

SILVER DONE, GOLD NEXT

Swimmer Toh loses to Filipino friend in the 400m, but seeks revenge in the sprints

Melvyn Teoh

Filipino swimmer Ernie Gawilan struck the first blow in the battle for supremacy in the pool at the Asian Para Games on Tuesday, beating Singapore's Toh Wei Soong to gold in the men's S7 400m freestyle.

But the foes, and friends, are just getting started, with Toh eyeing an upgrade in colour in their next clash on Thursday.

In his opening race on Tuesday, Toh, 25, clocked 5min 12.16sec to finish way off Gawilan's winning time of 4:58.29 at the Hangzhou Aquatic Sports Arena. China's Huang Xianquan (5:16.63) took the bronze.

The loss was a repeat of their battle at the 2023 Cambodia Asean Para Games, and Toh said: "It's not the time I had wanted for the 400m. But, having said that, it's not the main event I've been training for. I'm looking forward to the sprints on Thursday and Friday, I think we'll see something pretty exciting there."

Besides aiming for gold in his pet events, the S7 50m freestyle and 50m butterfly on Friday, Toh is also looking for revenge against Gawilan in the S7 100m backstroke on Thursday.

In Phnom Penh, the Singaporean had beaten the Filipino in the 100m backstroke to win the Asean Para Games silver medal.

He said: "I've been making a lot of progress in the 100m backstroke. It wasn't a main event for me for a long time.



Toh Wei Soong en route to claiming silver in Tuesday's S7 400m freestyle final. The Singaporean clocked 5min 12.16sec to finish way off Ernie Gawilan's winning time of 4:58.29. PHOTO: SPORTSG/JEREMY LEE

"But this year I've been transferring a lot of skills I've gained from butterfly and freestyle, into the backstroke and have seen very big improvements."

On his rival, Toh described Gawilan as a "wonderful person to compete against" and said: "From his

humility in conversation to his tenacity in the pool, he is a very welcome friend to see every time we compete in common S7 events.

"When we're done with swimming, I'd love to visit him in the Philippines and I'll be sad when we no longer compete against each

other."

Tuesday's silver was Toh's fourth Asiad medal – he won two golds in the S7 50m and 100m freestyle, and a bronze in the S7 100m backstroke at the 2018 edition in Jakarta.

Apart from Toh, compatriot

Claire Toh claimed a joint bronze with Thailand's Chilchitraryak Bootwansirina after she lost to China's Liu Jing in the Class 1-2 table tennis women's singles semi-finals.

Earlier, swimmer Colin Soon finished fifth in the men's SB13 100m

breaststroke final in 1min 12.76sec.

Singapore's 31-strong contingent are competing in archery, athletics, badminton, boccia, lawn bowls, powerlifting, shooting, swimming and table tennis.

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