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NATIONAL SWIMMER ONG CALLS IT A DAY

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SINGAPORE – Russell Ong, one of Singapore’s most experienced swimmers, has called time on his career with the national side.

The 26-year-old announced his decision on his Facebook page last night, after he failed to qualify for the South-east Asian (SEA) Games to be held from June 5 to 16 in Singapore. He made the announcement after failing to dislodge Joseph Schooling and Clement Lim as the event’s two fastest swimmers.

Ong came in second (23.67) in the final at the Singapura Finance Singapore National Age-Group Swimming

(SNAG) Championships at the OCBC Aquatic Centre last night, missing the qualifying mark of 23.41.

The SNAG is the final local qualifying meet for the SEA Games, and the SSA is expected to select the top two swimmers in each event.

“I tried my best this season given the circumstances, but will make no excuses and am sorry to have disappointed family and friends who have supported me all this while,” he wrote, adding: “Swimming is a cruel sport. She demands perfection. Prepare as you will, but a minor slip-up comes race day and she is unforgiving.”

Thanking team-mates and coaches for their support, he also stressed: “Upon asking myself if I have accom-

plished all I’ve wanted to ... the simple answer is yes ... With support from my parents, I have had a beautiful 11-year career as a national swimmer, and am walking away with that cap, together with nine SEA Games medals in the bag.”

The nine SEA Games medals include the bronze at the 2011 SEA Games, and silver at the 2013 SEA Games where he was the team captain.

Ong, a final-year business student at the Singapore Management University, will serve out his role as chairman of the Singapore Swimming Association’s Athletes Commission.

Meanwhile, national swim star Tao Li qualified for the SEA Games’ women’s 50m backstroke event when she clocked 29.50secs in last night’s final at the SNAG to finish behind winner Shana Lim (29.49) and ahead of third-placed Lynette Ng (30.73).

Tao Li also set a meet record of

29.43 in the heats earlier to re-write Annis B Loy’s 2013 mark of 33.03.

But she came in last in the 100m freestyle in 1min 00.13secs. Quah Ting Wen won the event in 56.11, ahead of Amanda Lim (56.90) and Hoong En Qi (57.32). The two-time Asian Games champion revealed her new swimsuit had torn just five minutes before the race, but insisted it was not an excuse for her performance.

Nonetheless, she said: “I think my form is still there, so I’m not worried. What I want is (the) gold (medal) at the SEA Games... To compete in front of a home crowd (at the SEA Games) means a lot to me.”

Tao Li has already qualified for the 50m and 100m butterfly, and aims to qualify for the 50m and 100m backstroke as well. She had been undergoing high-altitude training in Kunming, where she trains alongside China’s Asian Games 200m backstroke champion Lin Zhengqi.



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Russell Ong
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