

SWIMMING

A SHOT AT GOLD, AND THE RECORD BOOKS

Swimmer Russell Ong aims for SEA Games glory and Ang's record

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SINGAPORE – The tag of South-east Asia's fastest swimmer has so far eluded Russell Ong.

Now, in a bid to transform his three successive 50m freestyle SEA Games bronze medals into gold, as well as finally crack Ang Peng Siong's 31-year national record of 22.69secs, Ong has enlisted the help of former national swim star Leslie Kwok.

The partnership, which began last November, came after his busy schedule at Singapore Management



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 ON BETTERING ANG PENG SIONG'S 31-YEAR-OLD NATIONAL RECORD

University (SMU) made it hard for him to commit to former national swimmer Gary Tan's training programme at Swimfast Aquatic School.

While Tan remains his coach, supervising him for dry-land and sets training, Kwok will focus on Ong's sprinting.

"I raced with Leslie when I was around 16. It was at the 2006 Singapore Open and I lost to him by a bit," said Ong, 23, a second-year finance undergraduate. "I didn't keep in touch with him until last year, when Gary brought him into Swimfast to help the sprinters with their strokes. Leslie said I still have a lot of room to improve in terms of technique."

He added: "My workload at SMU has been hectic. Sometimes, I've had to skip training. But I do not want to sacrifice my school work either, and this is where Leslie comes in. He has a lot of experience in sprint freestyle."

One of Singapore's leading sprinters in the late-1990s and early-2000s, Kwok, 39, won two silvers and a bronze in the 50m freestyle at three SEA Games from 1997 to 2001, and competed at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Even though he retired in 2003, Kwok, has remained close to the sport, helping to coach Nanyang Technological University's swim team.

"Russell was frustrated at not get-



Russell Ong now has former star Leslie Kwok as his sprints coach as he bids to land that elusive 50m freestyle gold medal at this year's SEA Games. PHOTO: TAN YO-HINN

ting the results he wanted, and we sat down to plan his future and targets," said Kwok, who is Managing Director of Spa Elements, Spa Infinity and Spa Wellness. "I drew up a programme for him to work on areas like circuit training, starts and technique. But we're constantly adapting to better understand each other."

Ong's personal best is his 2009 SEA Games bronze medal-winning time of 22.97. Two years later, he missed out on gold again, clocking 23.33 to finish behind team-mate Arren Quek (23.28) and Indonesia's Triady Fauzi (23.32). Ong also won the bronze in 2007 in 23.51.

His last competitive timing was 23.19 at last June's Southeast Asian Championships. Nevertheless, Kwok believes that Ong is in

good shape to meet this year's SEA Games qualifying time of 23.33 at next month's Singapore National Swimming Championship.

"If you're hungry enough, you will give it 100 per cent. And Russell has been fully committed," he said.

Toppling Ang's record is also never far from Ong's mind. "It's something I must achieve before I retire," said the only Singaporean to post a sub-23sec timing since Ang set the record in 1982. "I feel I'm inching closer year by year, and hopefully I can achieve it before 2016, when I aim to qualify for the Olympics.

"Leslie told me not to put too much pressure on myself, but I don't want to leave any stone unturned, only to say later on I should have done this and that."