

A DIVE INTO JUN HOONG'S PAST AND FUTURE

World diving champion and Olympic silver medallist Cheong Jun Hoong talks to Fadhli Ishak on her past, present and future



QUESTION: Let's go back to the start. Who introduced you to diving?

ANSWER: I started diving at the age of nine. A coach from China came to my primary school, SRJK (C) Yuk Choy in Ipoh. She was trying to find some kids to teach them diving.

Q: What happened then, did you like it?

A: At first, my parents just sent me there (for diving lessons) to make friends and exercise. I had previously been a swimmer.

I did not really think of diving seriously at first, I was just having fun. But then I got to know the sport better and it took off from there.

I joined Bukit Jalil Sports School when I was 13, and went straight to Form Two as I had done PTS (Penilaian Tahap Satu) previously.

Q: Who is your idol in the sport?

A: I admire the British diver, Tom Daley. Locally, I think everyone (of the top national divers) has different characters and strengths which I can learn from.

Q: You unexpectedly won the 10m platform individual gold at the World Championships in Budapest this year. How does it feel like and has your life changed?

A: My life is actually pretty much the same. Once in a while, people recognised me and asked to take a picture with me. As far as I am concerned, I am still the same person, I am not that famous. I am just a normal human being.

Q: Do others feel intimidated by you being a world champion at competitions?

A: Although I won the world championship, the next competition is still a new start. I still have to start from zero points again, and I do not think it gives me any advantage.

Q: Would you say this year has been a big success for you?

A: I think it has been a successful year for me. But there were a few ups and downs because at the start of the year I had a back injury and I was forced to miss two legs of the world series.

Q: How is your back at the moment?

A: I am slowly getting back into training. I still feel uncomfortable. Recovery has been a bit slow for me... maybe because I am ageing (she will be 28 next year).

Q: What is actually the problem with your back?

A: I have a disc bulge and a stress fracture, which is due to over-training. It is inevitable that an athlete will get injured sooner or later.

It will not go away even if I stop training. It will be there for the rest of my life. I have to learn to manage it and do the necessary rehab.

I could have surgery but it is not really necessary at this point. It does keep me up a night once in a while but it has not restricted my movement for now.

Q: What are your plans for next year?

A: I am hoping my back won't be as painful as it is now. The most important thing for me is to be in good condition physically, so I can continue my journey in diving.

Q: What about the Gold Coast Commonwealth and Indonesia Asian Games?

A: I hope to win more medals at the Games which is what every athlete dreams of. I will definitely try my best to do so and I would love it if I could repeat what I did in Budapest. I will also be competing in the World Cup and World Series next year.

Q: What do you think of your juniors, Jellson Jabilin and Kimberly Bong?

A: I think they are both very talented divers. I hope they have the determination to achieve what they want in the sport. My advice to them is to train well and try not to get injured.

Q: Diving is not as accessible as football where you can play in an empty space or field. How can people, especially the youngsters, start diving?

A: They can approach their state teams to get started and if they love it, then just keep doing it.



Cheong Jun Hoong started with diving lessons to make friends and exercise.