

WE ARE SEEING SPORTS UNITE SINGAPOREANS

I'M RACING FOR EQUALITY, NOT MONEY: YIP

Double Paralympic champion is grateful enough for increased support from Singaporeans

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SINGAPORE — Amid renewed calls from the public for Singapore para-athletes to get the same monetary rewards as able-bodied athletes when they achieve success on the world stage, newly-minted double Paralympic champion Yip Pin Xiu has come out to say that she is not racing for money, nor harbouring hopes of receiving a bumper pay day.

All she wants, she insisted, is equality shown to all athletes — able-bodied or otherwise.

While able-bodied athletes such as Joseph Schooling — who won gold in the 100m butterfly at last month's Rio Olympics — is due to receive S\$1 million from the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC)'s Multi-Million Dollar Award Programme (MAP), disabled athletes who win gold at the Paralympic Games get S\$200,000.

Speaking to TODAY after bagging her second Paralympic gold in Rio yesterday, Yip — who won the women's 50m backstroke S2 event in 1min 0.33sec — said the prize-money issue has never crossed her mind, and that she is already grateful enough for the increased support and recognition for para-athletes

over the years.

"As an athlete, I am not doing this for the money, so I'm not harbouring any hopes that (the prize money) will increase," said the 24-year-old, who is the first Singaporean to win multiple gold medals at the Paralympic Games. "My only hope is that there is equality shown to all athletes, both para-athletes and able-bodied athletes.

"Eight years ago, if you had told me it (having equal prize money for para-athletes and able-bodied athletes) was going to happen, I would say stop kidding. Because, eight years ago, we were far from (achieving) that.

"But over the years, we have seen more support, more recognition, and people being inspired by para-athletes. And we're grateful for that.

"We are seeing sports uniting Singaporeans, sports being more than just sports, being more than just a race. I am glad we are able to show Singapore what sports can do for us — like how it can unite the nation."

Some Team Singapore athletes TODAY spoke to believe the gap between the different prize purses should be narrowed, if not made equal.

"At the moment, the difference in prize money between an Olympic gold and a Paralympic gold is a little too big," said national kayaker Brandon Ooi.

"You should not give a Paralympic gold medallist much less than an Olympic gold medallist because (the achievement) is of the same level."

National women's dragonboat captain Chua Jia Min agreed.

"The disparity of the winnings between the Olympics and Paralympics should be less," she said. "Both (Yip and Schooling) are gold medallists at



Swimmer Yip Pin Xiu with her gold medal after she won the women's 50m backstroke S2 yesterday. She has not decided whether to continue training for Tokyo 2020.
PHOTO: SPORTS SINGAPORE

the highest level of their sport, and the hard work they put in is almost equal, so they should be awarded a similar amount.

"It'll be good if the prize money is equal. But if it can't be, as close as possible would be good."

Singapore Disability Sports Council vice-president Raja Singh said people should not be spending too much time arguing this topic as "there are a lot of little details that we need to go into if we do".

"There are many things we will have to look at in order to reassess the prize money," he added, without going into specifics.

"If there's a need to review it, it will be done. At this moment, we should focus on celebrating with Pin Xiu on her wins and move forward."

Yip's historic feat in Rio was met with wild celebrations back home in

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Singapore. More than 300 students and teachers from her alma mater Bendemeer Secondary School gathered in the school hall early in the morning for a live screening of her race.

"I am so incredibly happy, relieved — relieved that I managed to do it and met the expectations of everybody back in Singapore," said Yip, who won her first gold medal of the Rio Games last week in the women's 100m backstroke S2 event, in a world-record time of 2min 7.09sec.

"I did feel there was a bit of increased expectations and more eyes looking at me but, at the same time, I could feel the support from Singaporeans and I am so grateful for it.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the support. Because it was so early in the morning, and I didn't expect people to want to gather to watch it. But it is really heart-warming to know there are so many people cheering for us back at home.

"The fact that people are asking for more equality for para-athletes spurred me on in my race. It made me want to have a better showing so that their support did not go to waste."

With mission accomplished at the Rio Games, what's next for Yip?

The Singapore Management University undergraduate said she has not decided whether to continue training for the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

"I am just done with this Paralympics and it is still fresh and too early to be thinking about Tokyo 2020," she said.

"Give me a couple of months, and then I will answer you whether I am going to Tokyo. But I still want to be training for at least one to two more years, and we will see."