



PHOTOS: JASON HO

# GROOMING THE BEST IN STUDIES AND SPORTS

WITH SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS AND MENTORS AT SINGAPORE SPORTS SCHOOL, ATHLETES EXCEL ACADEMICALLY

**W**hat do swimmer Tao Li, bowler Jazreel Tan and paddler Pang Xue Jie have in common? Besides being among the pool of young athletes who have made their mark at regional and international sporting events, they are students of Singapore Sports School.

Sports School's reputation in grooming young athletes — including five World Championship title holders and two Olympians — is evident. Beyond the sporting arena, the School has also produced athletes who have excelled academically.

Among them is Sheena Soh, 19, who studied for her GCE "O" Level Examinations at Sports School, while training as a swimmer. In fact, the distinctions the Sports School and Victoria Junior College alumnus scored at her GCE "O" and "A" Levels Examinations have garnered her a National University of Singapore Global Merit Undergraduate Scholarship to study Economics later this year.

"Sports School gave me a strong



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foundation. Staying in the hostel meant that it was easier to get help from teachers after classes. And the modular system works well for student-athletes who travel overseas for competitions. You can defer a module until you come back, so your grades will not be affected," said Sheena.

Of the 39 student-athletes who sat for the 2009 GCE "O" Level Examinations, 30.8 per cent scored five or more distinctions, 76.9 per cent qualified for junior colleges and 97.4 per cent qualified for polytechnics. In addition, the distinction rates for many core subjects, including additional mathematics, combined humanities and all the pure science subjects, surpassed the national averages.

## BALANCING STUDIES AND SPORTS

Singapore Sports School's modular academic structure means that students enjoy an education that is "custom-made for them", said Ms Shaun Ng, a Mathematics teacher and mentor, who used to teach in the Gifted Education Programme at Raffles Institution.



**We give students the opportunity to be creative and encourage them to think out of the box. — Mr Chan Yew Fook**



**Every day is physically gruelling, but every day is a day to look forward to. — Ivan Tan**

"We know the dates of their competitions and training, and we tailor the schedule to fit. In a mainstream school, when a student returns from a competition, if the teachers can find the time at all, they will all go to him at the same time to try and make up the lessons he missed. Here, we stagger it, so that he can cope better."

As a mentor, she oversees a group of 15 students and "makes sure that they are not overstretched." Mentors maintain a dialogue with the student-athletes, their parents and coaches to ensure that everyone's expectations are aligned and the child's potential when it comes to studies and sports is maximised.

"We look after their well-being. Some of them miss home. We offer them a balanced perspective, let them know that they are not alone and that they have teachers and staff who can help," she said.

Parents are usually given the handphone numbers of the mentors, who also call them up periodically to fill them in on their children's progress. This is on top of casual catch-ups when parents pick up their children on Friday evenings, parent-staff-student conferences at the beginning and end of the year, and quarterly school-parent meetings.

Even the student-athletes' study time in the evenings is supervised. Subject teachers take turns to sit in and students are free to ask for help.

"They enjoy the attention and the structure helps them. We are always around to talk to them and give them the energy to soldier on," said Ms Ng.

For Secondary 4 student Ivan Tan from the Track and Field Academy, his mentors are more than just teachers.

"If you encounter problems, you can approach them. During competition periods, when you are really tired, you can talk to them or the other teachers. They are very understanding.

"They will arrange make up lessons for whatever you might have missed. And because class sizes are small, we know our classmates inside out and everyone is willing to help. Every day is physically gruelling, but every day is a day to look forward to."

## A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

According to Mathematics teacher Chan Yew Fook, a PSC Overseas Merit (Teaching) scholar and an alumnus of Cambridge University, Singapore Sports School believes in providing a rigorous, well-rounded education.

"There is no academic trade-off. We help them find balance and maximise their potential. They are here because they are talented in sports and we see to it that their studies are not sidelined. We provide the structure and the environment to help them achieve."

He explained that Sports School takes a student-athlete centric approach and that its teaching and learning principles emphasise the transfer of learning, the development of thinking skills, continual assessment, personalised and independent learning, safe and productive learning, as well as effective collaboration and communication.

Ms Ng added that Sports School encourages students to build on what they had learned in primary school and teaches them "habits of the mind": To be focused, disciplined and flexible in their thinking; to be persistent in their learning; and to apply the skills and habits they have developed in new situations.

"Academic learning and sports are not compartmentalised. When they go for training, these habits of the mind can be applied to their training," she said.

"And it works both ways," added Mr Chan, who was Head of the Mathematics Department at Xinmin Secondary School.

"What they learn in sports can also be transferred to their studies. Not only that, we also give them the opportunity to be creative and encourage them to think out of the box. And when they graduate and go out into the world, they will take all these valuable skills with them."

## THROUGH-TRAIN PATHWAYS

Last year, Singapore Sports School introduced a new six-year through-train pathway that culminates in the International Baccalaureate Diploma, a widely-recognised pre-tertiary qualification. Academically-able Express stream student-athletes from the 2010 Secondary 1 cohort will be able to bypass the GCE "O" Level



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Examinations and progress directly to the IB programme in 2014.

The extended pathway will match sports training and development programmes more closely, and offer students another option in academic pacing and assessment. The longer development pathway also allows greater flexibility for them to pursue sporting and academic excellence concurrently.

Over the next three years, Sports School will work closely with the Asia-Pacific Regional Office of the International Baccalaureate Organisation to work towards getting the School recognised as an IB World School.

Secondary 1 netballer Deborah Wong, who is on the IB track said: "My parents and I decided that this is the pathway for me. It has been fun; it is more interesting than primary school. For example, in Chinese class, it's not just about reading books, we also learn by watching Chinese movies. It's much more interesting."

Said her father, Mr Wong Kok Khuan: "I'm happy with what she is achieving now. If she was in a mainstream school, she would be restless. Here, she is engaged and interested. She gets a lot of encouragement from her teachers and I think that mixing sports with studies also helps promote a holistic development. The IB was an added draw. We felt that the IB provided one more avenue for her to choose from."

The IB Diploma is a rigorous, broad-based programme that includes six subject groups: Language, Second Language, Individual and Societies, Experimental Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science and the Arts. In addition, students have to do an Extended Essay, Theory of Knowledge and a Creativity, Action, Service component.

Said Mr Brian Ng, English and Literature teacher, who had taught the IB Diploma programme at ACS (Independent): "The Creativity, Action, Service is unique to the IB. This requires them to do community involvement projects, such as working with an overseas school to improve a playground that is worn out or to provide needy children with shoes or a new library. It involves thinking and creativity. They have to plan the project, make the arrangements and finally, execute it."



"The IB also stresses a lot on developing the students into confident oral communicators," said Mr Ng, who had also been Head of English Department at Raffles Institution.

"And in this age of globalisation, where there is a lot of uncertainty and where knowledge is changing very quickly, we at the Sports School share the IB's view that it's about teaching our students how to learn, and not just what to learn."

To ensure that late-developers do not miss the IB boat, Sports School will also admit promising students into the IB Diploma Programme at Secondary 3 and Year 1 of the IB Diploma Programme. The first batch of IB students will graduate in 2015. With the IB Diploma qualification, they can apply for entry into both local and overseas universities.

Selected students from Sports School can also bypass the GCE "O" Level Examinations and progress to the customised Republic Polytechnic-Singapore Sports School Diploma in Sports and Leisure Management, which will be conducted at Sports School. This diploma is specifically designed to provide the required flexibility to support their pursuit of both academic and sporting excellence.

CHAN SEET FUN

## SINGAPORE SPORTS SCHOOL OPEN HOUSE

Find out more about the Singapore Sports School learning experience from student-athletes, the academic faculty and sports coaches. The Open House also provides a glimpse of Sports School's world-class sports facilities and Olympus Lodge.

Date: May 22, 2010  
Time: 12.30pm to 6.30pm  
Venue: Singapore Sports School, 1 Champions Way, Singapore 737913  
Enquiries: Call 6761 8666 or 6761 8651  
Admission and registration: [www.sportsschool.edu.sg](http://www.sportsschool.edu.sg)