



She is one of the most bemedalled Singaporean athletes, having garnered 40 SEA Games gold medals over a 17-year swimming career.



He is a legend in the making who swam to nine golds in nine SEA Games record times at the 28th SEA Games.

CHAMPIONS ARE MADE OF THESE

Singaporean swimming champions Joscelyn Yeo, 36, and Joseph Schooling, 20, are 16 years apart in age. But it is no coincidence that they share the same traits of discipline, grit and resilience – the stuff champions are made of. They are proof that talent may be inborn but greatness is made.

FIRE FROM WITHIN

Joscelyn Yeo still remembers the intense emotions that were sparked in her as she watched the SEA Games live as a 10-year-old in 1989.

“That gave me a glimpse of what it would be like to fight for my country and flag,” she says. “It definitely fanned the flames of my desire to represent Singapore well.”

Two years later, she did just that. She bagged two silver and three bronze medals in her SEA Games debut in Manila in 1991. Her early success did not arise simply from her raw talent. Since she was nine, she had maintained a disciplined training routine that would begin at dawn before school even started.

The SEA Games was always special to her, says Joscelyn. “It’s the first step to international competitions and representing Singapore at major games,” she says.

Her most memorable SEA Games was the 1993 edition held in Singapore. “That was when I swam in front of my family, friends, teammates and the nation, who were all behind me and willing me on,” she recalls.

The tremendous home atmosphere helped for sure, and the then 14-year-old thrived under the pressure. She won nine gold medals and one silver, her largest medal haul at a single meet in her career.

Joscelyn went on to train under renowned coaches in Australia, and in the United States at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Texas, Austin.



She is so far the only Singaporean to have competed in four Olympic Games; the first was Barcelona in 1992. The three-time Sportswoman of the Year also won two bronze medals for the 100m butterfly at the 1994 and 2002 Asian Games, and collected a total of 40 gold medals at the SEA Games.

Yet, her imprint in Singapore’s sporting annals transcends her medal tally and records.

What this golden girl of the pool has accomplished is to inspire her nation with the possibilities of hard work and determination – the way her predecessors Ang Peng Siong, Patricia Chan and Junie Sng have also done.

“Whether it was the SEA Games or the Olympic Games, I put in 110 percent,” she says. “As a national athlete, you’re always finding ways to get better. It’s not the type of competition that drives you; it’s the fire from within that does.”

WILL STRIVE FOR GOLD AND COUNTRY

At the 2011 SEA Games in Palembang, Joseph Schooling was touched out at the wall by two faster swimmers in the 100m butterfly.

“I really wanted to win that race, but both of them were better than me that day,” he recalls. “No complaints, no excuses. I accepted it and put it behind me.”

Two days later, he bounced back in spectacular fashion, beating the next fastest swimmer in the 200m butterfly final by over three seconds. He clocked new Games and national records for the event. “That was also when I made the ‘A’ qualifying mark for the 2012 London Olympics,” he recalls.

That’s what champions do: They come right back.

“A true champion races with good character. He isn’t a sore loser,” Joseph says. “He picks himself up, trains and swims harder, and doesn’t complain about it.”



Now an undergraduate at the University of Texas in Austin, the 20-year-old trains under American Olympic coach Eddie Reese. He first moved to the US to join Florida’s Bolles School, known as a cradle of Olympic swimmers, in 2009.

These years of training with the world’s best have been paying off. Since his first SEA Games in 2011, where he also clinched the gold for the 50m butterfly in new Games and national records, Joseph has stacked success upon success.

He followed up with six gold medals at the 2013 Naypyidaw SEA Games, a silver in the 100m butterfly at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, and a gold in the 100m butterfly at the 2014 Asian Games.

“People may think I can just breeze through, but there is so much room for error that I can’t take any chances. I’d say all races are just as important and equally as hard,” he says.

“Whether it’s the SEA Games, Olympics or World Championships, I do my best. I can’t slack for one meet and go hard for the next. I’ve got to give 100 percent and make sure I don’t mess up.”

Josephs knows very well that the SEA Games is the meet that Singaporeans look forward to the most. “That’s why it’s special to me. I want to do well for my country,” he says.

And that’s what he did, sweeping nine golds and smashing nine Games records at the 28th SEA Games.