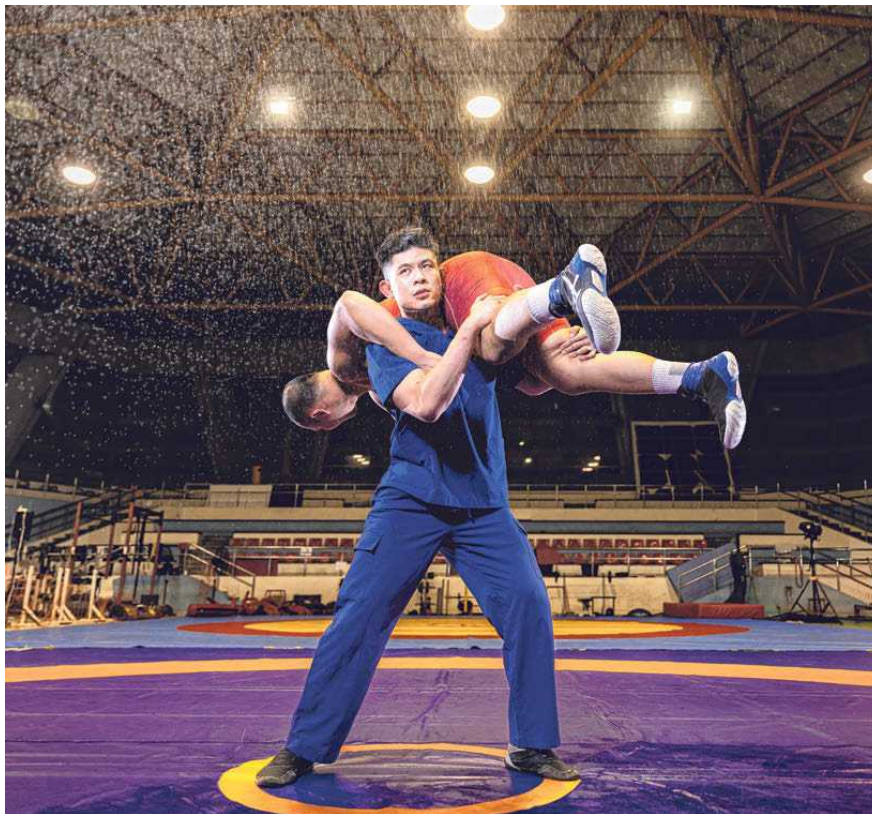


Fast, strong, and focused, the 67 Singaporeans in nine sports competing at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham are an uncommon breed. Ahead of the quadrennial event's opening on Thursday, **The Straits Times** features six athletes who are unique in their own ways, be it in their choice of professions, personal lives or their sporting journeys. Today, we look at how Lou Hong Yeow toggles between his roles as an aggressive wrestler and rehabilitative physiotherapist.



PAYING IT FORWARD

The experience I had with the physiotherapists left me deeply inspired and grateful. To pay it forward, I decided that being one myself would allow me to help fellow athletes too.



LOU HONG YEOW, wrestler, on how he became a physiotherapist himself

It allows me to better understand wrestling in terms of biomechanics, sports performances, and injury prevention, which is what we learn in school, and do at work.



LOU, on how his sports science and physiotherapy knowledge have helped him as an athlete

Ahead of the Commonwealth Games, Singaporean wrestler Lou Hong Yeow trains from 6.30-8am and 7-9pm every week day, in between his day job as a physiotherapist.
ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO AND CHONG JUN LIANG

HE'S A WRESTLER WHO ALSO HEALS

TEAM SINGAPORE

FREESTYLE WRESTLING

- Lou Hong Yeow (men's 74kg)
- Gary Chow (men's 86kg)
- Danielle Lim (women's 57kg)

David Lee

As bodies thud against the mat and grunts reverberate around Bedok Sports Hall, Singapore wrestler Lou Hong Yeow is hell-bent on finding a way to overcome his opponent with holds, pins, sweeps and throws.

In the build-up to the July 28-Aug 8 Commonwealth Games, the 27-year-old trains from 6.30 to 8am and 7 to 9pm every week day, engaging in manoeuvres he describes as "extreme displays of physical strength and athleticism".

In between, he swaps his spandex for scrubs and helps patients get back on their feet as a physiotherapist at Changi General Hospital (CGH).

Lou laughs at the suggestion he is a superhero in reverse, and shares how his career choice is intertwined with his sport.

From 2015 to 2017, he had suffered wrestling-related knee in-

juries that required surgery.

He had doubts if he would ever return to the mat, but after working closely with physiotherapists on intensive rehabilitation, Lou was strong enough to compete again in 2018.

At the 2019 SEA Games, he claimed a bronze in the men's freestyle 70kg event, becoming one of only five Singaporean wrestlers who have ever won a medal at the biennial meet since the sport's debut in 1987.

In the process, Lou was moved to shelve his plans to pursue a business or accountancy degree.

"The experience I had with the physiotherapists left me deeply inspired and grateful. To pay it forward, I decided that being one myself would allow me to help fellow athletes too," he said.

So, he applied to the Singapore Institute of Technology in 2017, and was offered a healthcare scholarship via the MOH Holdings' Healthcare Merit Award. He then chose to work at CGH for its exper-

tise in sports medicine and rehabilitation.

Lou says: "Since I started my physiotherapy career at CGH in 2021, I find satisfaction in helping patients to regain their function and quality of life. There is this saying that doctors add years to life while physiotherapists add life to years."

"I still hope to specialise in sports physiotherapy as it will be highly relatable for me as an athlete and it will put me in a position to provide first-hand experience and advice to my patients."

His intimate knowledge of physiotherapy and sports science, combined with his collaboration with the Singapore Sports Institute to work on technique and strategy, have also helped him become a more efficient athlete.

"It allows me to better understand wrestling in terms of biomechanics, sports performances and injury prevention, which is what we learn in school, and do at work," says Lou, who readily

shares his knowledge with his teammates as well.

As a teenager, Lou was already enamoured with martial arts, starting out with wushu while in secondary school, before dabbling in combat sports such as mixed martial arts, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and muay thai.

He eventually found his feet in wrestling after being introduced to the sport when he was 19 and was scouted for the national team the following year.

Lou says: "There is just something special about the feeling of being able to strategically outsmart and outmuscle an opponent into a takedown or a pin, as well as the raw hustle and grind of such one-on-one physical combat... applying techniques, tactics, and

strategies under physical and mental pressure."

His fighting spirit has not just led him to become the national wrestling captain, but he will also be part of the three-person contingent who will become Singapore's first Commonwealth Games wrestlers.

Lou says: "My earlier successes in the local wrestling scene spurred me to develop further in this sport, and it has always been my dream to represent Singapore in the major Games. To be among the first Singaporean wrestlers at the Commonwealth Games is a huge honour."

And just like how it is better to go through rehabilitation from injury with a physiotherapist, the athlete in Lou is appreciative of the support he has received from the small wrestling community despite it being an individual sport.

"You can only be as good as your training partners. I cannot imagine being a wrestler without this community — we have a shared identity," he says. "They are the teammates and friends whom I hustled with together in the gym, and shared my joys in victory and sorrows in defeat."

"The support and opportunities presented to me by the wrestling community have driven me to do my best to try and achieve my fullest potential, and I am looking forward to seeing where I stand at the Commonwealth level."

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SCAN TO WATCH
Lou Hong Yeow pins down his favourite hawker food
str.sg/cwg26