

Mister Singapore 2013 finalists tell us how they fought setbacks

Report by Catherine Robert
 crobert@sph.com.sg

It is a contest to crown the hottest heartland hunk.

But six out of the 19 finalists of Mister Singapore 2013 aren't even from the estates they're supposed to represent.

The finals of the annual pageant, which is in its 14th year, will be held tonight at RELC International Hotel.

Organiser Alan Sim, who introduced the "estate assignment" system in 2002, said it's their "trademark".

He told The New Paper: "We would prefer to have a pageant that is special and unique in introducing our contestants instead of assigning a number to them. Personally, I think it is more meaningful."

THREE CHOICES

But it isn't a perfect system.

He explained that when contestants sign up, they choose a first, second and third choice as to which estate they want to represent.

But a particular estate may have two finalists, hence the three choices.

Then there are some who want to represent an estate that has sentimental value for them, for example, the estate they grew up in.

Mr Sim said: "This happens every year since it is not possible to have all selected contestants coming from their respective estates."

MISTER BEDOK

I can't have kids

**WILSON LIM
 AGE: 29**

He may not have had the easiest childhood, having a speech impediment.

His stutter was later reduced, however, after he started working at a call centre and had more interaction with people.

But it was a taekwondo sparring practice session before a competition 10 years ago in Penang that changed his life forever.

Injuring his testicle during a fight that got out of control, Lim was told by doctors that the chances of him having a child are close to zero.

"I ended up with a leg injury, along with an injury that has now left me incapable of having a child," the engineer at an oil company said.

"One side is not functional because it basically burst."

Lim, who is single, said the episode was "sad" and "traumatising", but that he consoled himself with this: "There are so many abandoned kids out there who need homes and I could be that one person to help them in the future when I'm ready to have a family."

He channels his paternal instinct to a less fortunate three-year-old Vietnamese child through the World Vision Sponsor A Child programme, where he actively donates money towards the well-being of the boy.

Lim said: "He mails pictures that he draws and I write letters to him too. I'm excited about visiting him for the first time next year."



MISTER YISHUN

I was bullied badly

**EDWIN HENG
 AGE: 22**

As a kid, he was bullied in what he calls the "rough neighbourhood" of Yishun.

Heng was terrorised by his peers from the age of 11, all the way till Secondary 2, because of his scrawny frame.

Having loved basketball, he used to practise religiously at the school court – only to have the ball thrown at his face by bigger-sized seniors.

The Nanyang Technological University undergraduate in business said: "It doesn't matter that I was bullied, it made me the man I am today."

Heng, who has a girlfriend and stays with his parents in Khatib, joined the competition for a more "holistic experience" and the opportunity to travel.

"I'm stronger and I have a lot more self-confidence, so my past was nothing but a lesson learnt."

MISTER HOUGANG

I had to work hard

**ELIJAH ANG
 AGE: 29**

He discovered a passion for engineering research during his undergraduate days at Nanyang Technological University.

And now, he is pushing himself further by pursuing a PhD in material science at his alma mater.

Ang, who is on a scholarship, acknowledged that Singapore is a "paper-chasing country" and that having an extra feather in his cap will be an advantage.

"I've worked hard to get to where I am today. It didn't all just fall into my lap. I realised I had a passion for research so I decided to come back and pursue it," he said.

"Not many Singaporeans want to pursue a PhD. Most of the time, it's foreign scholars coming in. If I want to remain in research, a bachelor's qualification is not enough."

But it's not all work and no play. Ang, who is single and has been living in Hougang for the last 16 years with his parents, said: "Mr Singapore is an opportunity to do what I like, from modelling to photoshoots to travelling."

"But it's definitely not a full-time thing. I mean, how long can my youth last?"

"For me, it's like my CCA (co-curricular activity)."



MISTER BISHAN

I survived terror attack

**ERNEST FERDIAN
 AGE: 26**

He survived a terrorist attack – the Christmas Eve bombings in Indonesia in 2000.

That event taught the Indonesia-born Singapore permanent resident to seize life with both hands and cherish everything about it.

Recalled Ferdian, an accountant: "I was at the Canisius Catholic Church, which I attended when I lived in Jakarta. It was just after the Christmas Eve mass that the entire congregation heard the loud explosion."

"And it wasn't like the movies at all. There was no major panic immediately. In fact, everyone went silent."

"The bomb went off in the carpark and I was worried sick because my parents and brother had gone to the car."

He rushed out to find that his loved ones weren't harmed as the bomb had exploded on the other side of the premises.

They got into their car and quickly drove off.

Ferdian, who is single, moved here alone at the age of 17 to pursue a degree in business management at Singapore Management University, which his parents paid for.

He considers himself a Singaporean – especially because he has "learnt the Singlish lingo".



ALL SMILES: (From left) Mister Hougang, Elijah Ang, Mister Bishan, Ernest Ferdian, Mister Yishun, Edwin Heng and Mister Bedok, Wilson Lim.
 TNP PHOTO: LATASHA GOBI NATHAN

Q&A

WHO IS THE MP OF YOUR ESTATE?

Mr Bedok: I don't know.

Mr Hougang: My representative is, of course, Lee Hsien Loong.

Mr Bishan: I know it's the Minister of Defence and his name is Ng something?

Mr Yishun: I'm not sure.

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR ESTATE?

Mr Bedok: I believe the air is fresher in the East.

Mr Hougang: It's not so crowded like Jurong or Tampines.

Mr Bishan: I love the way Bishan is laid out. It's not as congested and it's convenient, especially if you want to go to the city.

Mr Yishun: The people are very friendly. Yishun still has a bit of an old-school aspect and many people living there are from the older generation. It gives off a family feel that not many places have anymore.

WHAT IS THE BEST DISH IN YOUR ESTATE?

Mr Bedok: The chwee kueh at Bedok Interchange.

Mr Hougang: The bak kut teh around Avenue 8. You can even top up your soup if you finish it.

Mr Bishan: The yong tau foo there is made using the old Teochew style with some sticky sauce. The one at Kim San Leng Food Centre near the bus interchange is my personal favourite.

Mr Yishun: Definitely the Chong Pang nasi lemak.

IF YOU WERE TO TAKE A GIRL ON A DATE WITHIN THE CONFINES OF YOUR ESTATE, WHERE WOULD YOU GO?

Mr Bedok: I would take her to Bedok Reservoir to watch the sunset. When that's finished, I'll tell her about the tales of suicides that happened there so she'll cuddle up to me.

Mr Hougang: There's not much to do in Hougang and we don't even have our own cinema. The closest cinema is in Ang Mo Kio or Sengkang. So maybe I'll take her home and whip up a home-cooked meal. We can relax on the couch and watch a movie.

Mr Bishan: I would take her for a jog at the newly-renovated Bishan Park because I'm an outdoors kind of person and if she doesn't last an hour or so, it's okay too. There's a McDonald's there, so we can go and have a meal instead. There's even a vegetarian restaurant, so if she's vegetarian, I've got it covered too.

Mr Yishun: I would take her for a good nasi lemak dinner, then for a movie at Northpoint Shopping Centre and maybe enjoy a quiet time chatting at Yishun Dam.

PHOTOS: MR SINGAPORE