



ASPIRING GOLFERS' ROLE MODEL

ation or self? Athletes, at various stages of their sporting careers, face this dilemma. And when making a decision on this, it's best to weigh the pros and cons, discuss the issue with helpful officials and seek family support.

SEA GAMES GOLD MEDALLIST'S U-TURN ON BECOMING A PRO IS A BOOST TO SGA

At the recent South-east Asia Games in Kuala Lumpur, Olympic swimming champion Joseph Schooling could have scooped up more than the six gold medals he won.

The affable and unselfish Texas University undergraduate could have gone for more individual gold medals, but his commitment to the three relay events saw him target sure-wins in the six events.

Just over a month has gone by since the Singapore contingent's splendid showing of the best-ever haul for an away Games.

And now another athlete, one who has also bagged a SEA Games gold medal, placed country before self and did a U-turn on his plans.

Singapore's top amateur golfer, Gregory Foo (above), 24, who had announced his decision to turn professional after the SMBC Singapore Open in January, is staying on as an amateur at least for another year.

The magnanimous gesture will see Foo target the prestigious Bonal-lack Trophy, and help Singapore to an Asian Games medal in Indonesia and a good showing at the Asian Amateur Championships in Singapore next year.

Foo's change of mind came about after reasoning and rationalisation with his long-time buddy Jerome Ng, acting general manager of the Singapore Golf Association, and key officials of the association.

The Asian Games commitment aside, another reason for his U-turn is that as a professional he will have very few opportunities to play in the early part of next year because of the scarcity of events in the region.

And with his SEA Games gold-medal winning teammates Marc Ong and Joshua Shou quite certain to turn pro next year, Foo's availability is a major boost to the SGA.

For some sports, like swimming or

bowling, winning a South-east Asian Games gold medal is passe.

Ever since the first Games in 1959 in Bangkok, our swimmers have garnered a pool of medals to be the best South-east Asian nation for the sport in the series.

GOLD STRIKES

And since the gold strikes of Henry Tan, Peter Lew and company when bowling made its debut at the 1977 Games, our alley avalanche of golds in the sport has been impressive.

Contrast that with the gold drought in football – a permanent fixture at all Games – and we get a measure of where our biggest ambitions could be. The sport of golf falls in this “must-win” rather than “sure-win” category.

For two valid reasons. One, it is not a permanent sport at the Games. And, two, the Thais, the Filipinos and the Malaysians have had a strong winning tradition so victory is always savoury.

Under such trying circumstances, Singapore made one of the biggest breakthroughs in sport at the recent SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur when our men's foursome struck gold in the team event, upsetting all odds against strongly-fancied Thailand.

And that gold medal came after a long 28-year lapse, since Samson Gimson's individual honour at the 1989 Games also in Kuala Lumpur.

So with that breakthrough comes high expectations for the future. If winning the gold was hard, it would be harder to retaining it.

So although Foo is unlikely to compete at the next SEA Games in Manila in 2019, his imposing presence and strong talent in the amateur ranks for a year will rub down on the young aspiring golfers in the SGA Elite Squad.

And, best of all, a role model aside, he will be a revered flagbearer for Singapore in the forthcoming amateur events.

SGA'S BOTTOM-UP APPROACH IS KEY

If results of the recent Lion City Cup, Santi Cup and Kartini Cup are anything to go by, there is some work to be done for women's amateur golf and the junior ranks for both boys and girls.

While our men's Putra Cup team did well to play second fiddle only to the Thais at the Gading Raya Golf course in Indonesia, the performances of the other three teams left much to be desired.

In the Santi Cup, Callista Chen was the

best Singapore finisher of three women at eighth out of 15 golfers.

And in the junior events, Andre Chong was the highest Singaporean at sixth in the Lion City Cup while Hayley Loh and Inez Ng took joint-10th slot in the Kartini Cup.

There is nothing to crow about from these displays and the Singapore Golf Association (SGA) recognises this fact. That is why the SGA had started its push to

boost junior golf with a camp and training sessions for the selected squads.

In this aspect, the SGA has been thankful to clubs such as Sentosa, Singapore Island Country Club, Tanah Merah, Sembawang, Keppel and Raffles, who have been gracious in lending their courses for the national cause of uplifting Singapore golf.

The junior camp was well attended, and the biggest plus is that parents

showed up in full force to help out and encourage their children.

Of course, finance and sponsorship are key elements in the push to encourage juniors – the future of any sport – to take up the sport and raise standards.

And the hardworking key SGA officials are working overtime to boost their budget, the most important date being the fund-raising dinner scheduled for Oct 6 at the Raffles Country Club.