

Sibling power

Relatively Speaking
Venessa Lee

National distance runner Mok Ying Rong, 20, does not feel overshadowed by her more famous brother, Mok Ying Ren, 26, who last December became the first Singaporean man to win the marathon at the South-east Asian Games.

That was his second SEA Games gold, after his 2007 triumph in the triathlon event in Thailand.

His sister is self-assured about her own sporting path.

"I don't feel like I live in his shadow. I have travelled a different journey and have my own achievements which I'm proud of," says Ying Rong, who won the women's 21km Sundown half-marathon in June and will be running in an invitation-only category for elite athletes in the Great Eastern Women's Run, Asia's largest half-marathon for women, on Nov 9.

Ying Ren, a doctor who is doing his national service as a medical officer at Nee Soon Camp and wants to be a sports orthopaedic surgeon, adds: "We're both independent people and we feel happy when the other does well. We're not competitive with each other."

He and Ying Rong, who studies physiotherapy at Nanyang Polytechnic, are both self-coached and occasionally train together.

As children, they each took up competitive swimming while at Red Swastika School, and later took part in triathlons in their teens while he studied at Raffles Institution and she, Raffles Girls' School.

They live with their parents, Mr Mok Yew Cheong, 57, an engineer at HDB, and housewife Tan Chwee Hoon, 52, in a five-room HDB flat in Tampines.

How would you describe your sibling relationship?

Ying Rong: We have always been pretty close. Most of the time, we don't talk about running, which can be quite stressful. Sometimes we destress by going to the movies together.

Ying Ren: Once in a while, we'll also share running tips and advice.

Would you say you have taken similar life paths?

Ying Rong: Our interests were similar, but I wasn't affected by what he was doing – it's what I wanted to do myself.

I want to be a top-notch physiotherapist.

In my running career, I feel like I'm still young. I have not maximised my aerobic development yet.

Both of you learnt to play the guzheng and, Ying Ren, you also took piano lessons. What was your parents' child-raising style?

Ying Ren: Our parents encouraged us to lead a well-balanced lifestyle, including music and sport. They gave us space to explore our options.

They have always been very supportive, for example, ferrying my sister and me to and from swimming training sessions, which started at 5.30am.

What are some of your childhood memories?

Ying Ren: Swimming at the Singapore Swimming Club, going for breakfast, having laksa in Katong, playing at Pasir Ris Park and playing badminton at the void deck.

Who was more strict – your father or your mother?

Ying Ren: My dad. He was the disciplinarian.

Ying Rong: We're strict with ourselves. We want to achieve our goals for ourselves. We don't see it as our parents being strict with us.

How were you disciplined as children?

Ying Ren: With a cane during my primary school days, for the usual stuff.

Ying Rong: I remember the experience of going for my regular training more than being caned. I remember being busy throughout those years, doing music and sport.

What are your family values?

Ying Ren: Perseverance. We did competitive swimming from Primary 4 to 6. As for running, we don't see ourselves stopping.

Ying Rong: Being more focused. You can't be in a competitive sport and not have a goal. This applies to studies and training.

How do you support each other?

Ying Rong: I am inspired and motivated by my brother. He's very determined when he sets a goal. He is aiming to qualify for the marathon at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Ying Ren: I posted a big shout-out on Facebook shortly after Ying Rong ran a personal best of 1 hour, 25 minutes and 33 seconds in a half-marathon in Sydney last weekend: "So proud of her! #siblingpower."

venessal@sph.com.sg



PHOTO: LIM YAHOUI FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

"I don't feel like I live in his shadow. I have travelled a different journey and have my own achievements which I'm proud of."

MOK YING RONG, on not being stressed out over the achievements of her brother Ying Ren (both left), which include winning a gold medal for the marathon event at last December's South-east Asian Games. She won the women's 21km Sundown half-marathon in June.