

Publication: CNA Online

Date: 31 August 2022

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When news broke on Tuesday (Aug 30) that Joseph Schooling had confessed to consuming cannabis overseas, shockwaves reverberated through the sporting community.

Public opinion was divided, for his brush with the law had resulted in an apparent rap on the knuckles for his misdemeanour in a country that has long adopted a no nonsense, zero-tolerance policy towards drug abuse.

Can Singapore's only Olympic gold medalist climb out of the seeming abyss that he is now in? I sincerely hope he does.

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Singapore's Joseph Schooling won gold in Rio. (Photo: AFP/Gabriel Bouys)

It is worth noting that Schooling's urine tests for controlled drugs were negative. Having concluded its investigations, the Central Narcotics Bureau handed over the management of the case to the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) where Schooling is serving full-time National Service (NS).

A formal letter of warning has also been issued to Schooling, informing him of the serious consequences of drug abuse meted out to all SAF personnel. In accordance with existing protocol, Schooling has also been placed on a supervised urine test regime for six months. SAF personnel who test positive during this regime will be charged and sentenced accordingly.

Given his abuse of privileges while on short-term disruption from full-time NS to train and compete in the Hanoi SEA Games in May, the Ministry of Defence is right and justified to revoke his sporting privileges for the rest of his NS.

It is likely that further sanctions will be meted out by swimming's local governing body and the Singapore National Olympic Council. He is almost certain to miss next year's SEA Games and Asian Games, which will greatly handicap his plans to qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics because of the lack of training and competition opportunities.

HOW CAN SCHOOLING SHOWCASE TRUE CHAMPION QUALITIES?

To deal with this latest self-inflicted setback will require Schooling to summon the qualities of cast-iron discipline, audacious self-belief, and a supportive community of family and friends. These were the qualities that enabled him to defy the odds to be a world-beater at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

This grave setback is an opportunity for him to showcase his true champion qualities - not for others but for himself.

His swimming career, which has been lacklustre in the last few years, has taken a severe hit - one which he might not recover from.

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But swimming perhaps may not be his top priority for now. He will have to acknowledge that his dalliance with drugs, even if one-off, may be symptomatic of other deep-seated issues.

DESPAIR IS NOT AN OPTION

Schooling's legacy as Singapore's first (and only) Olympic champ is secure but, hopefully, there won't be an unhappy footnote to this crowning achievement. He must now look ahead and redeem himself. Despair is not an option.

There is no alternative to bouncing back, for the alternatives are too disconcerting to contemplate for the nation's sporting idol.

If Schooling can make good and bounce back - even in non-sporting ways - then his having fallen way short will just be a blip in the larger scheme of things.

As a nation, we are now more accepting of shortcomings and failures; we might even be indulgent towards personalities like Schooling, recognising that coping with being in the spotlight and public expectations can be way too much to handle.

For a young country starved of sporting success on the world stage, Singapore had lionised and feted Schooling for his sensational victory in the 100m butterfly event.

He was conferred the prestigious Meritorious Service Medal (Pingat Jasa Gemilang) for his Rio Olympics achievement, where he beat American swimming legend Michael Phelps to win Singapore's first Olympic gold medal and establish a new Olympic record in the process.

In an August 2016 TODAY commentary after his Rio victory, I wrote: "The bottom line of Joseph Schooling's success is not merely about taking bold risks. It is about the audacity of self-belief and vision, and putting in the hard work to reach one's goal. As sports spectators, we are often taken in by the trappings of achievements. But the hard work and a craftsman-like approach to training and success are often not given due attention even as they enable the harnessing of one's talent to surpass the previous best."

The hard work for Schooling to pull himself up by his bootstraps has begun. He will have to do so in earnest and dig deep into his inner resources. He can count on his family, especially May Schooling, his mother, to provide a supportive environment.

We want Schooling to pick himself up and recover with grace and introspection. His coming clean and public expression of regret is an important first step to slaying his inner demons. We can play our part and give Joseph Schooling the time and space to work things out.

Eugene K B Tan is associate professor of law at the Singapore Management University. He was team manager of the national swim team at the 2004 Athens Olympics.