

Azizulhasni the inspiration as Afiq eyes podium at Paralympics

THE STAR 09/03/2017 Ms. 49
By LIM TEIK HUAT

SEPANG: Visually-impaired track cyclist Afiq Afify Rizan is hoping to follow in the footsteps of Azizulhasni Awang and ride to a podium at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.

Afiq and new partner Khairul Adha Rasol arrived home yesterday after clinching a historic bronze medal for Malaysia at the UCI Track Para Cycling World Championships in Los Angeles, the United States, on Sunday.

The duo beat Russia's Arthur Spirin-Leonid Tiutin 2-1 in the shootout for the bronze medal in the men's (B) tandem sprint to become the first Malaysians to ever stand on the podium at the para cycling world meet.

It is a new milestone for Malaysian para cycling, which has conquered Asia but yet to make a breakthrough at the world championship level.

Winning a bronze medal is sweet reward for the 22-year-old Afiq, who suffered a cruel blow at the Rio Paralympics last September.

He collapsed in the Games Village in Rio de Janeiro due to a viral infection and was forced to pull out just hours before he was due to start in the same event.



All for Malaysia: Afiq Afify Rizan (left) and Khairul Adha Rasol posing with their UCI Track Para Cycling World Championships bronze medals after returning home from Los Angeles yesterday.

"There's still a long way to go before the Paralympics, but it's my goal to win a medal at the highest level.

"I did not get to start in Rio, but winning this bronze makes up for that disappointment.

"I'm encouraged by what Azizul has achieved in track cycling ... I want to be like him, although I still lack experience.

"I will next focus on the Asean Para Games in August.

"After that, it's the Commonwealth Games in Australia and the Asian Para Games in Indonesia next year before I tackle the Paralympics," said Afiq.

Although former national junior track cyclist Khairul Adha, as the pilot, has formed a winning partnership with Afiq, coach Johari Nayan said they would keep their options open for the Paralympics.

"The Paralympics are still a long way to go ... we want to make sure we have the strongest pairing to fight there (in Tokyo)," said Johari.

"Actually, we were targeting a medal in the 1km time trial and setting an Asian record in Los Angeles, but they missed out.

"The sprint was harder to win but I think they were determined to do something on the last day of competition."