

# Running

with

## Vim and Vigour

Text and photos by Dr Lim Baoying

I first took up running in secondary school when I was tasked to be the physical training instructor in my extra-curricular activity (ECA), the National Police Cadet Corps. Running in those days was usually a few rounds around the fenced school compound and assembly ground in my sleeveless Nanyang Girls' High School top, PE shorts and canvas shoes. I would go straight off to attend school assembly before the school day started. It did not contribute to my love of running, but the discipline required by my ECA set the foundation for my endurance pursuit.

### Running competitively

Running really became part of my life only during my junior college (JC) years when I joined the school's cross country and middle- and long-distance running athletic teams (800 m and 3,000 m). The key figure in my journey was my running coach, Mr Leong Chee Mun, and I have had the great fortune of being able to repay him in recent years when I treated his multiple physical ailments as a doctor. My countless overuse injuries and ankle sprains combined with the

frequent visits to the physiotherapist also contributed to my eventual career choice in sport and exercise medicine. I completed my first full marathon (42.195 km) at the end of JC year one as a 17-year-old, even though the minimum age of participation was 18 years. That was in 1999 – nobody checked.

I continued to run throughout my time in medical school and had good standings in cross country and 3,000 m track events for the National University of Singapore. I even dabbled in kayaking and sport climbing, till I realised I probably needed to spend more time on my books rather than hours at the rock wall, and that the resulting finger stiffness might harm any prospects I had of being a surgeon. Running stayed a constant in my life until I purchased a road bike in year two while recovering from a bad bout of iliotibial band friction syndrome. Very soon, I became competitive in road cycling, and became a successful one as well since there were not many female road cyclists in those years. I even took the title of female National Road Cycling Champion in my last year of medical



Doing the run leg of Challenge Roth 2017, an Ironman distance triathlon

school at the brutal circuit set in Nanyang Technological University.

Cycling took over running for a few years as it allowed me to train while commuting in my junior years as a medical doctor. But the call of running came again from multi-sport events, specifically the duathlon (run-bike-run format) when the 24th Southeast Asian Games of 2007 listed it as an event. I was one of the best qualifiers in the local trials, but my quest sadly came to an end due to a stress fracture of the pubic ramus. Many more good years of competitive running, followed by duathlons and triathlons (swim-bike-run format) kept me sane as I progressed in my career as a medical doctor – although one might question how training for three events in a triathlon helps a sleep-deprived individual. But it is always with pride that I can call myself a multiple-time Ironman triathlon finisher (an event comprising swimming 3.8 km, biking 180 km and running 42 km), and patients in my current practice know that I walk the talk.



## A way of life

Having taken a long journey to finally exit as a sports physician in sport and exercise medicine earlier in August 2023 – even though I have been working at the Singapore Sport and Exercise Medicine Centre at Changi General Hospital since 2011 – running plays a key role in motivating me and relieving my stress. Many times, when it was tough juggling my work and study load, I just had to remind myself that it was a long journey I had committed to. Short, frequent breaks from my work and study to go for a run or other physical activities helped to clear my foggy brain and inject fresh vigour into the mundane.

I currently run about 60 km to 80 km a week over five to six sessions, undergo

strength training once a week and use the bike trainer once or twice a week. Waking up early and attempting to sleep early is a challenge in order to get the morning training session in, especially if it follows an evening training session the night before. However, keeping your activity and energy levels high while working full time is possible once a routine is set in place. Your body and health will also thank you for the investment you put in.

Physiological and chronological age discrepancy can be quite pronounced, especially when I compare myself as a lifelong athlete to a sedentary person of the same chronological age. Of course, I cannot deny that overuse and degenerative joints and tissues are

becoming limiting factors in how hard I can push myself. This is the future challenge for myself as I continue to stay physically active for my sanity and health, and as a good example for my family, patients and colleagues. ♦

Dr Lim is a sports physician who walks (runs) the talk. If she is not in the clinic talking or treating patients, you will probably find her on the road or pavement running and testing one of the many pairs of running shoes she has in her possession.



In the swim-bike-run routine in Metasprint Triathlon 2017



Receiving the trophy as the female National Road Cycling Champion in 2005, final year of medical school

