

Interview with Mok Ying Ren

By Ms Goh Zhaojing

An aspiring doctor and excellent triathlete who is also his own coach, Mok Ying Ren, a year one medical student at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, is a driven, optimistic individual who is constantly on the move to seek out new challenges for himself. In December 2007, Ying Ren went on to clinch the men's triathlon gold medal for Singapore at the 24th SEA Games in Thailand, with a winning time of 2 hours, 5 minutes and 8 seconds, just 24 seconds ahead of the silver medallist.



Goh Zhaojing: Can you give us a brief introduction of yourself as an athlete?

Mok Ying Ren: Sports events I participate in are the triathlon (1.5km swim; cycling for 40km; 10km run), biathlon (swim and run), duathlon (bike and run), road running (10km – half marathon races), track and field (5,000m to 10,000m races) and cross country (covering distances of about 4.8km).

I train for around 25 hours a week. This includes training for all three disciplines, preparations for training (transport, recovery massages, nutrition preparation), and planning for my own training sessions (I do not have a coach).

In my most recent competitions, I finished 1st place in the Army Half Marathon 2007, and came in 7th place (first Singaporean) in the 2007 OSIM Singapore Triathlon Elite (Under 23 category). I am currently training and preparing for the 2007 SEA Games triathlon in Korat, Thailand.

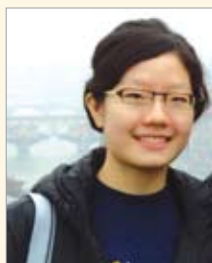
A personal milestone I would like to achieve as a sportsman is to take part in an Ironman (3.8km swim, 180km bike, 40km run) in the future. Also, I look forward to representing Singapore in major games while balancing my studies well.

GZJ: How did sports come to become such a big part of your life? What got you hooked onto participating in endurance events, especially triathlons?

MYR: I have been a swimmer since Primary 4. However, I got bored of just swimming in pools and decided to do all the events instead, *haha*. Also, I like the challenge of running faster and faster.

GZJ: When did you participate in your first triathlon? How would you describe that first experience?

MYR: In 2004, when I was in Secondary 4. It was a race in Malacca, Malaysia. I finished around 20th place. It was not very pleasant – during the last 10km run, I was full of cramps and it was not fun



Zhaojing is a first year medical student at NUS who loves languages, reading and learning about all sorts of things.

She also swims, bikes and runs but has currently only participated in movie marathons.

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at all. Complete agony for two hours! However, I have improved over the last three years and am now able to run comfortably off the bike, and can adjust my pace to suit my strategy.

GZJ: What is your favourite event – running, biking, or swimming? Why?

MYR: I feel that all three events have got their merits: Running is fun because you can do it anywhere, anytime without much hassle. It also happens to be my strength. Biking is cool because you can wear nice cycling jerseys and shorts. Swimming is very cool too because you get a free two-hour bath when you train!

GZJ: What do you think is the most challenging part of competing in a triathlon?

MYR: The challenge is to manage your body resources well in terms of energy expenditure, and knowing when to hold back. Each competition varies with the terrain, weather and field of competitors. In such a sport which requires three disciplines, one has to read his competitors' strengths and weaknesses well.

GZJ: In your opinion, what is most important to becoming a successful sportsperson?

MYR: Discipline. I can already feel the peer pressure around me in school when my peers have the time to go out with their orientation groups. For me, I have to study during breaks because I will be cycling on the roads when traffic is low at nights, or running in the mornings before school. Furthermore, as an athlete, I need to have more sleep as I get so tired from training, right? *Haha.*

GZJ: What do you like most about preparing for and participating in endurance events?

MYR: The flexibility of managing my own training, as well as the application of sports science to optimise gains.

GZJ: Recently there have been quite a few reports on the sudden collapse and deaths of apparently healthy sportsmen participating in endurance events, the latest incident being a 25-year-old participant in August's SAFRA Sheares Bridge Run & Army Half Marathon. What are your views on these incidents, especially as an endurance sports athlete yourself?

MYR: It is scary especially as I have taken part in two races where such incidences have occurred, and one incident happened to my close friend and fellow triathlete Thaddeus.

But I hope such incidents do not become a reason for Singaporeans to stop exercising totally, especially at a time when the Singapore sports scene is progressing rather well. For instance, there is mass participation in distance events like the Standard Chartered marathon. I feel that we should all learn to know ourselves and our limits better, and recognise when to stop.

GZJ: Has being an athlete in any way influenced your decision to study medicine?

MYR: Yes. I like biology as I like to learn what happens in my body when I train and race. Sports medicine is what I like to read up on though I would like to become a paediatrician. I love kids.

GZJ: The demanding nature of a medical course and career may require some sacrifices in the amount of time you will be able to dedicate to sports training and competitions in the future. How have you balanced sports and studies so far, and how far do you plan to continue with your passion for swimming, running and biking?

MYR: It is not easy, definitely. I guess I will need to stay a loner as long as I need to do this juggling act. But I always try to keep a balance. I mean, I cannot spend my whole life training and studying right? *Haha.*

I plan to carry on for a long time more. I am enjoying it so far. Maybe until I get arthritis...

GZJ: Have you tried any other sports? What are some of your other interests?

MYR: Sad to say, I cannot play ball games. I can only play some racket games like table tennis and badminton. I also like to play with some magic.

GZJ: Do you have any last words of advice for aspiring athletes?

MYR: Running is about beating yourself! ■

Editor's Note:

This article also appears in the February issue of NUS Medical Society's pULSE magazine.