

**Publication: CNA Online**

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Life for Singapore's star sprinter Shanti Pereira isn't about being in the fastest lane all the time. She takes it slow in this interview with CNA Women, revealing what she does when things get tough, how she likes to relax, and what her favourite pastimes are.



*Jacket with hood by Miu Miu. Pearl necklace with Akoya cultured pearls and white gold clasp with diamonds by Mikimoto. (Photo: CNA/Kelvin Chia)*

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04 Nov 2023 06:52AM (Updated: 04 Nov 2023 10:42AM)

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This has been a memorable year for Shanti Pereira. The national sprinter's decision last year to quit her job to focus on running paid off, undoubtedly. It wasn't just make the year she became a full-time professional athlete – 2023 is also the year she had the most wins and broke the most national records in her 10-year running career.

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The 27-year-old clinched five gold medals – two at the Southeast Asian Games in Cambodia, two at the Asian Athletics Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, and her recent victory at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

Fresh out of Hangzhou, she's taking a month-long break before she gears up for the race of her lifetime – the Paris Olympics in July 2024.

CNA Women met with Pereira in October and asked her, among many questions: Who is Shanti Pereira outside the race track? How does she engage in self-care? And how, as a medal-winning athlete, does she take it slow?

DEALING WITH STRESS AND PRESSURE

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Singapore's star athlete may have had an exceptional year, but her journey was not without obstacles.

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Growing up as the youngest of four siblings, Pereira loved to run. In fact, her family of six are avid runners – we both laughed at how often she would have heard the pun “It really runs in the family”.

Sprinting meant a lot to her but she wasn't sure if it was something she could pursue full-time.

Remembering my struggles then also makes me feel more grounded today and will help me face my hardships tomorrow.

“There was a time when I felt uncertain and inadequate,” Pereira said, as she reflected on her “slightly unconventional” education path.

She spent a few years at Singapore Sports School, then studied for a diploma in sports and leisure management at Republic Polytechnic, and two years ago, got her degree in accountancy from Singapore Management University.

After graduating in 2021, she struggled to find purpose. “I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, and everything felt like it moved so fast that I just couldn't keep up,” she said.

Despite winning medals at national competitions, there was self-doubt. “If I wasn't good enough as a sprinter, and I didn't know what I'd do outside of running, then who am I?” she said.

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Eventually, Pereira learned to focus on things within her “circle of control” and “being present in the here and now”, and felt more at ease.

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"I started reflecting more on what I could work on rather than having everything figured out," she said.

She found a job as a writer at a beauty and skincare website and spent her days off and weekends training for competitions.

"I realised it was okay to be lost sometimes – not everyone has it figured out all the time and that's fine," she said. "Remembering my struggles then also makes me feel more grounded today and will help me face my hardships tomorrow."

#### SELF-CARE IN THE FORM OF CLEARING HER MIND



*Cropped T-shirt top and matching skirt by Bottega Veneta. Tiffany Lock Bangle in yellow and white gold with half pave diamonds and Tiffany Lock Bangle in yellow gold by Tiffany & Co. (Photo: CNA/Kelvin Chia)*

With her extremely packed schedule, Pereira understands how crucial time management and self-care are.

Her Google calendar – the trusty app she relies on to keep her life neat – is filled with training sessions, meetings with her coach, media engagements (such as this day-long

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photo call for CNA Women), meetings with brands and sponsors, and more. For now, she manages all these commitments herself.

"Life can be a bit of a roller coaster ride," she said. "But I've learned that it's okay, it's part and parcel of being an athlete and it's more important that I figure out how to handle it, so I clear my head to calm myself."

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One of the ways she does this is through journaling, which helps her “clear the mind”.



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Since she started racing in 2013, Pereira has kept what she calls a "training journal". It's where she observes the progress of her training, and pens daily reflections and any feelings she experiences on a particular day.

"Journaling helps me process my thoughts and makes me understand why I may go through certain feelings like being upset or overwhelmed," she said.

"And there's no special or strict routine about it – when I'm in the mood to write, I'll write on whatever I have."

Journaling also helps her see how much she's grown.

"It helps with future reflections," she said. "Looking back at how I was even just a few months ago can help me reframe certain past experiences and make me feel more present now."

FINDING JOY IN THE BASICS

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Pereira declared how unapologetically “basic” she is about what she enjoys.

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Her favourite dates are going to the movies, and she loves spending slow Sundays watching the same episodes from her favourite show, Modern Family.

"These simple things may be basic, but they are what makes me happy," she said.

Pereira is also an avid shopper. "I love looking out for new clothes and I love skincare, so I love spending time shopping," Pereira laughed as she recalled shopping in every city that she's visited.

"Whether I travel for a race or leisure, there's always some random shopping district that I can find in any city I find myself in."

It's why her recent trip to Seoul, South Korea, with boyfriend Tan Zong Yang, who is also an athlete and a lawyer by profession, was so "healing".

Whether I travel for a race or leisure, there's always some random shopping district that I can find in any city I find myself in.

Not only did the city have many quaint cafes for Pereira to journal in and enjoy a coffee fix, the streets were also lined with fashion and beauty shops.

She is already looking forward to returning for more retail happiness. "Hopefully, I can come back in summer so I can shop for more Singapore-friendly clothes," she said. "Thankfully for my bank account, it was autumn."

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*Cropped top by Nike. Grain de cafe rings and Panthere de Cartier watch by Cartier. (Photo: CNA/Kelvin Chia)*

Mornings are particularly sacred for the sprint queen, where she makes herself a hearty savoury breakfast, gets ready for the day and carves out intentional time with herself.

“Again, I’m a basic girl. I just love avocado on toast with sriracha and I can’t live without coffee,” she said. “I can barely function without my daily kopi c siew dai.”

The precious downtime she gets in the morning is why she starts her day early, even if no one else in her household is awake.

“My days can get a little hectic, so I really appreciate my morning time when I can unwind,” she said. “It’s like the calm before the storm.”

“Mornings are the important breather I need before I take on anything that happens throughout the rest of the day.”

Journalist: Izza Haziqah; Art director: Jasper Loh; Senior producer: Lindsay Jialin; Photographer: Kelvin Chia; Assistant photographer: Roy Yap; Styling: Sharon Tulasidas; Hair and makeup: Marc Teng using Keune Haircosmetics and MAC Cosmetics, respectively.

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