

Paralympics is what counts for Toh



From left: Para-swimmers Toh Wei Soong and Wong Zhi Wei with Ferin Fu, mother of para-swimmer Nicole Fu, at the Toyota's Start Your Impossible dialogue session yesterday. PHOTO: BORNEO MOTORS

Sazali Abdul Aziz

Clean cut and sporting a shy smile, Toh Wei Soong is regarded as the new face of Singapore para-swimming, particularly after making a splash at last year's Asian Para Games in Jakarta where he won two golds and a bronze.

While hopes were high for the swimmer to make an impact in his maiden outing at the World Para Swimming Championships last month, he returned from London empty-handed despite qualifying for three finals.

But Toh believes that the world meet has helped him identify mis-

takes that he hopes to eliminate before his Paralympics debut in Tokyo next year.

"My first world championships, especially at the iconic Olympic Park, was an experience I won't forget," said Toh, on the sidelines of Toyota's Start Your Impossible initiative at the Singapore Sports Hub yesterday.

"While these are not mistakes I would have liked to make, they are (the ones) I needed to make to make myself a better swimmer and go further in my sport."

He was seventh in the 50m butterfly and 100m freestyle and eighth in the 50m free. He also swam the 400m free and 100m backstroke

(S7 classification).

Declining to elaborate on his mistakes, he said they were little "technical things", adding wryly that there were "too many to count".

Toh, who picked up the Sportsboy of the Year gong at the Singapore Disability Sports Awards in August, is coached by Ang Peng Siong, Alex Ang and Osamu Gushi.

A first-year undergraduate at the National University of Singapore, he rose to prominence at the 2015 Asean Para Games in Singapore, winning three golds before adding another two golds and a silver in Kuala Lumpur 2017. He also bagged a bronze at last year's Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

The 21-year-old was diagnosed with transverse myelitis (an inflammation of the spinal cord, which restricts the use of his legs) when he was two.

At yesterday's dialogue session,

he shared his journey as a national athlete with about 20 aspiring para-athletes, parents and members of the disability sports fraternity.

The other speakers were para-swimmer Wong Zhi Wei and Ferin Fu, mother of para-swimmer Nicole Fu.

Said Toh: "I've always wanted to inspire youth with impairments to pick up sports and chase their dreams.

"Together with the rest of the para-sports community, I am certain that we will see the next generation of para-athletes rise up."

Director of marketing and business strategy at Borneo Motors, Samuel Yong, said: "Heroes like Wei Soong are wonderful role models to young people. We see him living out the 'Start Your Impossible' spirit in his everyday work."

msazali@sph.com.sg