

Beating the odds

Siti aims to excel in studies and chess

By TAN MING WAI

NATIONAL chess player Siti Safura Jaafar was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) when she was just three years old.

SMA is a genetic disease affecting the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement.

Her condition slowly deteriorated and by the time she was 15, she could no longer walk.

She uses a motorised wheelchair to get around.

But the plucky Siti has never let her disability hinder her from excelling in studies – and chess.

Having just completed her Master of Science in Phytochemistry from Universiti Putra Malaysia two years ago, the 34-year-old from Seremban is pursuing a PhD in Bioinformatics at the Perdana University in Serdang.

It's her desire to further understand SMA that's spurring her on to continue with her education.

"No doctor could give me a satisfactory answer to my disease. So I decided to find out more on my own when I completed my Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examinations," said Siti.

"My ambition is to become either an academician or a scientist. That's why I'm pursuing a PhD in Bioinformatics. It's a field that is related to my disease as it involves the science of collecting and analys-

I've waited long enough and I can't wait to get started.

Siti Safura Jaafar

ing complex biological data such as genetic codes.

"I wish to understand SMA further. Hopefully, one day I'll find the answer I've been seeking all this while."

For now, Siti's shifting her focus to winning gold when she makes her appearance at the Asean Para Games here from Sept 17-23.

"I've waited long enough and I can't wait to get started. I was supposed to make my debut in Myanmar in 2014, but I had to skip it due to logistical issues.

"I then missed out on Singapore 2015 due to health problems."

Siti will head into the Asean Para Games buoyed by her victory in the Goldis Malaysia Chess Challenge 2017 in Kuala Lumpur, where she overcame some of the able-bodied contestants to clinch the 1,200 rating and below category title.

At the Asean Para Games, she will compete in four events – rapid and standard individual and teams.



All pumped up: National chess players Siti Safura Jaafar (right) and Nur Feiqha Maulad Mohamad Halil can't wait for the Asean Para Games to start. — Bernama

At a glance...

WHEELCHAIR TENNIS



Venue: National Tennis Centre, Jalan Duta, K. Lumpur
Dates: Sept 18-21

MEDALS AT STAKE

3-3-3

ACHIEVEMENTS

1-2-1 (2011 Solo, Indonesia)

THE TEAM

Manager: Lenny S. Ghandi

Coaches: Mohd Nadir Ashraf, Ahmed Shahrom, Nik Muhd Nik Ibrahim

Players: Ariffahmi Zaquan Ariffin, Abu Samah Borhan, Azman Hasan, Muhd Firdaus Ibrahim, Mohamed Yusshazwan Yusoff.



ABOUT THE GAME

ONE of the forms of tennis adapted for those with lower body disabilities. The size of courts, balls and racquets are the same. There are two major differences from pedestrian tennis; athletes use specially designed wheelchairs and the ball may bounce up to two times. The second bounce may also occur outside the court. There are three categories – men, women and mixed team.

ABU SAMAH BORHAN



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