

Para-swimmers have their day at SPH C'ships

Nigel Choo and Lok Weng Seng

Last month, eight-year-old Charlyze Lim had watched the exploits of Vietnamese swimmer Nguyen Thi Anh Vien as she won eight SEA Games gold medals at the OCBC Aquatic Centre.

Yesterday, at the same venue where her idol had made waves, it was Charlyze's turn to shine, with two medals at the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) Foundation National Para-Swimming Championships.

The Pathlight School pupil, with mild autism, won gold in the 50m breaststroke and silver in the 50m freestyle in the 7-9 years age group.

She was among more than 90 swimmers from 17 schools, associations and clubs who took part at the annual event hosted by the SPH Foundation and Singapore Disability Sports Council.

The meet also served as a test of preparations for the Dec 3-9 Asean Para Games at the Sports Hub.

For some of the swimmers, the event was a chance to clock qualifying timings for the regional meet.

Said Wong Meng Ee, 45, an assistant professor for special education at the National Institute of Education, who is blind: "Although I have not been training specifically for swimming (because of professional commitments), I thought that this was a great opportunity to try out to represent Singapore for the Asean Para Games."

Another Para Games hopeful is



Eight-year-old Charlyze Lim was all smiles leaving the swimming pool after winning a silver in the 50m freestyle in her age group. She also won gold in the 50m breaststroke.
ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Sophie Soon, 18, who has been juggling classes at Nanyang Polytechnic, violin practice and training since January.

"It has been quite nerve-racking. I've never taken training so seriously, and it has made every session count," she said.

For national para-swimmer Toh Wei Soong, 16, yesterday's event was a stepping stone for the December Games, which he hopes to be a

platform to qualify for next year's Rio Paralympics.

"The Paralympics is one of my biggest goals. I'm just grateful I have had the opportunities to come this far at such a young age and at such a short time," the Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) student said.

James Leo, who won a swimming bronze at the 2014 Asean Para Games in Myanmar, a manufacturing engineer, said yesterday's meet

provided invaluable exposure for the beginners.

"As long as they take the first step out to participate, there is a chance they may get hooked to competitive swimming like I did," he said.

His point was echoed by Ginney Lim, general manager of SPH Foundation: "Participants from past editions have proved that with passion and determination, nothing is un-achievable. We hope this high

level of participation will continue in years to come."

Amid the 100-plus spectators and volunteers, Paralympians Theresa Goh and Yip Pin Xiu were spotted as they cheered on the swimmers.

"We are here to show our support for the para-athletes that have trained hard for today," said Yip.

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