

His road to happiness

Undergraduate Ashley Liew shares with **Joan Chew** how he regained his confidence once he got into shape

What do you do to keep fit?

I run twice a day – in the morning before school and in the evening. I usually run at East Coast Park but I sometimes run on the treadmill in my school's gym too.

I also participate in group training sessions twice a week. To build speed, we do interval runs such as running at a high intensity for 400m, resting for a few seconds, then repeating the run.

I also do tempo runs which challenge me to run faster than at my normal pace for a steady period of time. In total, I clock more than 100km weekly.

During triathlon season, I train by swimming 3km twice a week and cycling a total of 120km on another two days of the week.

Has there been a time when you were not fit and fab?

I was always chubby. When I was in junior college, I took up canoeing and dragon boating.

Somehow, I bulked up even more, so I would walk along the school corridors sucking in my stomach and pretending to look fit. But on the inside, I had low self-esteem because I was constantly teased about being flabby.

When I was doing national service, I made it a point to run regularly, four times a week. I thought that gave me the right to eat whatever I wanted. I had up to four full meals a day and that led me to weigh 80kg in 2006. That is a phase in my life I have vowed never to repeat.

What prompted you to lose weight eventually?

I looked at a photo of myself taken during a marathon in 2006 (inset) and was disgusted with my shape. That was a turning point in my life and I started to participate in triathlons to lose weight.

I also experimented with cutting down on my carbohydrate intake from two servings of rice each meal to between half and one serving. This became the catalyst for future weight loss.

My training programme also became more structured once I met my coach, Mr Rameshon Murugiah, who holds Singapore's national record for the marathon (two hours, 24 minutes and 22 seconds), in December 2008. He helped me to improve my running and to shed more weight.

Before all this, I tried wearing a vibrating belt for 10 minutes a day for two months, but the purported slimming effect did not take place.

What has changed in your life after you lost weight?

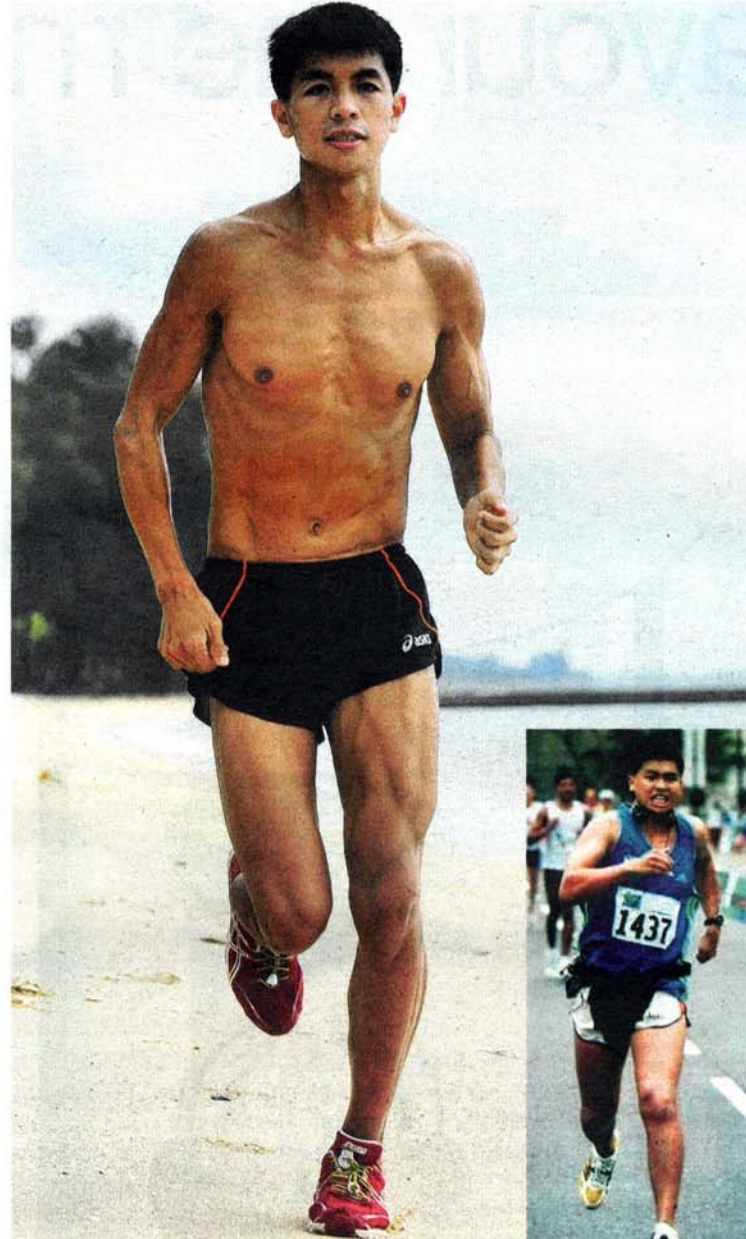
I feel more confident and am no longer self-conscious. I definitely do not need to suck in my stomach any more.

Schoolmates are shocked when they see how much I've changed, but a handful still tease me with nicknames such as "moobs" (man boobs), which they used to call me.

I do occasionally hear giggles from schoolgirls when I run past them. I wonder if that is a good or bad thing.

What happens if you do not get your exercise fix?

Exercising is a daily routine, so I get very moody without it.



BIO BOX Ashley Liew

AGE: 25
WEIGHT: 56kg
HEIGHT: 1.77m

ABOUT HIM: It is hard to believe, looking at Mr Liew's fit body, that his friends used to tease him about having man boobs.

But, as one of Singapore's top endurance athletes, the final-year political science and finance undergraduate at the Singapore Management University (SMU) is getting the last laugh now.

He was the seventh local participant to finish in the Standard Chartered Marathon Singapore three weeks ago, and was second in the previous two years. The country's top marathoner Mok Ying Ren was first.

He has completed 11 marathons and 20 triathlons – an achievement he puts down to hard work and determination.

Just five years ago, in 2006, he tipped the scales at 80kg. He has lost 24kg by watching his diet closely and training intensively for races.

When he is not working out, he enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, an SMU graduate who works in a bank.

He is an only child and lives with his 61-year-old father, who is an active golf player.

PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO, COURTESY OF ASHLEY LIEW

My girlfriend can attest to this because it happened when I took a hiatus from training last year after sustaining a foot injury during the cycling leg of the Bintan Triathlon.

For a month, I could not wear shoes, so there was no way I could run. Instead, I did sit-ups at home, but I still felt down.

What is your diet like?

The key is to have a routine. My biggest meal each day is breakfast, followed by lunch then dinner.

Having supper is unacceptable because it means I'm taking in excess calories.

As an endurance athlete, I consume plenty of carbohydrates such as rice and pasta. But I am careful not to overeat these because excess carbohydrates turn into fat.

After each exercise session, I will get my protein from food such as tofu or consume protein-recovery drinks to repair my damaged muscles.

I also take plenty of fruit and vegetables to stay healthy.

Do you count your calories?

I do not because counting calories is too mechanical and stressful. I do, however, scrutinise food labels during grocery shopping.

I also weigh myself daily to ensure my weight

remains constant. Putting on even 2kg can affect my athletic performance.

What are your indulgences?

I have instant noodles once a week for breakfast and treat myself to a few chunks of a chocolate bar twice a week.

I used to crave unhealthy local fare like char kway teow, but in the last two years, I've lost the appetite for it.

What do you do to relax?

Some people think exercising adds to their stress levels, but I disagree, as long as a person can manage his time well. I find running relaxing and associate it with a sense of freedom.

When I'm not running, I relax with my girlfriend by listening to music or watching television.

Would you go for plastic surgery?

No, because I appreciate whatever I have been blessed with.

Do you think you are sexy?

Not really, but I am confident enough these days to run topless. My girlfriend thinks I'm cute and, to me, that is good enough.

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