



What they lacked in numbers they made up in volume as a small delegation from the Singapore National Paralympic Council and the Singapore Embassy in Tokyo cheered on compatriot Yip Pin Xiu in yesterday's S2 50m backstroke final. Yip, 29, won the race for her second gold in Japan. PHOTOS: SPORT SINGAPORE

SPECIAL WIN FOR A SPECIAL ATHLETE

Comeback victory against Japanese foe earns Yip fifth gold; she's already eyeing Paris 2024

Laura Chia and Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent
In Tokyo

At the halfway mark, defending champion Yip Pin Xiu cast a glance at her Japanese rival Miyuki Yamada, who had a slight edge in their S2 50m backstroke final at the Tokyo Paralympics yesterday. But Yip kept her cool, telling herself to stick to her game plan and continue swimming hard. She

eventually caught, and then overtook, the Japanese. She touched home in 1min 2.04sec, over four seconds ahead of second-placed Yamada (1:06.98). China's Feng Yazhu was third in 1:11.55 at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre. Yip, 29, was overjoyed at claiming her second gold in Tokyo and fifth Paralympic gold overall, but noted she was always cautious about Yamada and her strong starts. She said: "I know that (Yamada) and I were very close, especially in the first part of the race, so of course it's not guaranteed that I'd

touch the wall first. "From the corner of my eye, I did see her at least three times and there was always (thoughts like) 'Oh my gosh she's faster. Oh my gosh she's still there'. "But we stuck to the game plan which was going out in the first 25m as fast as I could... then holding on to the last 15m. I really had to hold on to it." With the victory, Yip retained the two titles she won at Rio 2016, having also won the S2 100m backstroke last week. She also holds the world record in both events, which she set in Rio. Acknowledging Yip's feats after yesterday's final, the venue commentator told the crowd: "Double gold medallist here in Tokyo. What

a fantastic swim!" No tears were shed during this victory ceremony, but the gold medal moment was no less significant. Yip said: "This year is a bit different in a sense that it's a five-year cycle. The past two years were so uncertain and across the world there was so much uncertainty. "But I'm really grateful that the Games happened, I'm grateful that I'm sitting here at the end of the day with two gold medals. "To me, it feels very special because we've learnt to adapt in the face of uncertainty and I think that with the entire country cheering me on, it's been really amazing." The small delegation of Singaporeans certainly made their presence felt. The raucous cheers of

the visiting officials from the Singapore National Paralympic Council (SNPC) and the Singapore Embassy in Tokyo echoed around the venue. Reflecting on her campaign, Yip told the Olympic Information Service: "At the end of the day, it's not only how much you put in but also how much your competitors put in. "What we can do is make sure we're consistent and make sure we've done everything we can to be the best high-performance athlete I want to be. At the end of the day, I have to hold myself responsible." Tokyo 2020 is over for her, but she said: "After this, it is back to the drawing board and I'm thinking how to be even better, even faster, for Paris."

WHAT'S HOT TODAY

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TOH WEI SOONG

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WORTH THE WAIT

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YIP PIN XIU, Singapore's Paralympic champion, retained both her swimming titles from Rio 2016.

But before the next campaign, Yip has other plans, and that includes setting up a swim school for able-bodied and disabled kids. In the meantime, she would like to enjoy herself a bit by not adhering to a strict diet or sleep schedule for a while. "It's been hard to plan anything with the pandemic. So I've been living day by day, but I'll go back and reflect on it and for now I think we're just gonna celebrate this win," said Yip. Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong took to social media to congratulate her on her achievement. He wrote: "5 gold medals on the most competitive of international arenas. There are 13 years between her gold medals. To be at the top of her game, consistently, 13 years apart, shows us just how special she is, as an athlete, in any sport and on any platform. "On top of this, outside the pool, she has given so much more to society... She made invaluable contributions as my Parliamentary colleague some years ago, raising points and suggestions with clarity and conviction. PX is also a nurturing role model, for our younger athletes, who look up to her with pride and for inspiration." laura@sph.com.sg waltsim@sph.com.sg