

The relentless pursuit of perfection

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Singapore swimming champion Russell Ong warms up with a smile.

There are no shortcuts to success. No one reaches the top without discipline, determination and grit. Singapore swimming star Russell Ong can attest to this.

“I am up by 5:00 a.m. as practice starts at 5:30 a.m. I’m back in the pool again at 4:30 p.m. I train 10 to 11 times a week. A typical session involves about 6km worth of mileage, with different sessions allocated for the trainings of the various energy systems like aerobic, anaerobic,” said the multi-medalist Ong, who also enjoys high-adrenaline sports. He’s tried bungee jumping and white water rafting, loves jet skiing and almost any other watersport imaginable.

Between his early morning and late afternoon swimming schedule, Ong makes time for his studies at Singapore Management University (SMU), where he is in the final year of his finance course as he prepares for the 2015 Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Singapore.

The freestyle swimmer has garnered three gold, three silver and four bronze medals at the SEA Games between 2007 and 2013. He was appointed captain of the national swim team for the 27th SEA Games last year, where Singapore emerged as ASEAN’s top swimming nation, reaping 11 gold, nine silver and 10 bronze medals.

Ong started swimming when he was six years old. However, he only felt passionately about it at 15.

“Back then, I only dreamt of earning myself a swimming cap with the Singapore flag and my name printed on it. I never thought I would become a multiple SEA Games medalist,” he said.

He considers his first SEA Games medal in 2007 as his most meaningful experience as a competing swimmer, recalling how he never thought he could ever win an individual medal.



Russell brings drive and passion to everything he does.

“I think the satisfaction in that was more of seeing the elation in the faces of my parents,” he said. To this day his dad remains his inspiration. “My dad is a good example of someone who achieved success through hard work and determination. He applied the same dedication from his work to being a fantastic father.”

While most people his age are just beginning to pursue career advancement, the 25-year-old athlete has already achieved plenty, not only in swimming but also in the fields of acting and modeling.

He has graced glossy magazine covers and appeared in television commercials. He played a part in the local Mandarin horror film “Ghost Child”, which was commercially released in Singapore last year. Both fields are certainly promising prospects after he hangs up his goggles.

“At this point in time nothing is off the table. I still have a year to decide. I am frankly not sure if a desk job will suit me so I am keeping my options open for now. Maybe that could be my new challenge,” said Ong, who started wearing prescription glasses at 13.

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He's leaning toward a career in banking or entertainment, but hopes to make a name for himself in whichever path Ong takes. One thing's for sure, he said: "I will apply all the qualities I have learnt from my sport."

For now, swimming is his top priority.

"I have to ensure that my body is in tip-top condition when I race and, as an active person, I cannot imagine going a day without my sight. I think that most people take our eye health for granted and, hence, I always pay special attention to ensure that my eyes are healthy. I wished I had paid more attention to them when I was younger so I could have 6/6 vision," he said. "It is one of the greatest advantages an athlete could have."

He switched to contact lenses at 17 just when he was starting to be even more active. Wearing glasses for activities like gym and extreme sports was not working out for him.



A rare moment of relaxation.

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“My mother uses Acuvue contact lenses and she purchased my first pair. The brand was also highly recommended by optometrists for its trusted technology and comfort,” he said.

“Switching to contact lenses opened up my world. I felt free and liberated. Simple things like going for a jog without the annoyance of a pair of bouncing spectacles, to heading out with my friends and feeling more confident,” he said. “I have been wearing 1-Day Acuvue Moist for the past eight years. The lenses are so comfortable, it feels like I am wearing nothing at all.”

His vision is focused on the SEA Games 2015. The oldest member of the national men's team wants to become Southeast Asia's fastest swimmer.

“I have never trained this hard in my life. I want to do Singapore proud,” says a very determined Ong, who came second to Indonesia's Triady Fauzi by just 0.02 seconds at last year's SEA Games. He is unwavering in his resolve to take home the elusive gold in 2015.

“I want the 50m freestyle gold medal and I no longer consider it elusive,” he said.

The thought of standing on the podium with Singapore's national anthem playing in front of a home crowd gives Ong goose bumps. “It will most likely be my last hurrah and I want to go out with a bang,” he said.

It takes passion, perseverance and purpose to succeed in sports – and in life. Whether it's modeling, acting or something else that occupies Russell Ong's life after sports, he's certain to give it everything he's got.

“Look beyond your limits,” he said. “Whatever you do, be sure that when you look back, it will be without regrets.”