



Sailing into the world of Dr Ben Tan

1. When I was a child, I was ...
... frankly, not too forward looking and did not really dream about what I wanted to be. I was more interested in playing with my Chemistry set, spiders and Matchbox cars, apart from sailing. It was only at key junctures that I was forced to make up my mind, like when choosing my academic courses. I was always oriented towards the Sciences, so picking the Science stream in Secondary School and Triple Science in Junior College were easy decisions. As for my career, I only decided on Medicine after the 'A' Levels results were announced. Before that, I did entertain thoughts of being a

physicist, as I was strong in Physics. The problem was that I did not like Mathematics, and who ever heard of a great physicist who was bad at Mathematics? Medicine was appealing because it had elements of all the sciences (Biology, Physics and Chemistry) with minimal Mathematics – until we had to do medical statistics, that is.

2. My best medical school memories are ...
... of my clinical group mates and late nights outside the medical library. I went sailing straight after school (at about 4 pm), and would sail till dark before rushing down to do weights at the West Coast Gym from 8pm



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to 10 pm. If I were to go home after gym, I would surely fall asleep immediately, so instead I would drag myself to the medical library (or rather to the benches and corridors outside the library) to study. If it were not for my study group that kept me company till way after midnight, I would have flunked out of medical school very early on.

3. The most influential person in early life is ...
... Professor Low Cheng Hock. I gain inspiration from many people. But in terms of Medicine, I am forever grateful to Professor Low Cheng Hock for mentoring me, even till this day. From him, I learnt the true meaning of dedication.
4. I spend my Sunday mornings ...
... waking up at 6 am and running with the MR 25 (a running club) gang at MacRitchie Reservoir at 7 am sharp. I have retired from competitive sailing (which took up whatever time I had outside of work, including weekends) but my Sunday mornings are still pretty unenviable. The running distance we run increases progressively from 18 km to 35 km as the year-end marathon approaches. When I get home after the long runs, my wife has the hose and shampoo all ready for me to bathe my German Shepherd before I even get a chance to have breakfast or shower! It is not easy to bathe big dogs, especially after a half marathon, and yes, they need to be bathed weekly! As a consolation, I have to keep reminding myself that if I were still sailing, I would be out the whole day on Sundays and would only be free after it gets dark.
5. A bad habit I would like to kick is ...
... pressing the snooze button on the alarm clock instead of getting up the minute the alarm goes off. It has become such a habit that I have to set the alarm clock at 5.45 am if I intend to get up at 6 am.
6. My greatest extravagance is ...
... contributing to the government's already bursting coffers by driving through the ERP gantries repeatedly, all because I am too polite to cut in and end up missing my turn around the CBD. Or perhaps my greatest extravagance is purchasing an Xbox games console, wishfully trying to be a 'normal' person (every household I know has one). I have only used it

thrice before that model became obsolete, and it is still sitting in the cabinet. Maybe the new Xbox 360 will succeed in getting me hooked.

7. The last book I read was ...
... *The Da Vinci Code*. Sports Medicine and Science is so broad - there is a huge pile of medical literature waiting for me to clear. To entertain myself (I recognise the importance of mental health), I take the short cut and watch DVDs instead. In this way, I get to know the whole story in less than two hours, instead of spending weeks trying to finish a book.
In terms of my favourite book and author, I am a bit old-fashioned. I like Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*.
8. (a) The music playing in my car stereo is ...
... whatever music the news channel is playing. I am not really a music fan and I cannot study or read while listening to



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music. Background music distracts me.
But I do listen to music in the car – it
sounds better than road noise.

(b) My favourite song/singer is ...
... Michael Jackson. He is a little whacko
but I have great respect for his singing
and dancing abilities.

9. (a) The last movie I watched was ...
... *Crash*.

(b) I think everyone should watch ...
... *Lord of the Rings*.

10. My biggest food weakness is ...
... chocolates, I guess. Never buy big
blocks of chocolates. Just buy small,

individually-wrapped ones, even if it is not
environmentally friendly or economical.

11. I am more concerned about ...
... how I would see or remember myself than
how others would remember me.

Dr Ben Tan is the Head and Consultant Sports Physician at the Changi Sports Medicine Centre, and the Chairman of the Singapore National Olympic Committee Athlete's Commission. Having started sailing at the age of 12, he became renowned for his consistency at major events, keeping him within the top 50 in official World rankings. He was the first recipient of the SNOC's Multi-Million Dollar Award Programme and was declared Sportsman of the year three times (1991, 1994 and 1995). He is also placed Top 10 in Timesport's Millennium Series on Singapore's Sporting Greats. ■