

KEEP CALM AND BREAK RECORD

Mental skills help freediver Maniam cope with stress, set national mark

Laura Chia

Going into the Nov 5-6 Singapore Freediving National Championship, Ethan Maniam knew he had to be as calm as possible, especially after his goggles flooded at his previous meet in August, which ruined his attempt.

Using that experience as a benchmark, he knew what to expect in his third competition since picking up the sport in August 2021. To prepare, he did yoga every day and practised meditation to relax himself.

He told *The Straits Times*: "I came into this meet holding Murphy's Law in my mind. In the week leading up to this competition, I did a lot of visualisation training and tried to prepare myself for different scenarios."

"My equipment was a bit misplaced during this meet but it was OK. I just took the attitude that whatever happens, I can sort it out."

His effort paid off when he registered 179m to rewrite the dynamic with bifins national record on Sunday. The old record of 151m had been broken by fellow competitor Coleman Yee, who recorded a dive of 160m just 30 minutes before Maniam's effort.

In this discipline, a diver must cover as much distance underwater as possible with the aid of a fin attached to each foot.

In the women's event, Elys Lai rewrote her national record in the dynamic with fins category by one metre with a 190m dive while her feet were attached to a carbon-fibre monofin. The 44-year-old, who competed in June's world championships, also holds three other national records.

Despite knowing that he had broken the national mark, Ma-



niam, 22, was simply relieved that his dive had gone smoothly.

The Year 4 National University of Singapore medicine undergraduate said: "Any competition is very stressful and anxiety-inducing, especially when you have only one attempt. At the venue, I told myself 'no expectations'."

"I knew what I was capable of, I was just going to go there, do my best and relax through it all. During my dive, I thought it would be quite cool to break a national record and hold one for once in my life, so I decided to keep pushing

and I was pleasantly surprised I did it."

He also had to juggle school, his hospital attachment and training – which consists of pool sessions, lifting weights, runs and yoga.

It was tough, but he managed by being flexible, he said, adding that he also used the sport as a respite from school as it helps him focus on the present instead of external worries.

"It's a sport that makes you feel uncomfortable because your body is telling you to stop and it induces anxiety. But to do well, you need to

overcome all of them by keeping a clear mind so you feel very relaxed.

"I just try to be present in my mind and work through the stress of daily life to get myself in the zone when I'm diving."

Maniam's coach Jonathan Chong, who holds the static apnoea Southeast Asian record of 7min, 38sec, was proud of Maniam and they had a dimsum buffet to celebrate after the event at Changi Beach Club.

Static apnoea competitors remain stationary during their dives while holding their breath. Chong hopes to organise more

competitions to get more people into the sport and help current athletes improve.

He is also lobbying for the sport to be included in the SEA Games to raise its stature.

When he first started in 2013, only one other Singaporean was competing. Now, he estimates that there are 60 to 80 active freedivers in the community.

A series of local competitions will be organised by freediving clubs in the next few months, while he is targeting 2023's world championships and a regional

WELL PREPARED

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ETHAN MANIAM, freediver who broke the men's national record in the dynamic with bifins category on Sunday.

Besides visualisation techniques, Ethan Maniam also did yoga and practised meditation to help him relax ahead of the Singapore Freediving National Championship on Sunday, when he broke a national record. PHOTO: AFIZA AFFANDI

meet in New Zealand.

Chong, 35, said: "Our plan is to get people used to the competition environment and pressure (to build up for bigger meets)."

"Singapore has massive potential and we are very strong in the region so I would like for us to continue growing."

"If we can get into the SEA Games, the sport would really shine and get that recognition, which then helps us get support and further grow the sport."

laura@sph.com.sg