



SHOOTING FOR MORE GLORY

Koh switches from sailing to shooting, aims to qualify for trap event at 2013 SEA Games

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YOU MAY know Koh Seng Leong as the sailor who recovered from a horrific bike accident in 2005 to win a Laser silver medal at the Asian Games a year later.

But Koh as an aspiring national trap shooter?

The 27-year-old, who represented Singapore in sailing at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing despite his injuries – a broken left index finger, severed nerves in his left hand and a slipped disc in his back – has swapped his sailing gear for a shooting vest.

Koh is almost a month into training as part of the Singapore Shooting Association's high performance development squad – a programme aimed at identifying potential national shotgun specialists.

The programme was introduced by SSA's director of coaching Zhao Jinhong at the start of this year, and Koh is among a handful of shooters who trained under national shotgun coach Zhu Changfu.

Koh's injuries, along with factors such as commitment of potential teammates and longevity in sport, prompted him to take up the "fresh challenge".

"For sailing, the doctor gave me a five-year 'warranty' for my back, if I were to continue sailing at the Olympic level," said the third-year Singapore Management University (SMU) undergraduate. "I guess I don't want to risk it."

Before picking up shooting, Koh enjoyed keelboat sailing with the SMU sailing club and played ultimate frisbee during weekends.

He had wanted to choose a sport where his progress will not be affected by the varying commitment levels of teammates, where fitness and physique can be compensated by skill and training, and where the level of competition is high.

"Is that sport an Olympic sport? If not, then the competition doesn't get to a high-enough level to excite me. I like the level of competition to be very high," he said.

That was why he jumped at the opportunity when his father Koh Aik Beng, an academy manager at the Singapore Sports School, told him about the shooting programme.

And he is undeterred by the prospect of picking up a discipline at an age where most athletes are giving up sports for their careers and families.

"I prioritise shooting quite highly because I realise if I give a half-hearted effort, I will never do well in the sport.

"I want to represent Singapore in shooting – that is my goal. To do that I have to grasp every opportunity I have to train and everything else become second priority.

"I don't want to end up missing the SEA (South-east Asia) Games team by one or two shots, knowing that I could have trained a bit more," said Koh.

Presentations

His schedule is packed, travelling about 700km around Singapore each week. Koh has two full school days on Monday and Tuesday.

He also travels from his Pasir Ris home to the National Shooting Centre in Lim Chu Kang for three-hour morning training sessions from Wednesday to Sunday.

He works on his projects and presentations in the afternoons and also manage his boat-chartering and events management business.

Twice a week, he coaches young sailors at the National Sailing Centre in East Coast.

His aims are to make the national team by SSA's monthly shoot this November and make the SEA Games trap shooting team in 2013.

Koh said: "I am just excited at this prospect of changing my sport. Seeing how other people can pick up the sport late and still excel gives me a bit of hope that I can still make it some day, even when I pick up the sport at 27.

"It may be a long process and not many people can last, but I hope I can."



NEW TARGET: Koh Seng Leong was an accomplished sailor (above) but his new love now is trap shooting (left). PICTURES: COURTESY OF SINGAPORE SAILING AND KOH SENG LEONG

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