



BY GODFREY ROBERT

Ross Tan, 64, is a director with a mechanical and electrical equipment company, who became the Singapore Golf Association president in 2016. He is a passionate golfer who is keen to see golf regain its position as a leading sport in Singapore with the Republic winning several regional titles and producing some top players. He has set in place programmes to bring about the renaissance in golf before his term expires in July 2022.



# FROM JUST A SOCIAL PLAYER, THEN CLUB CAPTAIN AND BOARD MEMBER TO SGA PRESIDENT

ROSS TAN'S METEORIC RISE TO HELM LOCAL GOLF IS BORNE OUT OF A DESIRE TO GIVE BACK SOMETHING TO THE GAME

**When did you start playing golf, and how did you get involved in the game? How often do you play?**

**Tan:** My interest in golf came about around the early 1990's when like many Singaporeans I was attracted to the game when it was enjoying a worldwide surge in interest.

Live telecasts of major events, Seve Ballesteros' imprint on the game and subsequently the Tiger Woods phenomenon swept Singapore and the world. So I caught the bug too.

Like many Singaporeans, I joined Palm Resort Golf and Country Club in Senai, Johor, for a reasonable membership price of about S\$30,000 at a time when club prices in Singapore were beyond the reach of many golfers. I then join National Service Resort and Country Club (then Safra) in 1994 followed by Jurong Country Club in 1996.

Nowadays, I play golf

at least twice a week, occasionally three, with my kakis as I am also a member of the Singapore Island Country Club, Sentosa Golf Club and Keppel Club. Prior to that I was a member of Jurong Country Club and held the position of captain for a few years before it was closed in 2016.

**What business are you involved in? Does golf help in your business? Networking, building contacts etc?**

I'm still actively involved in a few businesses in Singapore and overseas. My main business involves manufacturing and supplying of products linked to the building - M&E industry.

I do networking through golf, but it's more social networking not much business networking as I do not like to use my current position as

president of the Singapore Golf Association to link up business.

I leave the wheeling and dealing of business transactions to people I employ.

**What is your current handicap index? And what is the lowest you have been? Did you or do you go for lessons from coaches/instructors?**

My current handicap index is 12.4 and the lowest I attained was 9. But that single handicap is hard to maintain, unless you take the game very seriously.

I take the game more for fun and socialising. I did go for some lessons in the past every now and then but I have never been disciplined enough to follow through and practise what I learn. I have also been to the range, but I feel that golf can be time-consuming.

Nowadays I just turn up for my golf games and hope to play good golf because I have the competitive spirit in me. And we play for small wagers.

**What made you vie for the SGA president's post? How long have you been president, and when does your term end?**

When I became Club Captain of Jurong Country Club in 2012, one of my ambitions was to serve in the National Association and see what I can give back to the game which has provided me so much fun and entertainment.

I joined SGA as an Executive Board member in July 2013 serving under then-president Bob Tan.

Subsequently I took on the helm as SGA President in 2016 and my term ends in July 2022.

**What do you hope to do for Singapore golf? Where do you see Singapore golf going, now that the scene is facing so many inherent problems?**

I hope to do more to get more young people take up golf at social level. We at the SGA are already working on various initiatives taking care of Junior Golf Development by working with fraternity partners with various junior programmes.

The juniors are the future for the game. For that I can safely say many initiatives have enjoyed considerable success and we are almost there. However looking at the current median ages of the average golf club members, which is past 50 years of age, it is scary that the pool of young parents actively golfing is just not enough.

If young parents don't play, the chances of their children picking up the game are very slim. This is our biggest challenge.

**What sport did you play in school? How far did you go?**

I was more into football, as it has been with many youngsters then. I also played bowling at a reasonable level during my school days at St Andrews. I have also dabbled in rugby as my school had a tradition in the sport. Unfortunately I didn't make it as an elite sportsman in any of the sports.

**Do you feel that the closure of clubs, and end of lease for some clubs, affect golf in a big way? How do you think we can circumvent this problem?**

Clubs like Jurong Country Club and Raffles Country Club are already history. With their closures, the overall golf eco system is affected from the NSA point of view because we (SGA) depend on clubs to churn out players to join the many junior and senior national programmes that we select elite players from. The smaller the pool the lesser fishes to catch!

Adding to closures of clubs are the closures of public ranges. With fewer conveniently located ranges since Toa Payoh, Bishan and East Coast are gone, there's lesser chance of people picking up the sport.

Take a look at the new Sky Range at NSRCC, which is doing reasonably well. Maybe the authorities could consider assigning some land for such clever use.

**What has been your most memorable game?**

My most memorable game was at the BMW World Finals played in Fancourt in South Africa in 2017 for which I qualified as one of three representatives for Singapore.

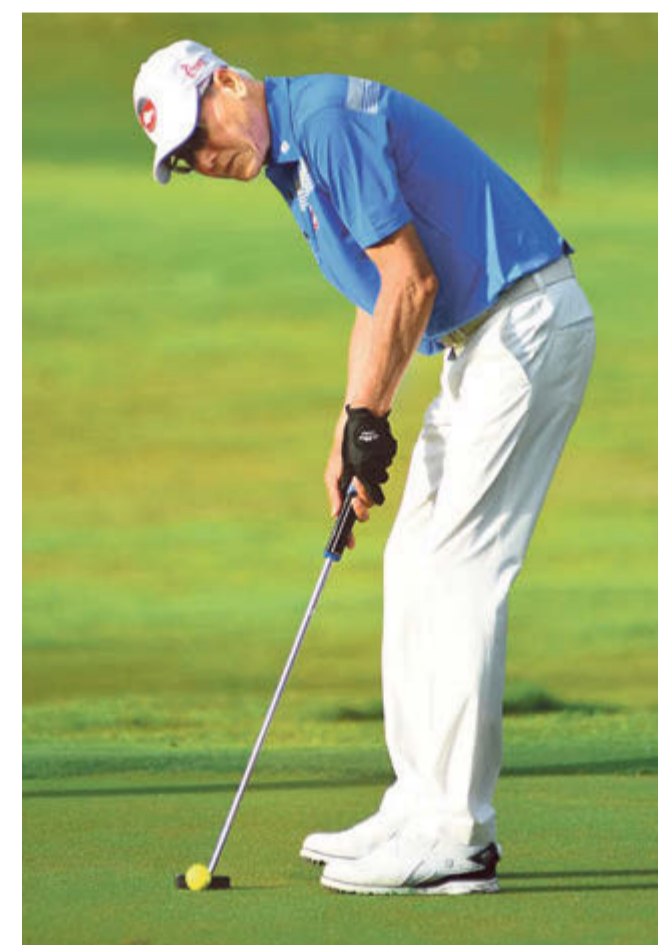
I felt that I played respectably over the three days to be placed 8th individually among a field of more than



Ross Tan (in blue) with flightmates (from left) Lee Lian Hong, Tan Chong Huat and Winston Toh.



Ross Tan's drive for show...



...and putt for dough.

**golfer? And which is your favourite course?**

My favourite golfer is Fred Couples; I like his demeanour, a real golf gentleman. A US Masters winner in 1992 and a former world No. 1. I have watched the American a few times and I like his approach to the game and his temperament.

My favourite local course is SICC Island (Old Course). I play there when I can on Sundays as I have always liked the old course charm and serenity.

**If you have to choose three golfers to make up your dream a flight who would you select?**

Of course, American legend Fred Couples will be my first choice. I have always admired his talent, his attitude and approach to the game.

He strikes me as a humble and friendly personality. He is also very down to earth despite his status as a world-acclaimed golfer.

Then I would choose Thai star Jazz Janewattananond, who won Singapore Open and had just competed in the US Masters in Augusta. When I got know him at Serapong in 2018, I found him to be a nice person, and very easy going.

I would also include Ng Chee Meng, the NTUC secretary-general, in the flight. I have played with him a few times socially. We're a similar handicap standard and I like his fun, competitiveness and never-say-die attitude.

100 players from 40 countries.

**Did you manage any hole-in-one in your almost 30-year golfing career?**

My one and only hole-in-one was achieved at Seletar Country Club - hole 6 - on 2nd December 2014 in a social event. I used a five-wood to ace the 185-metre hole.

**Who is your favourite**

**"I HOPE TO DO MORE TO GET MORE YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE UP GOLF AT SOCIAL LEVEL. WE AT THE SGA ARE ALREADY WORKING ON VARIOUS INITIATIVES TAKING CARE OF JUNIOR GOLF DEVELOPMENT BY WORKING WITH FRATERNITY PARTNERS WITH VARIOUS JUNIOR PROGRAMMES."**

— ROSS TAN

Photos: Thamm Sook Wai

SWING TEAM

SUPERVISING EDITOR  
S. Murali  
muralis@sph.com.sg

EDITOR  
Godfrey Robert

WRITER  
Jeremy Theseira

SUB-EDITOR  
Ida Karsia

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS  
Spencer Robinson  
Ven Sreenivasan  
Rohit Brijnath  
Rahul Pathak