

# GOING FASTER, GOING FURTHER




## Interview with Dr Mok Ying Ren

Interview by Dr Jipson Quah, Editorial Board Member

**Dr Mok Ying Ren (MYR)** is an orthopaedic surgery resident in National University Hospital (NUH). An accomplished runner and swimmer, he won the gold medal for the triathlon at the 2007 Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). Having specialised in running since, he is the reigning seven-time local champion of the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon and was the first Singaporean marathon champion at the 2013 SEA Games. He is also currently the Singapore record holder for the 5,000 m and half marathon events. Dr Jipson Quah (JQ) speaks to him on his upcoming 2017 SEA Games race and how he continues to push new frontiers in the fields of running and medicine.

Dr Jipson Quah is currently a resident in the Department of Histopathology at Singapore General Hospital. He enjoys music-making, fitness-related activities and editorial work in his free time.



**JQ:** Congratulations on your qualification for the 2017 SEA Games! You ran an amazing personal best of 2:26:07 for the Seoul Marathon in March. What was your preparation like for that race?

**MYR:** Preparation for the marathon and SEA Games qualification this year has been mentally and physically challenging. Having been used to running 180 km a week in the US as a professional runner, it took some time for me to adjust back to full-time work as a doctor in my first year of orthopaedic residency at NUH. I had to adjust my training volume and intensity accordingly to give my body time to recover from both work and training.

I now try to integrate training into my lifestyle by running home from NUH to Marymount after work each day. This allows me to cover 13 km over an hour as part of my commute, saving precious time. On the weekends, I do a longer run of about two hours with some running friends.

**JQ:** Running 13 km from work in just over an hour – most of us run that distance in a week! Okay fine... I run that in a month! How is your orthopaedic residency in NUH coming along and how has it impacted your training?

**MYR:** Residency in NUH has been a challenging but exciting experience so far. My first year in residency involved me rotating into other medical specialties, such as general surgery, emergency medicine and anaesthesiology. I'm lucky to have seniors and colleagues who are helpful and keen to share their knowledge with me.

Of course, I have had to adjust my training programme drastically as residency takes precedence over running. I believe that it is now time for me to focus on honing my medical skills and contributing to the Singapore healthcare



1



system. In the past, I used to have trouble coming to terms with finishing work late and missing a workout. Now, I am more comfortable with skipping a run should a day in the operating theatre run late.

**JQ:** There must be many fans and supporters who enjoy taking photos with you at work! Who have been the core influences in your life?

**MYR:** My family has been a strong pillar of support in my running endeavours. My significant other, Belinda, is always encouraging and supportive of my running pursuits. She puts in a lot of effort to schedule meetings/activities according to my work and training schedules. For example, our weekend activities are usually dictated by where I do my long runs. On top of that, she has become my personal nutritionist, making wholesome smoothies for me after my runs.

**JQ:** I am sure Belinda's smoothies include the most nutritious ingredients to fuel your body! What are your other hobbies, when you are not running, studying or operating?

**MYR:** I don't get much down time, but when I do, I enjoy spending it with Belinda. We like eating out and have recently also started doing more "normal" couple activities, such as going to the movies. Over the New Year weekend, we visited Climb Central at Kallang Wave Mall to try our hands (and legs, literally) at rock climbing. It was no doubt challenging for us! If time permits, we hope to go for a diving course later this year.

We also regularly go out with our families to catch up over meals. My parents

love eating vegetarian cuisines and it has been interesting seeking out hidden vegetarian restaurants around Singapore.

That being said, given my passion in both sport and medicine, it is only natural (and somewhat inevitable) that a number of my hobbies are centred around these two realms. As an extension of this, I have started educating myself on myofascial trigger point dry needling – a form of therapy for muscle pain – since some time ago. Having spent considerable time and effort reading, practising and attending courses, I am finally able to administer it confidently on myself.

**JQ:** Wow, that is impressive! What do you hope to achieve in your surgical and running careers?

**MYR:** My ultimate goal is to combine my passion for running with a career in sports orthopaedics. Having represented Singapore for the past ten years as an athlete, it will be great for me to be able to contribute back to the sporting community in a different way. I would love to help fellow athletes cope better with their injuries, and to encourage fellow Singaporeans to lead healthy and active lifestyles while ageing gracefully.

**JQ:** Judging from the popularity of your Instagram posts and the number of followers, I think it is no understatement to say that you are a sporting icon and role model in Singapore. Tell us more about your bid to qualify for the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio.

**MYR:** Even though I did not manage to attain my goal to represent Singapore at Rio 2016, I do not regret making the decision to spend one year in Boulder,

Colorado, as a full-time athlete. I witnessed the hard work that professional runners put in for many years before attaining breakthroughs in their running careers. It was a great learning experience, but most of all, it made me certain that I didn't want to stay a full-time athlete. I want to be both a good orthopaedic surgeon and a world-class athlete.

I am looking forward to representing Singapore once again at the 2017 SEA Games, having missed out on the last edition due to an injury. I hope to do my best and do the country proud once again.

**JQ:** Any hopes and dreams for the rest of 2017?

**MYR:** In addition to recapturing the 2017 SEA Games marathon title, I also want to work hard and continue to refine my surgical skills and knowledge in orthopaedics. ◀

#### Legend

1. Racing at the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon 2016
2. Dr Mok enjoying a weekend dinner with his family members
3. All smiles during the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon 2016 prize presentation ceremony
4. A group photo with his fellow colleagues in his general surgery posting