



I'M NOT PAST MY PRIME, SAYS LEE

With a settled life, veteran national shooter Lee is eager to go professional, with Beijing 2008 firmly in sight

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AFTER a record Asian Games haul of 8 golds, 7 silvers and 12 bronze medals, Team Singapore's only catchphrase at the moment seems to be "Go for Gold" at the Olympics.

While national trap shooter Lee Wung Yew came home from Doha empty-handed, he is hungry for a shot at the Beijing Games in 2008.

According to the 40-year-old, he has reached a phase in his life where he can devote 100 per cent commitment towards working to the ultimate goal.

On Tuesday, TODAY visited the Inova Junior College Physical Education teacher at his condominium, situated conveniently across the school.

The veteran shooter said: "This is a good time to go into serious training.

"My son will be in secondary four next year and is not staying with me.

"I recently got married again, and my wife has been really supportive.

"In fact, she has been encouraging me to take up the chance to train full-time if the opportunity arises.

"I'm lucky that she is a very independent woman and is okay with me being overseas for a few months at a stretch."

Joshua, Lee's teenage son from his previous marriage, is now 15, and living with his mother.

Current wife Lynn is a lecturer at Temasek Polytechnic.

With no major financial commitments to worry about, Lee claimed he would jump at the chance to train full-time in preparation for Beijing 2008 under the "Glory for the Nation" project.

A joint initiative by the Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) and the Singapore Sports Council (SSC), the project has been set up to help talented elite athletes train full-time to achieve success at the 2008 Olympics, or the London Games in 2012.

Up to \$7 million will be pumped into the project, which will be headed by Singapore's International Olympic Committee executive board member, Ng Ser Miang.

It is believed about a dozen elite athletes will be identified, with Lee a possible candidate.



GUNNING FOR NATIONAL GLORY: Lee believes that now would be the perfect time for him to start training full-time for the 2008 Olympics.

Tomorrow, the Lees will set off for a two-week trekking holiday in Sikkim, a mountainous region in India.

It will be a kind of honeymoon, after their marriage in September.

The national star will then come back to begin training again.

Lee revealed he has already held discussions with the Ministry of Education to see how his work commitments would fit his training schedule.

One possibility is for him to take a two-year sabbatical, with a view to going back to school after the 2008 Olympics.

"I have never done full-time training for more than six months," said the sharpshooter, who happens to be the only one in the family with perfect eyesight.

"The last time I went full-time was to prepare for the 2002 Busan Asian Games and I had to take no-pay leave back then as there was no provision for full-

But the first thing that runs through my mind is whether I can fulfil this aspiration of mine and rise to the occasion and meet the standards expected of me at the Olympic Games.

— Lee ponders if he can make the grade at the highest level

time training.

"I was supposed to be reimbursed for my loss of income under the Grant for Loss of Wages scheme, but it only covered my basic salary and not CPF or allowances.

"I lost more than \$10,000 during that period, which was very painful."

Lee is keen to train under top Italian coach Marcello Dradi, who is the current coach of the

Indian national team.

The Italian has his own shooting ground in Bologna and he has some of the world's best trap shooters in his stable.

With the right financial support, Lee wants a stint in Bologna, to pit his skills against the world's top shooters.

Lee, who has been representing Singapore since 1985, said: "Money will of course be a major concern. After all, I have bills to pay.

"But the first thing that runs through my mind is whether I can fulfil this aspiration of mine and rise to the occasion and meet the standards expected of me at the Olympic Games.

"To be honest, the fear of failure has always been at the back of my mind.

"But over the years, I have learnt to keep it in perspective and not be too bothered with other people's expectations.

"That is why I will not hesitate to enter a system where I can breathe, eat and sleep

shooting.

"There is definitely no other way if I want to make the step up."

In Doha, Lee missed out on the final of the Men's Trap event by a single shot, finishing in seventh spot, while the top six qualified for the final.

Some may say any investment would be better spent on younger athletes, but the 40-year-old, a member of the men's Double Trap team that won bronze at the 1998 Asiad in Bangkok, said: "Some sports have a short lifespan but not shooting.

"My scores have been improving over the years and I can still see myself improving further.

"In fact, I was recently one of seven athletes awarded the International Olympic Committee's training scholarship, worth US\$800 (\$1,200) a month, to help prepare for the Beijing Games.

"I take it as a recognition that I am not past my prime."

WEE TECK HIAN