Scaling great heights through teamwork

By Sarah Ng

FOR the past three months, Singapore Management University (SMU) business student Shaun Ng has learnt a lot about dogged determination from Sivasangar Ponnusamy, a badminton player from the Special Olympics Singapore (SpOS).

The strangers came together in February, in training to scale Mount Kinabalu—South-east Asia’s highest mountain at 4,101m. Shaun, 22, and Sivasangar, 16, are part of a team, comprising 20 SMU students and 15 intellectually disabled athletes and nine coaches from SpOS, preparing for the expedition next month.

The expedition is SMU’s new outdoor adventure initiative called Dare to Dream 2004, an annual student-led project under the new EnxPLOr programme which strives to hone leadership and team-building skills.

It is the first time that SMU students have worked with the special athletes.

One of the main aims is for them to learn from one another values such as commitment and teamwork.

Shaun told Straits Times yesterday: “From the experience, I have learnt that no matter how different we are, we are able to accomplish something if we set our minds to work together.

“And when we face challenges, we push each other and tell each other that we can do it.”

He is Sivasangar’s buddy for the expedition, which starts with the Special Olympics Nature Unified Team Competition in Sabah on June 18 and 19, followed by the Mount Kinabalu climb on June 20 and 21.

To prepare themselves, all members of the expedition have been going through a twice-weekly routine of cardiovascular exercises and trekking on Bukit Timah Hill.

On whether there is any difference in training special athletes, SpOS president Dr Tio-Koh Sock Miang said: “Special athletes are no different, they train very hard and are very committed to their goals.

“They probably take more time to process information, and they need help to stay focused and motivated. Once they get past that, they can push themselves forward to perform.”

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— Dare to Dream 2004 participant Shaun Ng