

## 2014 SINGAPORE SPORTS SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONY

### SPEECH BY MIRZA NAMAZIE

Principal Mr Tan Teck Hock, students, staff, parents, and most importantly, the graduating class of 2014 of the Singapore Sports School,

This is a very special day for the Class of 2014. 112 of you are graduating today, and for that you should be proud. Not only because you are graduating, but also because many of you have made your mark on the international sporting stage, in the Commonwealth Games, the Youth Olympics, and the Asian Games. Your principal has already named a few of you, and I know for a fact that there are many more of you who have also accomplished great things. But even before that, be proud because out of over 45,000 secondary school students in your year alone, only the few of you have been privileged enough to get a place in the Singapore Sports School, to benefit from everything that it has to offer. You thought the Gifted Education Program was selective? This is even smaller, even more selective. So you should be proud, you should be very proud.

At the same time, you should not forget how truly fortunate you are. I was, once upon a time, a student-athlete much like you. Unlike you, however, I was not in an institution dedicated to sports, although as an ACS boy, I suppose I was as close as you could get. But back in the day, we did not have the decades of sports research, the extensive and expensive facilities available for training, the coaches and trainers helping to perfect our motion or posture, the tailored diet for optimal muscle growth, the physiotherapists, or any of that. What did I have? I started my running career in a pair of white Bata shoes.

My running career:

- In Primary School, I was perpetually in C Division, as the divisions were then based on height, which at that time meant being limited to just two track events, 60m and 100m races, where I always ended up placing second. This didn't sit well with me.
- In Secondary 1, a friend egged me on to try out for the school cross-country team. The trial was a 5000m run at the then Farrer Park Athletic Centre. In those days, it had a cinder track. When the time came, I started out at the bottom of the pack and continued running at my own pace, in my white Bata shoes no less, and at the end I realized I was ahead of everyone. Everyone including JC boys, or to put it in your terms, 'A' division boys
- So I started my running career. And mind you, there were no ultra-light running shoes or aerodynamic outfits. I used to run cross-country barefoot just to reduce the weight on my feet!

- So for all these things that you have that we never did, the facilities, the personnel, the technology, the shoes, never forget how lucky you are

I want to share something with you that I've never done publicly. That I was epileptic as a child and was under treatment until my very early teens. It was when I started running that the fits of epilepsy slowly disappeared.

What did running teach me? Pace, perseverance, discipline. These are traits that will not only help you in running, swimming, sailing, table tennis, or whatever other sport you are in, but also in everything else you do in your life. In school. At work. Even in dealing with family problems and personal problems.

Pace is why you know how much you should do in an evening, or in a day, so that tomorrow you will be able to keep going. Pace is the reason you don't burn out a week before you take an exam, you close a deal, meet a deadline. Pace involves knowing yourself, knowing your task or your race, and planning strategically so that you can sustain yourself to peak at the last lap.

Discipline is the reason you can find enough time to train and to study, because you make good use of your time, efficient use of your time. Maybe you won't have as much time playing DOTA or Candy Crush as your friends do, and maybe you will have to ignore your Whatsapp chat groups for large chunks of the day, but if you manage your time in a disciplined way, you will be able to do everything you need to do.

One such case in point is an athlete by the name of M Jegathesan. He was an old ACS boy and the fastest man in Asia, winning a gold medal at the Asian Games and taking part in the Rome Olympics in 1960 and the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. He got 8 A's for his 'O' Levels in the late 1950's, back when 8 A's meant something. He was able to use his time efficiently, and despite the grind of a medical career, became a doctor, training at the same time, and has achieved times of 10.3 seconds in the 100m, 20.7 seconds in the 200m, and 46.3 seconds in the 400m.

And perseverance. Perseverance is the reason you don't give up. Perseverance is the reason you don't give in. Perseverance comes from focus and drive, and it is what keeps you disciplined, keeps you pacing yourself. When everyone else has given up or resigned themselves to failure, perseverance keeps you pushing on because you know that you can do it, you just have to keep going.

Armed with these three things, you have tools at your disposal that many other people lack, and that gives you a significant advantage over them. You just have to step up and use them, the same way you step up to the block or the pitch or the plate. Those of you here who aren't part of the graduating class, you may have exams coming up, and I hope you use these tools well.

And for those of you who are graduating today, I would like to congratulate you on making it through your secondary school years intact, and as you continue your journey, I wish all of you the very best. Some of you will go on to break records and win medals, and some of you will eventually go on to graduate from top-ranked universities. A few of you will do both.

So like I said, some of you will go on to break records and win medals, and some of you will eventually go on to graduate from top-ranked universities. A few of you will do both.

I want you all to remember that these are not the “lucky few”. These are the few who use the tools available to them to excel in everything they do, and reap the rewards.

You’re probably thinking of someone else right now, someone who has always worked harder than you, gotten better grades than you, always beaten you in training, or in the big race. Maybe they will be one of the few. But that doesn’t mean that you can’t be too. Pace, perseverance, and discipline will take you further than you may believe. You just have to want it badly enough.

Today you graduate from Secondary school. Today you have won a great battle. But the war continues. So don’t rest on your laurels for too long, because you still have a lot to do. Personally, I would say that the principle of pace dictates that today you should just enjoy yourself, but you know yourselves best, and you know what your own pace is, and I know that you have the discipline to keep to that pace.

Before I wind up (I know you are all hungry, bored, and wondering why this old fella is lecturing you), I would like to give you one piece of advice. Don’t give up your passion. I stopped running too early in my life. Though I was a double SEA Games medallist (silver and bronze, no gold), I never went to the Olympics. I got caught up in university, I got caught up in work. I got distracted by everything else. Let me tell you, once you’re 25, or 30, and you haven’t run or swum or played football or water polo for years, you’ll never get back to where you were. I lost my discipline, and I never tried for the Olympics. And that is my biggest regret to this day.

Your Principal said earlier, set your targets. I would like to add to that. Don’t lose sight of them. Persevere.

Once again, a big congratulations to you all, and I wish you all the very best.

