Dutch award for SMU student

BY KOH HUI THENG

GROWING up, Singapore Management University student Edwin Poh, 24, saw his civil-servant father trading.

Even after putting in a hard day's work at the office, the elder Mr Poh would call his broker and check the Teletext for stock updates when he returned home.

Each time he made a successful trade, father and son would rejoice at the news.

Over the years, such a love for numbers must have rubbed off on the younger Mr Poh.

Last month, he won the Traders Trophy Worldwide (the Netherlands), an online trading simulation contest organised by Oxyor, a Dutch financial trading house.

Placed in a simulated e-trading room, competitors have to make split-second decisions to buy or sell stocks based on the news stream coming in, price movements and online interactions with fellow student traders.

Currently studying in the Dutch city of Maastricht on a three-month exchange programme, Mr Poh had decided "it would be fun to take part" in the preliminaries last November.

What started out as a whim turned into a windfall, when he beat over 650 peers to win 1,000 euros ($82,000) and the honour of top student trader.

His secret to success is simple, said Mr Poh.

Instead of concentrating on maximising profits, the number-cruncher focused on minimising losses.

During the Dec 3 final last year, the 42 finalists - whittled down from an initial field of 650 - traded in three company stocks: Heineken beer, KLM and Air France airlines and Dutch supermarket chain Ahold.

Surprisingly, Mr Poh's 5,000 euros profit was not the biggest gain.

While he did not know what the largest winnings were, he said: "I won because I had a bit of luck. I was also very conscious of losses.

"For example, if I chose to go long on Heineken and the price went up, I would quickly cut the position as it was not in my favour. That was something the judges seemed quite impressed with."

Perhaps having taken part in the 2008 version of the contest in Singapore helped too.

The yearly affair is open to university students in six areas - Dubai, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Singapore, South Africa and Sweden.

Post-competition, Mr Poh is looking forward to his June graduation and a week-long internship with a Chicago finance company.

His enthusiasm for the world of commerce filtered through clearly, even over the phone.

"I've always been interested in how finance relates to everyday life and how things like global economics and fundamentals affect the way we live, work and play," he explained.

Citing Bloomberg news as a constant source of information, Mr Poh also said he gets his literary kicks from reading trading-psychology books.

Futures trader Alexander Elder's works, including Trading For A Living and Come Into My Trading Room rank high on his list of favourites.

He admitted: "Now I know what the traders mean when they say the thrill (of making a successful trade) is the best thing in the world."

However, turning his interest into a full-time job is not on the cards.

Said Mr Poh: "There are not many trading positions available in Singapore.

"It's also too stressful doing this for a living. Imagine monitoring news, having clients calling and discussing the best trading strategy with your teammates - all at the same time."

For now, he is content with landing a banking position upon graduation.

Now, the final-year accountant and finance undergraduate knows exactly how Dad felt when the trade tuned to his advantage.

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