

JUST 0.16SEC FROM A MEDAL

Toh upbeat despite near-miss in last race, sees signs of progress in Paralympic debut

Kimberly Kwek

Just 0.16sec separated Toh Wei Soong from a Paralympic medal in the men's S7 50m butterfly final yesterday, but the swimmer was not mulling over the near-miss after the race.

Instead, he remained upbeat about his performance at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre – after all, he had rewritten the national record twice during the day.

The first was in the morning heats, when he clocked 29.90 seconds to eclipse his previous mark of 30.76sec. He later lowered the mark in the final with a 29.50 effort, just off Colombian bronze medallist Carlos Daniel Serrano Zarate's 29.34.

Toh, 22, said: "I've cut down my time from this morning and this morning was also a huge leap from where I was, so I think I did a pretty good job carrying out the race plan, not letting my nerves get to me and going out there and giving my best."

"I went out fast, started strong, sped up at the back end. I didn't



Toh Wei Soong swam 29.50sec in the S7 50m butterfly final, just behind Colombian bronze medallist Carlos Daniel Serrano Zarate's 29.34. PHOTOS: SPORT SINGAPORE

slow down so I'm happy about it."

The event was won by American Evan Austin in 28.98sec, with Ukraine's Andrii Trusov (29.03) coming in second.

Toh was also pleased with how he had fared in an event that he had started to enjoy racing in only over the last two years.

He said: "To shave off almost two seconds from my 50m butterfly this year is tremendous because it wasn't an event I really enjoyed do-

ing for the longest time."

"It's really been honing the technique and getting to a level of proficiency where you aren't fighting the water. Once you enjoy something, you'll be good at it."

Toh, who has transverse myelitis – a condition caused by the inflammation of the spinal cord – had also broken his national mark in the men's S7 50m freestyle final on Tuesday, after he clocked 28.65sec to come in seventh.

The National University of Singapore undergraduate was also seventh in the men's S7 400m free final last week.

He was the last Team Singapore athlete in action at Tokyo 2020, where 10 athletes represented the Republic across six sports.

Reflecting on his experience at his first Paralympics, Toh said: "Any Paralympic, Olympic venture for the first time would be an incredible venture."

"I don't have anything to compare it to but I think this is a more special Games because of the circumstances around it."

"Just to be able to share the space with the people who've overcome so much just to be here, that is a wonderful feeling."

"Overall, I'm very happy with the experience – with the facilities, with the organisation, with my fellow athletes. We've all trained and endured a lot and we've given our



UNEXPECTED BREAKTHROUGH

To shave off almost two seconds from my 50m butterfly this year is tremendous because it wasn't an event I really enjoyed doing for the longest time.



TOH WEI SOONG, national swimmer, believes he can go even faster.

best, so I'm very satisfied."

With his first Paralympics completed, Toh is now looking forward to the future. He said: "We've been working on a lot of things in the past few years and those things haven't come to fruition yet so there's a lot of room for improvement. So I'm excited for the next few years because it means a lot more new experiences, a lot more new times."

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