

BY GODFREY ROBERT JEROME STANDS UP TO THE CHALLENGE

AS SGA'S HIGH PERFORMANCE MANAGER, HE TAKES A PROFESSIONAL VIEW OF SITUATIONS

Unlike the majority of his peers in Singapore, he was a late starter in golf. Jerome Ng picked up the game at 13, just before he switched from Holy Innocents' High School to Saint Gabriel's while studying in Secondary Two.

However, the sporting fire in him burnt and he was obsessed with the game because his golf-playing parents, John and Lynn, were always behind him.

And in the 13 years of his immersion into amateur golf – from a schoolkid, junior, post-teen to professional – Ng filled his trophy cabinet with a multitude of trophies, showcasing his innate talent.

After turning pro in 2015 as a mature 26-year-old, Ng fulfilled a dream to be a mentor to his teammates by taking up the High Performance Manager's position with the Singapore Golf Association (SGA).

And with the help of national coach Andrew Welsford, a seasoned Australian teaching professional, Ng learnt the basics of instructional golf and is continuing to build up his knowledge base while managing the Elite squad of 12 boys and seven girls.

It has not been an easy road though, but Ng's steely determination and strong drive have seen him cross many hurdles and with the correct attitude of "I am still learning", Ng hopes to be a successful manager.

For many, managing peers – having been a teammate of many of the national amateur men – would be a difficult mission, especially so because a lot of the players are only a few years younger than Ng.

But as Singapore's No. 1 amateur Gregory Foo, 24, says: "Even when we were playing together, we looked up to Jerome. He was a good leader and we have a high regard and strong respect for him. And when he plays with us, he shows that he can have a mean game too."

That being the reaction from almost all the boys and girls in the national squad, Ng has his job cut out for him.

In fact, having been a player, leader, National Service (NS) full-timer, graduate in business management and a former bank employee, Ng is in a sound position



Jerome Ng (left) with Gregory Foo.

to understand his brood and their challenges.

As he says: "I know the demands of study, I know the constraints of NS and I know what the local sporting landscape is."

"Therefore I talk to each individual, tailor-make their training and playing schedules accordingly but ensure that team spirit is maintained on a weekly basis when they all get together on a weekend."

Ng also manages three Elite squad golfers who are based abroad, namely Melvin Chew in the United Kingdom, and Nicholas Chiam and Jesse Yap in the United States.

Ng has a tight weekly schedule, with training on Mondays and Wednesdays, sandwiching Tuesdays when he attends to administrative matters. On Thursdays he takes care of different batches of players and Friday mornings are dedicated to squad games on course and Friday afternoons for gym sessions.

He tries his best to get the whole squad together on weekends, and once a month when Welsford returns from Australia for duty, the national coach monitors the progress of his charges.

Ng has a friendly demeanour, easy mannerisms, good listen-

ing ear, caring personality and a warm disposition, but these qualities do not make him a "softie". As Foo says: "He knows when to be tough and we appreciate that."

Being busy is a befitting way to describe Ng, as he plans the squad for four tournaments next month, namely the girls for the Malaysian Ladies Open and the Queen Sirikit Cup, and the boys for the Malaysian Open and the Saujana Open.

After that, he accompanies Foo to the British Amateur Open and the European Amateur Open, two prestigious tournaments that attract about 240 players from around the world.

Ng also took the leading boys to the Riversdale Cup in Melbourne last month where Singapore's best player was Joshua Shou, who tied for 16th in a field of 130.

Ng, who took on the job with Welsford under the previous SGA management, is pleased that the new team that took over last year, are providing full backing to the coaching set-up.

The ever-smiling Ng is bent on repaying them with the right returns, although he admits that "the road ahead is challenging." And he is not going to short-change them where effort is concerned.

HAIL, AERIA FOR DISPLAYING THE RIGHT SPIRIT IN GOLF



Ralph Aeria (right) with son Andrew.

51 years...and still going strong in the game.

Just after Singapore gained independence in 1965, a seven-year-old boy took up golf.

Keppel Club was his playground. Picking up golf balls at the range and selling them for one cent each was his pastime. He would keep the good balls for play and use the rest at the range.

And during his early competition days, he played with just a five-iron and a putter, two clubs he bought for \$5 from a passer-by.

Today, Ralph Aeria is a competent golfer and still plays the game at a competitive level.

Hailed by many of his Sembawang Country Club mates as an accomplished "loyal servant" of the club, Aeria is a familiar figure to all and sundry.

This week, Aeria, 59, played in the Singapore Golf Association's Senior Open, where many of the fancied younger opponents kept an eye on the former fighter pilot with the Singapore Air Force.

Playing off a seven course handicap, Aeria finished third in Group A with a 237 (78-81-78) score, 10 shots behind Yong Yew Chai at the Sembawang course.

And he finished tops in the net category with 216 (71-74-71).

No doubt, these days the multi-champion – he had won innumerable Medal competitions, local club and Asean Armed Forces titles – competes to enjoy the game and have fun with his colleagues.

Still, the talented all-round sportsman (he had dabbled in football, hockey, rugby and cricket previously), who was dubbed by me in a The Straits Times article in 1975 as the "Wonder Boy", is a sight to behold in his golf attire.

In fact, Aeria, who started his golf with the popular instructor and former national player David Milne (now based in Perth), carried on his passion because his dad James, a colonel and former defence attache, too played the game.

The trend continued as Aeria's two son Andrew, 26, and Timothy 28, also enjoy the game, with the former now a rookie pro who teaches at Muru's Academy. Andrew also hopes to play in the Asian Tour and secondary Indian circuit.

Aeria's golfing journey is one for the record books. Keppel aside, as a youngster he played at the former nine-hole Tengah Air Base club some 40 years ago.

Even his wife Audrey, a former air stewardess who died of cancer, encouraged Aeria to play golf as she realised that not only was he good but also that he enjoyed company and made good friends, who had become her close associates.

She fought cancer for 19 years with a strong spirit, and despite the medical handicap, she accompanied him on most of his attachments, namely to Australia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Asean regions, and ensured that her two sons could stand on their own feet. She succumbed to the illness later.

— Godfrey Robert

photos courtesy of Jeremy Ng, Ralph Aeria