

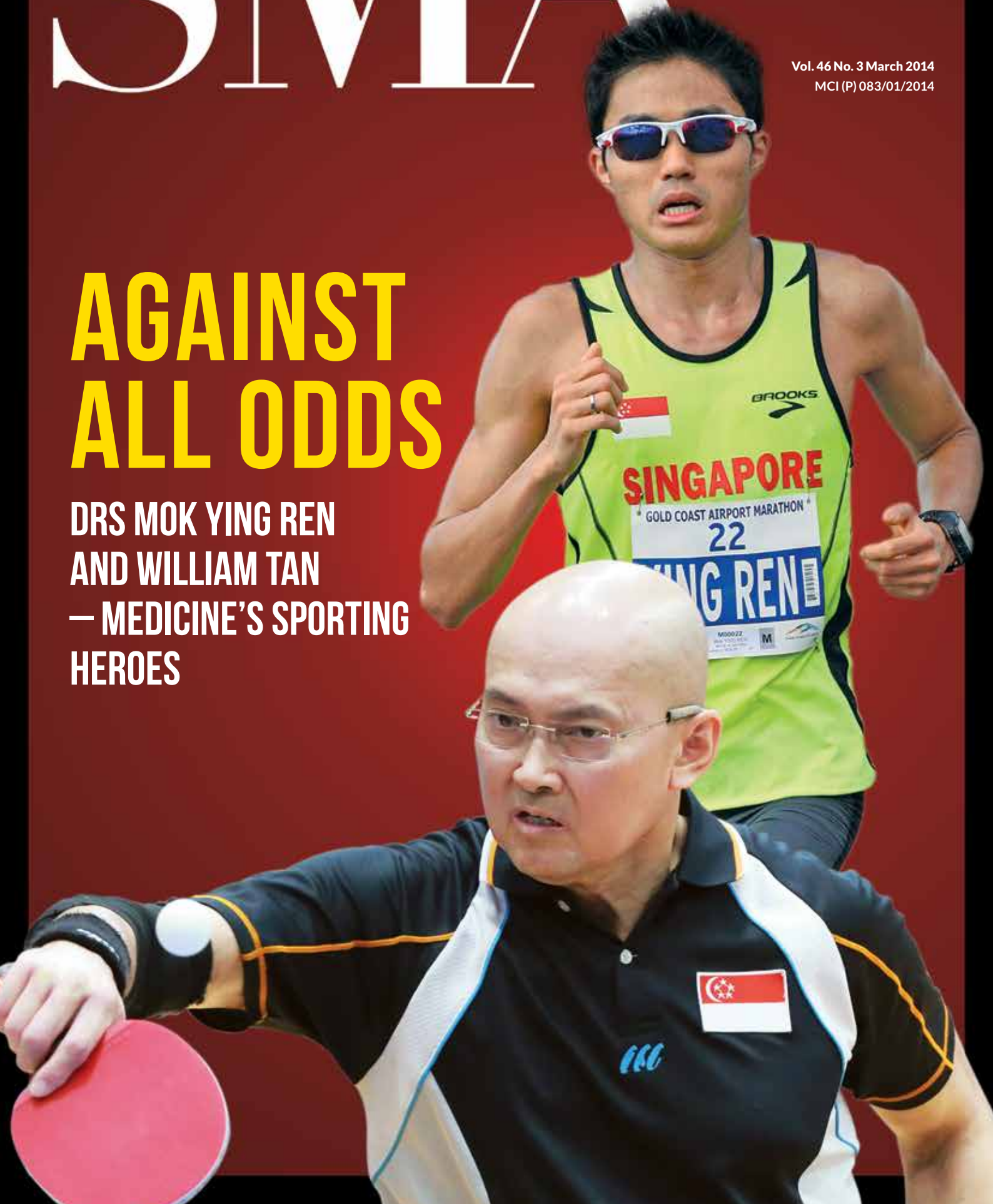
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AGAINST ALL ODDS

DRS MOK YING REN
AND WILLIAM TAN
— MEDICINE'S SPORTING
HEROES



ONE OF my favourite films of all time is *Chariots of Fire*. It is based on the true story of two young men, a Jew and a Christian, who strived for gold medals in track and field at the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris. Each man was motivated by deeply different inner drives. Harold Abrahams, then a law student, was fired by a burning desire to prove himself as a Jewish outsider in conservative Anglo-Saxon England, where he faced discrimination. Eric Liddell, the Flying Scotsman, son of Presbyterian missionaries, aimed to run the best race he could as a testimony to his faith and Creator.

In a similar vein, Dr Mok Ying Ren and Dr William Tan have displayed extraordinary courage, resilience and stamina to medal at the recent Southeast Asian Games and ASEAN Para Games respectively.

I do not know Ying Ren personally but people who do have spoken of his breathtaking talent, determination and discipline. One of the most inspiring images from any

allogeneic blood stem cell transplant and achieved complete remission. As a resident physician at the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), he goes about his clinical duties as if he were not limited by his polio or his cancer. The transplant did leave him with stiff joints and skin lesions from graft-versus-host disease, and we were concerned that he might have trouble functioning fully as a busy doctor in the NCCS Ambulatory Treatment Unit. However, he has done great and been an inspiration to our staff and cancer patients alike. To top that, he has taken up a new sport, table tennis, and won a medal to boot!

As a young medical officer, I was once on call with my then houseman, a confident and likeable former Raffles Institution rugby captain who had been popular in school, especially with the girls. He turned to me during supper one night and quipped, "Han Chong, you are single *ah*, let me teach you how to attract and date girls!" Stereotype of the too-cool-for-



THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GROW WEARY

By Dr Toh Han Chong, Editor

marathon is that of John Stephen Akhwari of Tanzania when he competed in the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Akhwari, then considered Africa's top marathoner, fell badly at the 19-kilometre mark, dislocating his knee joint and smashing his shoulder. He struggled against all odds and immense pain to finish the marathon in last place after sunset. The media captured the poignant moment of this lone runner struggling, but with dignity, into the Olympic stadium as the few spectators left applauded from the stands. Later, he was to say, "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race."

William too has been a marathoner for years, raising money for many charities and causes in the process. At the Paris Marathon in 2009, the childhood polio Paralympian bled profusely from the nose as he pushed his wheelchair across the finish line, and was later discovered to have stage 4 chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. He has since received an

school sports jock aside, sports does bring out the best of the human spirit. As a medical student, I remember doctors who played at the highest peak of sports, including David Kirk, previously captain of the All Blacks; the late former Brazilian football captain Socrates; and my clinical group mate Robert Wainwright, who captained the Scotland national rugby team.

There are parallels between sports and Medicine. Both require hard-driving stamina and staying power, a kinetic tactile intensity, a sweaty singularity of mission, an ability to get down dirty and grimy, a necessity to be a team player and, as many young doctors will know, a strong will and stomach to push beyond the thresholds of sleep, hunger and pain. Just as sports has seen the ugly face of doping and perverse behaviours because of potentially immense monetary rewards, Medicine too has to rise beyond the distorting tendency towards too-transient tangible benefits that steers away from its Greater Beauty and Purpose. ■