

A Real High-Flyer



Welcome to Team Players, a new feature about members of staff who have done something remarkable outside the office and how this helps them in the work place.

'HURDLES KING' Henry Tang Hon-sing, Hong Kong record holder of men's 110 metre hurdles and 400 metre hurdles, has raced against some of the world's best hurdlers, including China's Olympic gold medalist Liu Xiang. He now works at the Watsons Athletic Club in Hong Kong. *Sphere* sat down with him to find out how being a leading athlete has helped him in his personal and professional life.

How did you get involved in athletics?

When I was in Form 1, I participated in the school's sports meet. I got into the 100 metre finals and came eighth, which really meant last. I was quite frustrated and discouraged. Kids like to win. A few months later, there was an inter-school sports meet, so I started doing some training myself. Then in Form 2, I started growing and suddenly ran the 100 metres over a second faster, so sports teachers started to notice me and athletic clubs wanted to recruit me. Then I started training with professional coaches.

Why the 110m hurdles?

At 19, I got injured during an international competition and stopped competing for over a year. When I started again, I wasn't very fast and was really upset. Then I saw some people hurdling. At the time hurdling wasn't popular but I tried and it felt good. The more I trained, the more I liked it.



Clockwise, from left: Henry training; Closing Ceremonies at the Sydney Olympics; with Olympic gold medalist Liu Xiang.

What was it like competing at the Olympic Games in Sydney?

It was very different from what I'd imagined. The scale was much bigger. Inside the Olympic Village, the living conditions were very good, and you could meet people of so many different nationalities. The atmosphere in the stadium was also different – there are no empty seats at the Olympic Games, with 50,000 to 60,000 people watching you compete. The strangest thing was I didn't feel nervous at all once I walked into the stadium. The pressure disappeared. All I wanted to do was run and compete.

What makes 110m hurdles Olympic gold medalist Liu Xiang so special?

He is very disciplined and self-controlled. Many great athletes when they reach a certain level get distracted by fame and success, but not him. He believes in his coach Sun Haiping. They have a very good relationship, maybe because they've been training since Liu was little.

How has the discipline of training and competing helped you in other areas?


It's given me huge motivation and improved my time management and discipline. I'm also more organised. It's also helped me with my personal philosophy on life, because I used to be rather self-centred, just like most kids. I'm now much more pro-active and positive.

I learn while I work. I come across many coaches, local and overseas, and learn a lot of from them. I then use this knowledge to coach my trainees. There are also a lot of management issues that come with being involved with sports. At the Watsons Athletic Club, we have corporate social responsibility programmes, which are meaningful for me and society. And as an athlete I'm very competitive, which also explains why I compare myself to other colleagues. Athletes are rather stubborn, which is both good and bad, but that can also translate into being more persistent and confident.

What's it like being a coach?

As an athlete, I was always receiving, always enjoying something. But as a coach, I give a lot. Coaches are very devoted but are largely unknown to the public. Since I became a coach, I have realised that the coach is responsible for a lot of things, including the athletes' studies, because you need to have a balanced life. Athletes often treat their coaches as someone very close to them and will seek them out to help solve problems. There's a lot of expectations. A good coach has to have good communication skills, understand what to teach athletes and how to convey ideas correctly. Since I became a coach, I've paid much more attention to improving my communication skills.


Hong Kong people work hard – do you think they should play more sport?

Sure – playing sports can help reduce stress. It also makes you more positive. You don't have to play sport for a long time to begin with – five or 10 minutes is enough. Keep it up. If you find you are not interested in that sport, just change to another one. 

Desk Duties

I am responsible for external affairs related to track and field sport as well as some administration work such as arranging courses and sports meet schedules. As I've been an athlete, I know what athletes really need and give them appropriate support. We have good connections with sports companies and try our best to get sponsorship for athletes. For young people in the training classes, we offer them various activities to balance their study and training. For example, we used to give lectures to grade six students in primary school to prepare them for life in middle school. Many schools co-operated with us on that project. We also give lectures to track and field athletes and coaches.



 Do you have a colleague who excels at a sport, has an interesting hobby or generally makes the world a better place outside office hours? If so, please nominate them so they can be featured in *Sphere's* new Team Players section. Contact SphereE@hwl.com.hk and tell us why your friend or colleague is so special.