

INQUISITIVE NATURE

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NURULASYIQAH MOHD TAHA, boccia player, who has a master's degree in analytics.

At the Asian Para Games in Hangzhou from Sunday to Oct 28, Singapore's 31-strong contingent will be competing for honours in archery, athletics, badminton, boccia, lawn bowls, powerlifting, shooting, swimming and table tennis. Today, The Straits Times features boccia player Nurulasyiqah Mohd Taha.



Nurulasyiqah Mohd Taha, who has spinal muscular atrophy, is hoping to use video analysis to help her and her boccia teammates improve. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

GROWTH MINDSET SUSTAINS VETERAN

Lin Tianbao

Nurulasyiqah Mohd Taha, who has played boccia for 19 years, is not only proficient in the sport. She is also conversational in five languages, including Korean, Ja-

panese and Portuguese, and has a master's degree in analytics.

The 38-year-old, who has spinal muscular atrophy, labels herself as a curious person, whose thirst for knowledge and positive mindset have kept her going during tough times.

These include the past 3½

years, when she had to stop competing overseas due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Her resolve to pull through has been rewarded with a place in the 31-strong Singapore contingent at the Asian Para Games, which open in Hangzhou on Sunday.

The Republic will be represent-

ed by four boccia players, including Asean Para Games gold medalist Toh Sze Ning.

Nurulasyiqah, a full-time technical specialist, said: "Maybe my experiences demonstrate that I try to adopt a growth mindset... I find learning fun and I'm open to learning new things, so in a way

I'm a curious person."

Her inquisitive nature has seen her obtain a master's in analytics from Singapore Management University while she was unable to travel abroad for competitions.

She wanted to learn more about data analysis after suggesting to her teammates that they could

analyse videos of their boccia matches to help them improve.

She added: "In the course of doing that, I wondered how we could make use of the information from there."

While she advanced academically, the last few years have not been easy for her on the court. She slipped down the world rankings because of her inactivity in competitions, which resulted in her failing to qualify for the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021.

Nurulasyiqah recalled feeling "weird" then as she was unsure when she could compete again, but she continued to train to make sure that she would be ready to perform when the opportunity came.

Training sessions were also affected during the early part of the pandemic, when safe-distancing measures meant that she was unable to be on the court with her assistant, whose role is to place the ball on the ramp based on the player's instructions, before the player attempts to deliver the ball as close to the target as possible.

Nurulasyiqah said: "We tried remote training where my assistant was on court while I was at home, and I was giving instructions for her to execute the shots."

"It was interesting how we had to adapt to those times and throughout that period of time I had to keep my skills up to par."

She said she could still simulate 90 per cent of physical training conditions then, adding: "I kept reminding myself that this situation isn't going to be forever, but I also kept wondering when the day would come when the pandemic would be over (and I could compete again)."

That day came on Sept 4, at the Boccia World Cup, in Fortaleza, Brazil.

"The first day when we went down to check out the court, it was a mixture of relief and excitement. And the adrenaline of competing just came back again," she said, adding that it felt like a "restart" for her.

She eventually placed ninth out of 15 players in the BC3 female category, but her result did not bother her as she prepares for her second international competition in the post-Covid era – the Asian Para Games.

While her lack of competitions means that it would be tough for her to rise up the rankings and earn a spot at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, Nurulasyiqah just wants to focus on the present.

The world No. 40, whose best Asiad performance in the singles was sixth place in 2018, has set herself a semi-final target this time around.

Considering her passion to learn, it is apt that she is finding new ways to apply her new-found knowledge of analytics to boccia.

"I'm still taking time to explore avenues to apply what I've learnt, as there are different techniques," she added.

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