



Jonathan Chan has been relishing his return to training for next year's Tokyo Summer Games. Chan, the first Singaporean diver to qualify for the Olympics, admitted to being rusty but is grateful to be back in the pool as Singapore exited the circuit breaker. ST FILE PHOTO

Coronavirus pandemic

TEAM SG RESUME JOURNEY TO TOKYO

Besides rust, many are also having to adapt to the new safety protocols in training facilities

Nicole Chia

Coaches wearing masks. Athletes having to make safe entries to their training venues. No mingling with teammates.

A "new normal" enveloped the sporting landscape yesterday as Singapore's top athletes finally returned to training following a coronavirus-enforced hiatus.

Reigning Paralympic swimming champion Yip Pin Xiu was one of the first to test the waters of the controlled conditions designed by Sport Singapore to keep athletes and their trainers safe from Covid-19.

First, she had to follow a specific route from the entrance of the OCBC Aquatic Centre to the pool – designed to ensure there is no interaction between individuals – and

then she had to stick to the time slot allocated to her.

These were some of the measures although for Yip, both were a first and she said: "We're taking a lot of precautions and I think it's absolutely necessary."

"I'm very grateful for the opportunity to resume training and I think it's a good start to be able to continue again to Tokyo next year."

The Olympic Games will take place in the Japanese capital from July 23-Aug 8 next year, while the Paralympic Games will be held from Aug 24-Sept 5. Both were postponed by a year because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yip was one of some 30 local athletes across 10 sports who have qualified, or are close to qualifying, for next year's Olympics and Paralympics and who have been allowed to resume training "under controlled conditions" at selected venues following the end of the circuit breaker period on Monday.

Of her return to the pool 70 days after her last session, she said: "We had to start easier because it's been a while since I've been in the water."

"In the pool I certainly do not

feel like I'm in good form. I've been exercising on land, so I've been doing my cardio and weights stuff but it's very different from the water as a medium.

"Aerobically and anaerobically, everything is also not as good as before but hopefully I'll be able to build it up again."

She was not alone in feeling rusty. In the surrounding pool a bit later, diver Jonathan Chan kept his three-hour training session "simple" by doing jumps on dry land, dive imitations and somersaults before gradually picking up the pace.

"(I was) definitely slightly rusty, not something that could have been avoided. But overall, I think (I'm) still in a good place," said the 23-year-old, adding that he did not have many concerns about resuming training as he found the safety protocols easy to follow.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to get back early, hopefully I can use this time as a head start to get back to top form."

Equally enthusiastic about returning to action were the women's table tennis team although things were also different for them.

Their coach Hao Anlin said: "Having to wear masks will affect com-

munication and there is definitely some adjustment required. But all these are understandable given the circumstances and we have to remain socially responsible."

National swimming head coach and performance director Stephan Widmer, who donned a mask while overseeing training at the OCBC Aquatic Centre, said the athletes and coaches greeted one another with smiles and "elbow wiggles", adding: "The challenge is you just want to walk towards one another and give a hug but you can't do that..."

"Generally, it was very positive vibes on the pool deck. Someone said their first 50 felt really good, then it started to get hard, and someone else said the first half an hour felt good but after that, their arms started to feel like concrete."

"These were things we expected and communicated, the approach from everyone was really (that of) a team dynamic – they were appreciative of the opportunity and went straight to business mode."

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Additional reporting by David Lee

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BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

We're taking a lot of precautions and I think it's absolutely necessary. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to resume training.



YIP PIN XIU, Paralympic swimming champion, welcoming the safety protocols.

SHEDDING RUST

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STEPHAN WIDMER, national swimming head coach, on early teething issues.