of Team Singapore.”

Yip, now the owner of three golds and a silver from the Paralympics, defies convention and changes perception by showing what her disability enables her to do in the water.

She swims to empower herself, although somewhere along the way,

MIXED FEELINGS

Everyone thought I was confident going into Rio. I was confident, but at the same time I had doubts.



YIP PIN XIU, double gold medallist at the Rio Paralympics, on her struggles leading up to the September extravaganza.

it evolved into something much bigger than what this final-year Singapore Management University undergraduate could ever envision.

It is why the tingles come every time she thinks about Rio, about her toil to ensure the Singapore flag is seen by the world, and about the Singaporeans who call out in support of her on the streets.

Said Yip: “There was immense relief because I won two golds, but at the same time there's also this super overwhelming feeling you get because of the support from Singaporeans.”

“I wanted to do it to create a positive impact in society. Of course it's a personal achievement, but at the same time... (it sends) the message that as long as you have a dream, set your mind to it and persevere, one day you'll get there.”

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