

Six athletes who want to 'Be Like Mike'

SNOC's new initiative with Canon set to turn youngsters into household names here

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EVEN today, so many remember Gatorade's *Be Like Mike* advertising campaign, which made the energy drink company's cash registers ring for so long with American basketball legend Michael Jordan as their poster boy.

The sports industry in Singapore is light years away from the scene in the United States when it comes to using top athletes to market and promote leading brands.

But after yesterday's unveiling of the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) Official Partnership Program (SOPP), the country may just have taken the first big step forward, as it strives to turn its athletes into instantly recognisable sports stars.

Leading photographic and digital imaging solutions brand Canon have teamed up with the SNOC to nurture and promote sporting talent here through SOPP, in a four-year deal worth \$1 million annually.

It features an initial list of six top national athletes in swimmers Tao Li and Quah Ting Wen, bowler Jasmine Yeong-Nathan, shooter Jasmine Ser, sailor Roy Tay and football prodigy Hariss Harun, and the SNOC plan for them to appear in advertisements, TV commercials and public posters.

It is believed each athlete will receive a four-figure sum as remuneration annually as ambassadors of SNOC. The six will also endorse Canon products and make public appearances.

"We don't really have any (sporting) heroes, so this is in line with SNOC's thinking of making them stars," said SNOC secretary-general Chris Chan.

Lim Kok Hin, Canon Singapore senior director and general manager (business imaging solutions and business solutions division), added: "With these six athletes, we can run programmes and campaigns, and help to publicise our brand and products. They will be on billboards, papers, posters and TV commercials ... But it must be done tastefully to come out socially and culturally correct."

Both were speaking at the Equinox, Swissotel the Stamford, where Canon Singapore president and CEO Satoshi Kimura and Chan signed the deal, witnessed by Deputy Prime Minister and SNOC president Teo Chee Hean and International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board member and SNOC vice-president Ng Ser Miang.

Last year, Canon inked a five-year sponsorship deal worth slightly under \$2 million with SingaporeBowling, and they are currently in talks with the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organising Committee about supporting the inaugural Games, which Singapore will host next August.

Lim stressed that Canon's in-

volvement is not just about money. "Young boys and girls, looking at these athletes in the newspapers and billboards, will say, 'I'd like to be like them, so I'll practise harder,'" he said. "Hopefully, Canon can help make these (six) athletes more famous, and more youths will see them as icons of success."

Tao Li, the 2006 Asian Games swimming gold medallist, has deals with Speedo and FedEx and footballers Noh Alam Shah (adidas) and Indra Sahdan (Nike) also have individual sponsors, but commercial deals for local athletes are scarce.

The SNOC, funded mainly by the Tote Board, have a four-year deal with apparel sponsors Yonex until end-2010 and they want to grow the pie. Talks with a potential sponsor to offer rewards to Singapore's medallists at the recent Asian Youth Games — reported by TODAY last week — are already in progress.

"This signifies SNOC's foray into working with sponsors," said Chan. "We've (always had) a product, but were concerned with other priorities. But the day has arrived where SNOC as a brand with the five (Olympic) rings is significant enough for sponsors to want to work with us and we should go out and work with partners for many other objectives ... We hope to reach a stage where we are self-sufficient."

The athletes couldn't be happier. "It's great a big company like Canon are helping create more awareness for local athletes," said Yeong-Nathan, the 2008 AMF Bowling World Cup women's champion.



(Clockwise from top left) Hariss Harun, Jasmine Yeong-Nathan, Tao Li, Quah Ting Wen and Jasmine Ser. **WEE TECK HIAN**

SPORTS ON TV & RADIO

TODAY

8.10am	Football	Velez Sarsfield v Boca Juniors, Ch 27
7pm	Baseball	World Cup, Ch 113
9pm	Cycling	Tour of Spain, Ch 113
9.15pm	Golf	Austrian Open, Ch 26
9.25pm	Cricket	England v Australia, Ch 110

TOMORROW

1am	MLB	Royals v Tigers, Ch 23
1am	Baseball	World Cup, Ch 113
1am	E League	Lille v Valencia, mioTV Ch 61; CSKA Sofia v Fulham, Ch 62; Basel v Roma, Ch 63
3am	E League	Villarreal v Levski Sofia, mioTV Ch 62; Lazio v Salzburg, mioTV Ch 63
6.35am-11.35pm	SportsZone Minutes	Hourly Sports updates live on 938Live

SPORTS BETTING

League	Home Team	Away Team	Match KickOff (Singapore date/time)
S.League	Super Reds	Tampines	Thu, 17/09/09 7.45pm
A League	Adelaide	Melbourne Vict	Fri, 18/09/09 6.00pm
S.League	Woodlands	Gombak	Fri, 18/09/09 7.30pm

UE Europe, E League Champ and German League matches are also on sale.
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