

STILL QUEEN OF THE POOL

Swimmer Yip Pin Xiu retains her women's S2 100m backstroke title at Paralympics



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As the Singapore flag rose above the podium at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre yesterday, tears fell from swimmer Yip Pin Xiu's eyes.

The 29-year-old had just retained her women's S2 100m backstroke title less than an hour before that with a dominant performance that earned her a fourth Paralympic gold medal.

She touched the wall in 2min 16.61sec, with her closest competitor Miyuki Yamada of Japan coming in 9.57sec later. Mexico's Fabiola Ramirez took the bronze in 2:36.54.

Yip's gold on the opening day of competition at the Tokyo Games allowed Team Singapore to kick-start their campaign on a high note.

Such was her performance that it seemed like nothing had changed from the 2016 Rio Games, where Yip blew the competition out of the water, winning the event in a world record 2:07.09 – nearly 12sec ahead of silver medallist Feng Yazhu of China.

Even the event commentator in the cavernous 15,000-seater venue in Tokyo noted Yip's stature, citing her world record and her medal wins at Rio 2016 and Beijing 2008. "She is back here to vie to dominate, once again, in the S2 100m backstroke event."

But in reality, this gold in Japan was different from the others.

Yip told The Straits Times: "I do feel like there's a difference mainly



Yip Pin Xiu touched the wall in 2min 16.61sec – almost 10sec earlier than her closest competitor. PHOTO: SPORT SINGAPORE.

because it's been a rough 1½ years for everyone, not just myself.

"It wasn't a conventional route to get here. We didn't have training camps, we didn't have competitions. There was a lot of adapting we had to do."

She noted that it was a case of who could adapt best to the conditions, "so I really have to thank my coaches, my team, (who were) able to still bring me here this year."

"I'm really grateful for that and so grateful for all the support back home."

The past year has been full of challenges as Yip, along with many

other athletes, saw their training disrupted and competitions postponed or cancelled owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Days before she flew to Tokyo, Yip was hit by jitters that left her without sleep and an appetite.

But despite the hardships in the lead-up to Tokyo, it was a journey that Yip said she would embark on again: "It's something I really love and would 100 per cent do again – I would take the pain, struggles."

"To hear the national anthem here is magnificent and I will do it again."

At home, President Halimah Ya-

cob led the tributes, writing on Facebook: "Competing on the global stage is no easy feat and I am glad that Pin Xiu as well as her fellow athletes remain focused and determined to achieve their goals... Continue to do your best. We are cheering you on!"

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also posted on social media: "Pin Xiu, Singapore is proud of you, and you inspire all of us!"

In a Facebook post, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong wrote: "She is, quite simply, legendary... PX is showing us what it means to be resilient amid

difficult times."

Yip will now turn her focus to her next event – the 50m back – next Thursday, in which she is also the defending champion and world record holder.

She said: "The next few days are extremely crucial for me to do my best to perform in the 50m backstroke, so I'm going to stick to my diet, train well and stay disciplined."

While Yip is a veteran of four Paralympics, fellow swimmer Sophie Soon made her debut yesterday.

She clocked 1:28.61 in the S13 100m butterfly heats to come in

last of 18 swimmers.

The 24-year-old endured a rocky start to her race when her goggles fogged up before she jumped into the water, but she said she was determined to put that behind her and work towards her SB12 100m breaststroke event on Wednesday.

She said: "I want to be able to look back on that race and confidently say that I did my best regardless of the result. With today, we've got some good learning points to take forward to next week."

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Medal tally	G	S	B	Total
1 Australia	6	1	3	10
2 China	5	1	2	8
3 Russian Para Committee	3	1	2	6
4 Italy	2	1	2	5
5 Ukraine	1	5	2	8
6 Britain	1	4	1	6
7 Brazil	1	1	2	4
8 Netherlands	1	1	0	2
9= Belarus	1	0	0	1
9= Chile	1	0	0	1
9= Israel	1	0	0	1
9= Singapore	1	0	0	1

WHAT'S HOT TODAY TOKYO SINGAPOREANS IN ACTION

EQUESTRIAN
 MAXIMILLIAN TAN
 Dressage Individual – Grade II (3.56pm)

POWERLIFTING
 NUR AINI MOHAMAD YASLI
 Women's (up to 45kg) category (3.30pm)

ON TV: Catch the action live on Mediacorp Ch5 & meWatch.