

# NUR SYAHIDAH ALIM

## WORLD'S NO.1 PARA-ARCHER



STORY & ILLUSTRATIONS  
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## Foreword

In 1973, long before “inclusion” became a buzzword, a national initiative to address the rights of persons with disabilities in sports resulted in the formation of the Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC).

While “inclusion” has become a more commonly-touted word today, the SDSC does not take its work any more lightly than before. We know that this has not come easy, and there’s still far more to be done.

Syahidah’s story encapsulates the Paralympic values: courage, determination, inspiration and equality. These values convey the very essence of the impact we hope to achieve through this book.

As we continue to chip away at old beliefs and stereotypes, perhaps one day, more will understand that para athletes are athletes, and para sports are sports. Disability must never disqualify, and neither must it diminish.

~ Singapore Disability Sports Council

This book is dedicated to all the kiddos who are reading this:  
I hope my story will encourage you to DREAM BIG just as how all those  
who had believed in me.

And to all our TeamSG athletes, continue touching the hearts of all through  
your extraordinary feats.

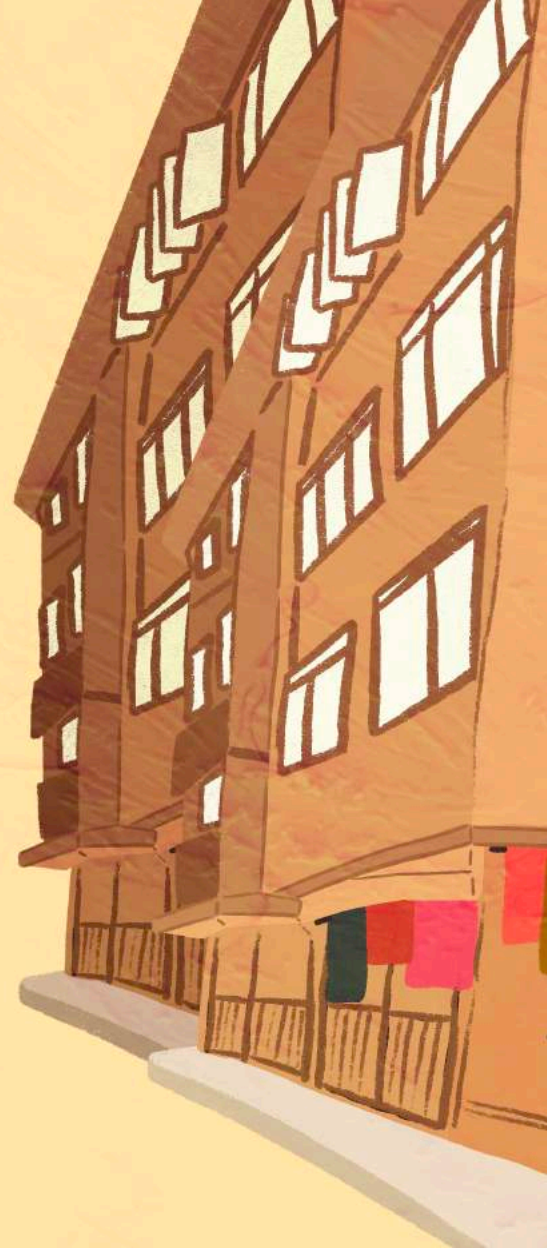
~ Nur Syahidah Alim

# Nur Syahidah Alim

World's No.1 Para-Archer

# Chapter 1

## Promise







BLOCK 124

It was on a mid-summer morning. Syahidah was looking out the window of her house at the canopy of trees and a gaggle of glossy starlings scampering from one tree to another, when a thought popped into her head.

She dashed off to her mother, Zaharah, who was walking out of the kitchen with a warm plate. “Pancakes!” Syahidah said, leaping with joy.

“How did you know I wanted them?” Syahidah reached for a quick bite.

“Wait, bring out plates for everyone first.” Zaharah commanded her.

Syahidah brought the plates and as she laid them on the table, she said with zest, “Mak, I want to be free. I want to roam the world, and meet exciting people!”

This brought a smile to Zaharah. She said, “If you truly want it, you shall have it one day.”

Syahidah poured honey over her steaming pancakes.

She began to chomp but as her mind wandered off to the lands afar, Syahidah knew even at that young age that **DREAMS DON'T COME TRUE ON THEIR OWN. YOU HAVE TO WORK ON THEM.**

“Mak, am I weak?” Syahidah asked innocently. The question hushed all voices in the house.

“Make me a promise that you will not let anyone tell you that.” Zaharah fixed her gaze into her daughter’s soft beady eyes.

Syahidah said with resolve, more to herself than her mother, **“PROMISE.”**

Syahidah was too small to realise that this was the most important decision of her life.

# CHAPTER 2

## PAIN



While Syahidah's dream began sprouting inside her, she had some very important matters at hand – her school and her schoolmates.

Her school days were packed with books and homework but Syahidah discovered that lessons were not just learnt in the classroom.

She was having some hard ones with her schoolmates too, and one of them was: when people don't like you, they bully you, insult you, abuse you and if all else fails, they ostracise you.

Cerebral palsy affected Syahidah's lower body. She could not walk, run or balance as well as her classmates. Over time, Syahidah learnt that

discrimination took many forms. Sometimes, the insults were oblique. “Why don’t you rest a bit and let us finish the game?” Sometimes, they were in her face. “You are so slow...You’ll make us lose!”

Sometimes, they came in the form of pity. “The swimming lessons are ‘mandatory’ for everyone, but you should not risk it.”

Sometimes, they came in the form of abuse and often ended with a snigger. “Don’t go near the water at all. You’ll be ashamed.”

Syahidah felt shrunken, reduced, and avoided her classmates. She would spend more time in the library than in the sports hall.



She felt she was born to miss out on all the fun in life. One night, she came back home distraught.

“Mak, why can’t I learn to swim? Everyone can swim. Only I can’t.”

“Why... who says that, dear?” Her mother asked.

“Why am I born this way?” Syahidah asked, a look of **PAIN** in her eyes.

Zaharah stood silent for a moment as memories flooded her. She recalled her own pain when the doctor told her that there was no cure for the condition her daughter was born with.



She had known then that this question would come some day, and braced herself for it. Zaharah held Syahidah firmly and said to her in a clear and gentle voice.

“Remember this: you are NOT weak. You are just different. One day, people will know this.” She said, patting Syahidah’s face with her warm and soft fingers.

But sometimes, no words or warmth or softness can heal the scars of abuse.

Syahidah learned this lesson too.

# CHAPTER 3

## PATH



Syahidah's mother wasn't one to give up easily. The next day, she found a swimming instructor and brought Syahidah to him.

"Teach my daughter and you get two more students." She told the instructor.

Two more children popped out from behind her. They were Syahidah's sister and her sister's friend.

Syahidah took to swimming as a fish takes to the sea.

"Mak, I feel free!" She shrieked in joy, splashing the water with her arms.

Although Syahidah couldn't see her future, she somehow felt it. "I will find my freedom through sports. I will not be looked down anymore."

Days became months, and months became years. Syahidah's dream to roam the world became a young tree inside her, now a teenage girl. Swimming had given Syahidah strength and endurance - both essential for the path she was about to discover.

One day, her love for sports brought Syahidah to the Singapore Disability Sports Expo. For the first time in her life, Syahidah came across sports adapted for persons with disabilities.

Sailing. Badminton. Handcycling.

She tried her hand at each of these but none sparked any joy. Just as Syahidah turned to leave, her eyes were drawn to a man shooting arrows at a target. Syahidah stood still, transfixed by curiosity and desire.

“It’s a very physical game; one needs strength.” She heard a voice from behind her.

“Do you think you can do it?” The voice added.

Syahidah took to the challenge. When she held the bow and arrow, she felt an instant connection. As she pulled the bowstring, it gently brushed the bridge of her nose.

She broke into an instinctive smile shooting off her first arrow. Off it went and hit the center of the circular target.

One after another, she shot ten arrows.  
One, two, three, and so on.  
All the arrows were spot on.

Eyebrows were raised, jaws were dropped and even some claps were heard.

“You have a real knack for archery.” The same voice that questioned her was now full of admiration. That’s how Syahidah started on her **PATH** to becoming the world’s top archer.





# **CHAPTER 4**

## **PREPARE**

When Syahidah told her mother about the Expo, Zaharah's first words were, "I am happy you have not lost sight of your dreams."

Within a week, her life took a new turn – with bows, arrows, shooting lines, and target paper. Syahidah began training in archery every weekend.

Saving up every dollar and coin she could, Syahidah gave up many small pleasures in exchange for more training practice, and better equipment. The nearest shooting range was still a fair distance from her house. Slowly and steadily, rain or shine, Syahidah lugged her archery gear over the arduous trek - a mere worn path through a

shadeless field - to the range week after week.

One day while Syahidah was watching TV, Zaharah threw a question at her.

“So, what are your plans after graduation?”

“I am still looking for a job.” Syahidah said, her eyes glued to the TV.

“And what about your archery?”

She turned to her mother and saw her intent gaze.

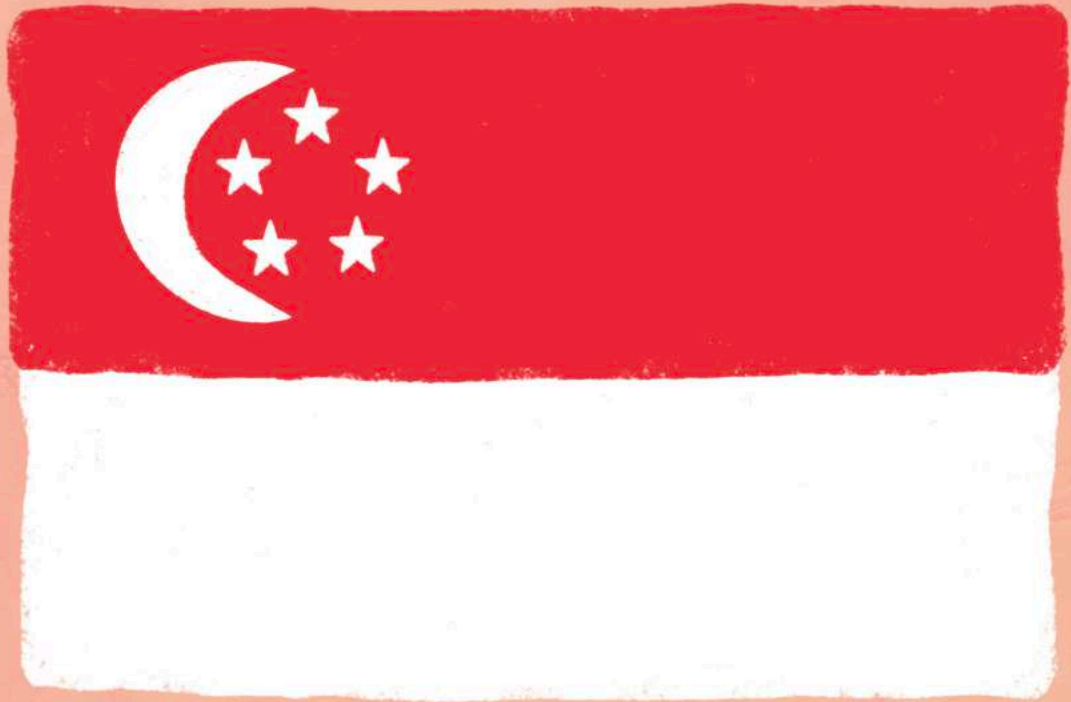
“You love archery. I know you look forward to it every weekend. Why not try for the national team?”

“I am not ready for any competition, Mak. I am still new to the sport.” Syahidah said doubtfully.

“Don’t think you can’t without even trying it once.” Her mother said with a stern face.

“Yeah, ok.” Syahidah said, amused yet stirred by her mother’s sudden question.

The next day, Syahidah found herself in a room full of youngsters queuing for the national trials. When it was her turn, she finished with flying colours and got through the selection.



As part of the national team, Syahidah began to **PREPARE** for competitive archery. Her trainings got longer, tougher and began to occupy her weekdays, on top of weekends. She would leave her house long before sunrise, and come back long after sundown. Be it pleasure or pain, Syahidah took no breaks. She needed to improve her core strength and focus.

“The good news is that you can sit and shoot your arrows.” One coach said.

“The not-so-good news is that you still need very good core strength, regardless of whether you are sitting or not. So there’s still much to work on.”

Another added. As Syahidah entered a new phase of her archery journey, she found little company.

“They said it’s a masculine sport and I know why. There are hardly any women!” Syahidah ruminated to her mother.

“It will change.” Zaharah encouraged her.  
“There’s still a long way to go, but you keep trying. Remember what your coach says: don’t lose your focus on the goal.”

Syahidah knew her fight wasn’t with others. It was with herself. She was comforted that she wasn’t fighting alone. Her mother was with her.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **PRACTICE**



Fate conjured a challenge for Syahidah – the 2015 ASEAN Para Games was only two months away from the time she entered the national team.

It would be Syahidah's first major competition, and she was determined to do well. Syahidah stepped up her practice and workouts.

After a long day at the shooting range, coaches sat the athletes down and gave them useful tips for success.

“You cannot only rely on strength. Control is equally important. The game is more mentally demanding than it looks.”

“Visualise hitting that target perfectly. Play out your victory moment over and over again in your head.”

As her training intensified, new challenges emerged.

The national team trained at a distant range, so Syahidah had to use taxis to carry her delicate yet bulky equipment to trainings. These trips ate into her savings. Sometimes, on her way, Syahidah’s eyes would wander to a movie poster of the latest blockbuster or an advertisement of a new ice cream flavour. To save money for transport to her trainings, Syahidah pushed these temptations aside.

But life had its little joys too. One late evening, as she walked out of the archery range, Syahidah saw her parents waiting. They brought her to her favorite fried chicken joint for supper.

Sometimes, her coach would let the team go for a break.

“Don’t think I am letting you off the hook. Relax and recharge your brain. It will help you focus better.”

Under the keen eyes of her coaches, Syahidah’s skills grew rapidly. But as the date of the competition drew near, Syahidah felt a ball of nerves jangling in her.

The sports psychologist sought to buoy her diminishing confidence. “You have the strength. You have control over your mind. You have done your practice. Let those do the work.”

It succeeded. Syahidah came out tops in her event. When she received her gold medal, Syahidah surveyed the crowd of spectators for her parents. She could not spot them amidst the hundreds of faces, but she knew they were watching her.

This special moment was for them as much as it was for her.

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **PERSEVERE**

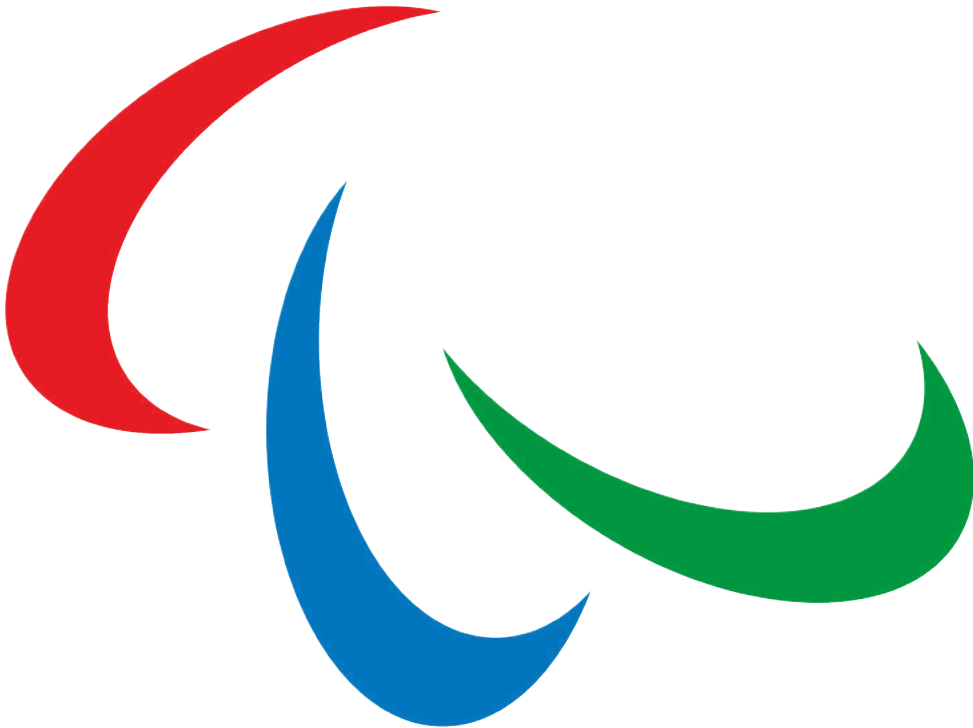
Syahidah's confidence had shot over the moon. She was ready to take her game to the next level.

Her big goal was to qualify for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. She had to prove to herself and others that she wasn't a one-time wonder.

When her plane lifted off for the qualifiers in Czech Republic, Syahidah's heart fluttered - her dream to roam the world had come to life.

Syahidah's performance at the qualifiers eventually scored a slot for Singapore at the Paralympics. She was going to be the first archer ever to represent Singapore at the pinnacle games.

# PARALYMPICS



Life was not without its obstacles. Juggling a full-time job and rigorous trainings was taking its toll on Syahidah, but she was too scared to give up her job to concentrate on her Paralympic goal. It was already not easy to land a job, and even more so for someone with disabilities.

During the long commute from work to the training venue, Syahidah would often ponder:  
What am I to do? Where is my life taking me with archery?

“Right now, it’s taking you to Rio.” She would hear her coach say at the shooting line. Syahidah would then remind herself of how she felt on top of the world when she earned her qualification slot -



a feeling that had been worth all the sacrifices made.

She was going to participate in the world's biggest para sport event. That alone, in her mother's words, was success. Syahidah did not think that should be the end, though. She wanted to continue challenging herself and earn a medal chance at the prestigious games.

Finally in Rio, Syahidah put up her best fight. She reached the quarterfinals of the Paralympics - a feat that earned her the 7th spot in the world.

When she returned to Singapore, Syahidah found herself becoming a topic of interest. Her stories

were in the newspapers. Her face was on TV. School kids wanted to listen to what she went through. People waved to her when she went out and sometimes came up to her to offer their well wishes. Syahidah had never felt welcomed by so many people in her life. She was happy she had stayed strong, like her mother had advised her.

Holding that thought, Syahidah knew she was not going to give up what she had set her sights on for the Paralympics. She made a decision for the biggest crossroad in her life.

“I have decided to place my corporate career on hold and pursue archery as a full-time athlete. My company is supportive of my decision and

assured me they have my back.” She told her parents.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” They asked her, advising caution.

“The important thing is to be committed and move forward. Won’t know until we try.” Syahidah said, looking at her mother. Finding strength in Zaharah’s eyes, she added, “I am challenging myself, and the people around me.”

With her parents’ blessings, Syahidah embarked on her new journey, but her parents’ question continued to bounce around in her head for a long time.

One day, her coach asked a group of new trainees.  
“What separates winners from champions?”

**“PERSEVERANCE.”** Syahidah said to herself instinctively. Then, she knew that conviction was what it took to erase her uncertainty.

Shortly after, Syahidah secured an elite sports scholarship that empowered her to pursue archery full-time.

# **CHAPTER 7**

## **PERFECTION**

While Syahidah continued to battle personal challenges that morphed in full-time archery, external setbacks occasionally threatened to derail her aspirations.

Syahidah was disallowed to compete at the 2017 Southeast Asian Games, although she had met the qualification mark. The games federation had deemed it unfair for her to use a stool during her shoots and enlist the help of a person to collect her arrows after shoots.

Both types of assistance had, however, been approved by World Archery for Syahidah after assessing her condition. The international governing body for archery voiced that these did not gain



her any advantage against non-disabled archers, and only provided her equitable treatment to compete with them. Such competitions were not unprecedented.

Nonetheless, Syahidah accepted the games' decision, and focused on her next target. With the gaze of an entire nation upon her, Syahidah defended her ASEAN Para Games title in 2017. The story was in all newspapers.

She became a national hero.

Over the next year, Syahidah practised every day without fail. Her life turned into a perfectly balanced bow that shot the arrows of her



ambitions far and high. Syahidah missed shopping trips. Movie nights. Her safe and cushy job that would lead to a comfortable retirement plan. She missed all of that.

“It would be all worth it when I reach the top at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.” She reminded herself, well aware that remaining focused would be her most difficult battle.

Days became weeks. Weeks became months. Syahidah saw nothing else and put everything she had into her practice.

From one coach to another, Syahidah scaled from level to level in her technique and form, but not

without some heartstopping moments.

Once, her wrist was so badly hurt from training that a specialist told her to give up archery once and for all. But Syahidah remained unwavering in her conviction to her goal.

Months of training had given her the mental muscle to make strong choices. She worked hard to overcome her injury, before returning to intense training.

In 2019, Syahidah travelled to the Netherlands for the Paralympic Games qualifiers - the World Para Archery Championships.

Round after round, Syahidah climbed to the top of the ranks, feeling stronger than ever. She was no longer captive to the ball of nerves like she used to.

On the day of the final, Syahidah looked out the window of her hotel room, and a thought occurred to her. “I’ve made it this far. Whatever the outcome, I will do my best and enjoy this moment.”

She turned around, half expecting her mother. Her phone started buzzing. It was her mother on the line.

“I just called to hear your voice. May Allah grant

you all the success today.” Zaharah’s voice came from afar, but Syahidah felt as though she was right next to her mother.

In a heart-pounding finale befitting of the prestige of the competition, Syahidah scored the same points as her opponent. They would have to enter a shoot-off, where one arrow shall decide the win.

“Breathe in confidence. Breathe out anxiety.” She heard her coach say.

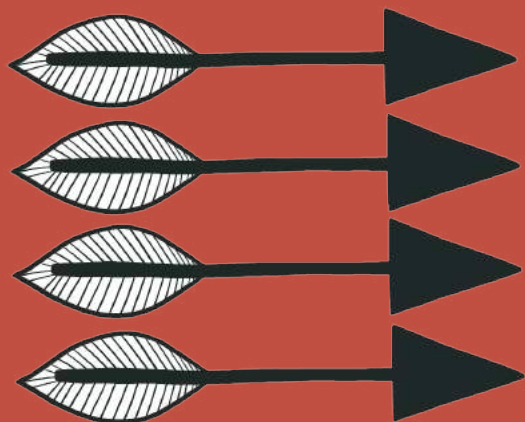
Syahidah closed her eyes for a moment. When she opened them, she only saw the centre of her target and nothing else. Syahidah took her shot.

# PERFECTION.

She was crowned the number one archer in the world.



**NEXT STOP -  
TOKYO 2020  
PARALYMPIC GAMES**





Rio 2016 Paralympic Games  
Photo credit: Sport Singapore





# Syahidah'S ACHIEVEMENTS

# Individual Compound Women's Open

- 2020 Fazza Para Archery World Ranking Tournament (Dubai, UAE) – Gold
- 2019 Asian Para Archery Championships (Bangkok, Thailand)  
- Gold
- 2019 Singapore Archery Open (Singapore) – ranked 8th
- 2019 Para-Archery World Ranking Tournament & European Cup Circuit (Nove Mesto, Czech Republic) – Silver

- 2019 World Para Archery Championships (s'Hertogenbosch, Netherlands) – Gold
- 2019 Para-Archery World Ranking Tournament & European Cup Circuit – (Olbia, Italy) – ranked 6th
- 2019 Grand Prix Mexicano (Monterrey, Mexico) – Gold
- 2018/2019 Indoor World Series, Macau Indoor Archery Open (Macau, China) – Silver
- 2018 Asian Para Games (Jakarta, Indonesia) – ranked 5th
- 2018, USA Para Archery World Ranking Event (Salt Lake City, USA) – ranked 4th

- 2018 Para-Archery World Ranking Tournament & European Cup (Nove Mesto, Czech Republic) – Bronze
- 2018 Hong Kong Para Archery Championship Open (Hong Kong, China) – Bronze
- 2017 ASEAN Para Games (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) – Gold
- 2017 Para World Ranking Event (Bangkok, Thailand) – Gold
- 2017 Asia Cup (Bangkok, Thailand) – ranked 9th
- 2017 SEA Open (Yangon, Myanmar) – ranked 8th
- 2016 Paralympic Games (Rio De Janeiro, Brazil) – ranked 7th



2018 Asian Para Games  
Photo Credit: Singapore National Paralympic Council



2015 ASEAN Para Games  
Photo Credit: Sport Singapore

- 2016 World Para Tournament / Final Paralympic Qualifier (Nove Mesto, Czech Republic) – ranked 5th
- 2015 ASEAN Para Games (Singapore) – Gold
- 2015 Asian Para Championships (Bangkok, Thailand) – Bronze
- 2015 NUS Indoor Championship – ranked 8th
- 2015 UUM Archery Open – Participated







2017 ASEAN Para Games  
Photo credit: Sport Singapore





# Mixed Team Open

- 2019 Singapore Archery Open (Singapore) – Bronze
- 2018, USA Para Archery World Ranking Event (Salt Lake City, USA) – Bronze
- 2018 Hong Kong Para Archery Championship Open (Hong Kong, China) – Bronze
- 2017 ASEAN Para Games (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) – Bronze
- 2017 Para World Ranking Event (Bangkok, Thailand) – Bronze

- 2017 SEA Open (Yangon, Myanmar) – ranked 4th
- 2015 ASEAN Para Games (Singapore) – Gold
- 2015 Asian Para Championships (Bangkok, Thailand) – ranked 6th
- 2015 National Disability League – Gold

## Women's Team Open

- 2019 Singapore Archery Open (Singapore) – Gold
- 2019 Pesta Sukan (Singapore) – Gold
- 2017 Asia Cup (Bangkok, Thailand) – ranked 6th
- 2017 SEA Open (Yangon, Myanmar) – Bronze



2019 World Archery Para Championships  
Photo credit: Dean Alberga/World Archery





2017 ASEAN Para Games  
Photo credit: Sport Singapore

# Syahidah

## IN THE NEWS

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# Para archer Syahidah is world No. 1, targets Tokyo

Winning a Paralympic medal has long been in Nur Syahidah Alim's cross hairs and her hopes of achieving that dream at next year's Tokyo Games received a boost after the Singaporean recently clinched the world No. 1 spot.

In the October classification by World Archery – rankings are usually released at the start of every month – the 34-year-old leads the standings of the compound women open individual category with 195.2 points.

Briton Jessica Stretton, who won gold at the 2016 Rio Games in the compound W1 category (impairment in all four limbs, uses a wheelchair), is second on 193.8 points with Russia's former world No. 1 Stepanida Artakhinova third on 190.

Syahidah, who made her debut at the 2016 edition and reached the quarter-finals in the open division,

told The Straits Times yesterday: "I feel very proud and honoured to bring Singapore to the top of the world in archery.

"One of my goals as an archer was to be a world champion. To be ranked first in the world for this season, thus far, would be my greatest achievement.

"It means a lot, not only for me, but also for the team behind me, knowing that all our hard work, effort and dedication are paying off.

"I will continue to work harder to represent and take Singapore to greater heights in sports."

Her next competitions are the Oct 19-26 Asian Para Archery Championships in Bangkok and the Jan 18-25 Asean Para Games in the Philippines.

Syahidah, who has a master's degree in knowledge management, has proven her ability at the highest level. In June, she held her nerve

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited.  
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Nur Syahidah Alim, who won a gold in the World Archery Para Championships in June, is aiming for a podium spot at next year's Paralympics.  
ST FILE PHOTO

to beat Stretton in a shoot-off to win the Republic's first World Archery Para Championships gold.

"My ultimate goal is to reach the podium in Tokyo 2020," she said.

"Training has been really intense preparing for the Asean Para Games and the Paralympics next year.

"I feel motivated to work harder

to bring Singapore more sporting milestones and I will continue to do my best in upcoming competitions."

After Syahidah posted the good news on her Facebook page, she received plenty of congratulatory messages from supporters.

Austin Tan wrote: "May not know you before this but will root

for you whenever I see your name. Good job and keep it going! You have made us all proud."

Singapore has clinched nine Paralympic medals – three golds, two silvers and four bronzes – but they have come from only two sports, equestrian and swimming.

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**David Lee**

# Discussion Points for Teachers



1. Be INSPIRED to make personal goals: “Dreams”, in this story, refer to future aspirations. Ask your students about their “dreams”. What do they dream of doing in the future?

2. Develop DETERMINATION to achieve goals: Do your students think that their dreams are difficult or easy to achieve? Are they “big” or “small”? Take the chance to discuss with your students what they need to put in to reach their goals.

3. Find the COURAGE to do the right thing: How would your students describe Syahidah’s classmates? Were they doing the right or wrong thing?

4. Know that everyone is EQUAL – we all have weaknesses and strengths: What do your students feel that they are strong in? Are there things they feel weak in? What can they say to someone who feels “small”?

# Suggested Activities for Teachers

1. Play a game of fun archery with your students. Choose a target, take aim and shoot!

(Replace this with another target throw game if you do not have access to toy archery equipment.)

2. Let your students draw a picture of their future self and describe their dream for their future. Write a promise to themselves to make their dream come true.

3. Print our I'mPOSSIBLE colouring sheet featuring Syahidah and let the students complete them. Hold an art exhibition!

## About Singapore Disability Sports Council

The SDSC is the national sports body for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), founded in 1973. It aims to transform the lives of PWDs through sport as a form of rehabilitative therapy, and means to realise their potential. Besides providing platforms for learning sport, SDSC trains talents to represent Singapore at regional and international competitions. Our success stories include Yip Pin Xiu, who was Singapore's first Paralympic gold medallist and the first para athlete to become a Nominated Member of Parliament.

Find out more at [www.sdsc.org.sg](http://www.sdsc.org.sg)

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Nur Syahidah Alim is the world's number one para archer. She also has the unique distinction of being the first archer ever to represent Singapore at the Paralympics. But did you know she was discouraged from playing sport at school? Or that she faced bullying and rejection at many levels due to her disability? In this story of courage, hardship, and perseverance, you will find out how Syahidah went from a young girl who was told she was weak to become the top para archer in the world.

