

SILVER-MEDALLIST NURUL SETS SIGHTS ON 2016 PARALYMPICS

SINGAPORE – National boccia player Nurulasyiqah “Nurul” Taha may not have managed to defend her two boccia titles at the 8th ASEAN Para Games (APG), but she believes she is still on track in her preparations to qualify for the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.

The 30-year-old, who lost in the preliminary rounds of the mixed individual BC3 event last Sunday, took silver in the mixed pair competition yesterday with team-mate Toh Sze Ning after the pair lost 3-7 (2-0, 0-2, 0-5, 1-0) to Thailand’s Chaemchoi Ekkarat and Visaratanunta Tanimpat at the OCBC Arena.

But even though Nurul admitted to feeling disappointed, she is determined to bounce back at next year’s Boccia Individual World Championships. “I am definitely a little disappointed,” said the national athlete, who has spinal muscular atrophy.

“But this will spur me on to play a lot harder and better for the upcoming

World Championships. I hope to qualify for the Rio Paralympics.”

Singapore have already qualified for the mixed pair BC3 event at the 2016 Paralympics via last month’s Colombia World Open. But Nurul, who was the first Singaporean to compete in boccia at the 2012 London Paralympics, and eventually finished seventh out of eight competitors in the individual event, wants to also make it into the mixed individual event in Rio.

“I will be trying my best to qualify,” said the Singapore Management University accountancy graduate.

“I learnt a few things at this APG. There are a few areas I need to improve on, such as skills in blocking opponents, being more defensive, and knowing when to switch between defend and attack.

“These things you can only learn through competitions, so I am glad for this APG experience.”

Nurul and Toh were not the only



Nurul Taha in action at the boccia mixed individual BC3 – Pool A preliminary match on the weekend at the ASEAN Para Games. PHOTO: SPORT SINGAPORE / ACTION IMAGES VIA REUTERS

ones who finished second in boccia for Singapore yesterday.

APG debutants Lim Kay Choong and Chan Siew Gek also finished second after losing 10-0 to Thailand’s

Tanbut Chaloeiphon and Somsanuk Ritthikrai in the gold-medal match of the mixed pair BC4 event. However, as there are only two teams in the competition, no silver medal was awarded. The Singapore team also lost 10-1 to Thailand in the mixed team BC1/2 event.

Thailand’s victories yesterday mean that the 11-strong Thai contingent, which includes three Paralympic gold medallists, have swept all seven gold medals on offer at this APG. Malaysia finished second with two silvers and a bronze, while Singapore came third with two silvers.

National team manager Kenneth Soh told TODAY that the Singapore Disability Sports Council has plans to build up the national team after the APG, by widening their search for potential talented players.

“Currently, all our players are those with MDs (muscular dystrophy),” he explained. “We want to follow Thailand’s example and recruit people with other medical conditions, such as those who are recovering from post-stroke, or have spina bifida.” **ADELENE WONG**