

NOT QUITTING JUST YET

Russell Ong is determined to give himself one last shot at SEA Games 50m freestyle gold

ADELENE WONG
 adelene.wong@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE— After winning the bronze medal in the men's 50m freestyle at three consecutive South-east Asian (SEA) Games, Russell Ong was hoping to sign off with a gold medal at the recent Myanmar Games.

Made the captain of the Singapore swim team in Naypyidaw, 24-year-old Ong's plans to hang up his swimming goggles for good may have to wait another 18 months after he came within a whisker of achieving his target of becoming the region's fastest man in the pool.

On Dec 15, Ong agonisingly missed out on the elusive gold medal, edged out by Indonesia's Triady Fauzi by just 0.02secs at the Wunna Theikdi Swimming Complex. Ong was 0.71s to first place in 2007, 0.36s adrift in 2009, and trimmed the margin down to 0.05s in 2011.

"I would've probably retired if I had won it but I guess I have to wait till 2015 (SEA Games) in Singapore," said Ong. "Losing by just 0.02s just shows how competitive and cruel the



50m free is. It is a bittersweet feeling because this is the closest I have come to bagging gold but again I lost to Triady. I lost to him by 0.02s as well in last year's South-east Asian Championships, and was 0.01s slower than him (for silver) at the 2011 SEA Games."

Ong, a third-year finance student at Singapore Management University, was almost an afterthought in Myanmar with all eyes on 15-year-old Darren Lim who had been tipped

to better Ang Peng Siong's 1982 national record of 22.69secs.

In June, Darren clocked 22.73s at the Singapore National Swimming Championships, the fastest 50m swim by a Singaporean in more than three decades.

Said Ong: "Some of my teammates told me they were sad I did not win but were happy that I will have to continue until 2015. Darren is still young; I am getting on in years."

Ong confessed he nearly gave it

Russell Ong came within a whisker of winning the 50m freestyle gold in Myanmar, losing by just 0.02s to Indonesia's Triady Fauzi.

PHOTO: WEE TECK HIAN



HOT BOD?

With his chiselled good looks, Ong has appeared in advertisements and on magazine covers such as Men's Folio, and acted in local film Ghost Child. With Sony and Puma as his sponsors, Ong has been approached by management firms and has not ruled out working in the entertainment industry.

all up four years ago after returning from Vientiane with four medals (50m and 100m free, 4x100m free and medley relays).

"I was simply satisfied with my four medals then," said Ong, who took a year off swimming in 2010 before returning the following year when he realised he had yet to achieve his full potential.

Despite realising work may come in the way of training once he graduates next year, Ong still wants one last shot at gold in 2015 on home soil.

"Of course I want the 50m freestyle gold, and it would be great to break Ang Peng Siong's 31-year-old national record as well," said Ong.

"It is like a monkey I have to get off my back."

For now, Ong has his sights set on qualifying for the Commonwealth Games next August in Glasgow, Scotland, and the Asian Games in Incheon a month later.

"Next year will be very busy. I have to work on some aspects such as my breathing technique," he said.

"I have to keep improving and to know what to do right every single lap I put in in training. There are a lot of technical aspects that will help me shave time off my swim."