

QUICK TIMES ARE GOOD SIGN FOR WONG

Still feeling after-effects of kidney transplant
but back to his best with national mark

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Four years ago, a routine medical check-up led to national para swimmer Wong Zhi Wei making a trip to the hospital, where he was stunned when the doctor revealed the diagnosis: Stage 5 chronic kidney disease.

Wong, then in his first year at Eunoia Junior College, was asked to see a doctor as his red blood cell count was low. His creatinine levels were found to be extremely high, indicating kidney damage. He was eventually diagnosed with chronic kidney disease.

Earlier that year, Wong had reached a career high by competing at the World Para Swimming Championships. In just a month, he had sunk to rock bottom as his world seemed to be falling apart.

"That hit me like a truck... I felt it was the end of the sport for me," said Wong, who spoke to *The Sunday Times* on the sidelines of the National Para Swimming Cham-

pionships on Saturday.

But the 21-year-old, who is visually impaired, is back in the game after receiving a kidney transplant in China in January 2020, and ready for what lies ahead.

He said: "The transplant was my saving grace. It was like a second chance for me. I took it as a second life, a second chance to compete and be at my best again."

Wong shared that he took three months to recover at home after surgery and despite missing out on classes, he caught up on his studies and scored 88 rank points in the A levels. He is now pursuing a degree in psychology at the National University of Singapore.

But the return to the pool was not as smooth sailing. After the transplant, his body now takes a longer time to recover from training sessions and competitions.

"My body sometimes just shuts down and doesn't listen to me," he admitted. He also gets heart palpitations, especially when the training is intense.

He also has to watch his diet and is more vigilant during tough sessions in the pool.

He added: "My body is largely healed. But there's always that (mental) barrier that, you know, this tragic event happened to me... It's about trying to believe in myself again and trying to hope that I can do better than last time even though I have this condition."

The year will be a hectic one for Wong, who is aiming for success at the Asean Para Games in June and the Asian Para Games in October. Wong, who won two gold medals at the 2022 Asean event in Indonesia, hopes to continue his winning streak while targeting a first medal in the latter.

His results at the National Para Swimming Championships will be a huge confidence boost, after he broke the national record in the S13 men's 100m butterfly with his time of 1min 3.25sec at the OCBC Aquatic Centre.

He also achieved a personal best of 34.48sec in the men's 50m breaststroke.

"I'm really satisfied with the results. I think it's a good sign of what's to come in the year," he added.

The national championships on Saturday saw keen interest from the community, with 67 swimmers competing – nearly double the 34 who took part in 2022.

In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the Singapore Disability Sports Council also held its first Skins event on Saturday, which saw former national athletes like Paralympian Theresa Goh competing with current swimmers in a knockout format. It was won by national swimmer Toh Wei Soong, with Darren Chan second and Wong third.

Besides Wong, three other athletes also rewrote national records: Colin Soon (27.65sec) in the S12 men's 50m freestyle, Janelle Tong (53.37sec) in the S10 women's 50m backstroke, and Jareth Wong, who clocked 1:13.49 in the S10 men's 100m freestyle.

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Swimmer Wong Zhi Wei (above) on the way to a national record in the S13 100m butterfly (left) at the National Para Swimming Championships on Saturday. It will be a busy year for him with the Asean Para Games and Asian Para Games coming up.
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