

Para-athlete Ashley Jeck overcomes challenges to complete sports science degree

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Para-athlete Ashley Irenaeus Jeck received his scroll from UiTM pro-chancellor Datuk Abdul Wahab Aziz at the university's 100th convocation ceremony in Samarahan yesterday. PIC COURTESY UiTM

KUCHING: Despite facing physical disabilities and a busy schedule of sports training and competitions, para-athlete Ashley Irenaeus Jeck successfully completed his Bachelor of Sports Science degree at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Sarawak.

The wheelchair-bound 24-year-old national para-badminton athlete was a standout recipient of his scroll at the university's 100th convocation in Samarahan yesterday.

A Melanau from Dalat, in the Mukah Division in central Sarawak, Ashley said he was delighted to have completed his three-year course successfully despite all the distractions.

After enrolling in 2021, he immediately faced challenges moving around the campus which was not designed to be handicapped-friendly.

"I rely on a wheelchair to move around and it was difficult to get from one area to another on this campus."

His university mates and friends, however, came to his rescue.

"They greatly eased my difficulties and this had gone a long way to enable me to complete my studies within the stipulated time," he said.

In the three years, Ashley also had to take frequent leaves of absence for training and travelling to represent both the nation and state in international para-badminton tournaments.

"I must thank the Higher Education Ministry for granting me the leave and the National Sports Council for helping me juggle my studies and training.

"Without their support, I do not believe I could have completed my studies and be here today to receive my degree."

Ashley's talent as a para-badminton athlete was first spotted when he was in school.

He was a student of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Dalat.

His prowess with the racquet led to his selection to Sarawak's Para Sukma squad in 2016.

But it was only six years later in 2022 that he struck a medal of any colour in the competition, winning gold in the Kuala Lumpur edition of the games.

That achievement paved the way for Ashley to represent Malaysia at the Asean Para Games in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, last year where he won bronze.

At the recent Para Sukma Games in Sarawak last September, red-hot favourite Ashley did not disappoint his home crowd by winning the gold in the men's WH2 badminton singles.

That success earned him a call-up to the national training camp at the Malaysian Paralympic Sports Excellence Centre in Kampung Pandan, Kuala Lumpur, to prepare for the Asean Para Games in Korat, Thailand, next year.

Ashley said the target set for him was to reach the finals.

"I am determined to achieve it," he said.