

# Making History for Hong Kong: Conversations with DGS Olympians

In summer 2021, Hong Kong celebrated the best results in history at the Tokyo Olympics. DOGA is proud to have eight alumnae spanning Classes of 2009-2020, to represent Hong Kong in swimming, table tennis, badminton, fencing, and golf.

Following the Olympics, the DOGA Editorial Subcommittee had the opportunity to sit down with four of our DGS Olympic athletes, who shared their fond memories at DGS and DGJS, their journeys to professional sports and unforgettable experiences at the Olympics, as well as personal reflections and words of wisdom for those coming after them.

Despite the uncertainties and stresses posed by COVID-19, which included the yearlong postponement of the Tokyo games, in addition to lockdowns and disruptions along the way, DGS Olympic athletes found new and effective approaches to continue training. What they share is perseverance, self-discipline, and wholehearted dedication to achieving their biggest dream of competing at the Olympics. They also hope that the Hong Kong team will achieve new milestones in the future. All Olympians emphasised the importance of both individual preparation, as well as teamwork and much-needed support from coaches, family, and friends. The old girls also share a sense of gratitude towards DGS, for the support they received from the school, teachers, and classmates in striking what was often a challenging balance between sports, academics, and personal interests.



Minnie Soo  
(Class of 2016)



Coco Lin  
(Class of 2013)



Karen Tam (center)  
(Class of 2016)



Toto Wong  
(Class of 2017)

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## Minnie Soo

"I was too short to see the top of the table but loved the sound of the ball!" joked Olympic women's table tennis bronze medalist Minnie Soo (Class of 2016), as she reminisced about the beginning of her table tennis journey as a child. With her father as coach, Minnie started playing when she was 3.5 years old, and over time, was captivated by the mental and physical rigours of the game. At DGJS, in spite of her busy training schedule, Minnie was able to find time for her multiple interests, including percussion, choir, solo singing, and art. She fondly recalled the supportive teachers, especially Mrs. Christina Chiang who encouraged her and ensured that she would not miss out on the opportunity to sing in the choir, despite her commitments to table tennis. Minnie treasures the lifelong friendships formed at DGS, and the learning environment, which encouraged critical thinking and the pursuit of different interests. In particular, her love of books, cultivated at DGS, helped her reach a breakthrough in her mental game, after reading the biographies about top athletes in different sports.



Minnie and sister  
Queenie at Hang  
Seng All Schools  
Championships 2012

As an elite athlete, she learned that enjoying the process and fighting for herself was a far greater motivator than meeting the expectations of others. This lesson particularly empowered Minnie in her Tokyo Olympics experience. In April 2020, after sustaining an injury to her arm, Minnie was determined to make it to the Olympic Village. Despite the physical and emotional challenges, she persevered. As Minnie overcame the pressure to meet others' expectations, she was able to enjoy



Painting is one of Minnie's  
favourite hobbies



Women's team table tennis bronze  
medal match



the competition process. She considers her medal-winning table tennis match the most enjoyable one in her life. “I did not have any expectations and just fought hard for myself,” said Minnie.

In her path to success, Minnie has had to pause full-time studies in order to commit fully to table tennis training. She is grateful for Mrs. Lau’s support and guidance in helping her to weigh her options, and considers her sacrifices for the sport that she loves worthwhile. Even when she was not at school every day, she never gave up learning. The love of books and love of learning instilled in her at DGS have provided a foundation throughout these years as she studied with tutors and looks to return to formal academic studies in the future. Minnie enjoys physics and talks about it with as much enthusiasm as she does with table tennis. “Physics gives me a new pair of eyes to see the world. We see very little, and we know very little,” Minnie said. While seemingly different, Minnie observes that both playing table tennis and studying physics require open-mindedness, in order to understand what at first may seem impossible. “We cannot control the results, but we can control our attitude,” she explained. Finally, Minnie encourages others not to fear failure, as conquering fear is crucial to enjoying the competitive process. “Once you overcome your fear, positive results will naturally follow.”



Olympic bronze medalist  
Minnie Soo

## Coco Lin

Coco Lin’s (Class of 2013) fencing career started serendipitously. When Coco was in Primary 5, her dad asked her to try out fencing with her cousin’s used fencing gear. Coco started with foil, which she initially did not enjoy, but later when she switched to épée, she found this discipline easier because of the simpler rules.

After just over one year of lessons, Coco surprised herself and her coach by placing third in an interschool individual competition. Her coach saw her potential and she also increasingly enjoyed training with teammates who motivated her to continue pursuing the sport. Coco joined the Hong Kong junior team in S4. Regular trainings were manageable, but travelling for 1-2 weeks at a time for overseas competitions made catching up with schoolwork during downtime and after competitions more challenging. At university, Coco continued to balance her studies in landscape architecture and fencing, but it was taxing at times.



Coco’s first individual medal in an international competition

Despite the glamour, Coco’s biggest struggle was constantly doubting her own potential, because she had only mostly won accolades as part of a team, which she felt was not ideal for an individual sport. She dared not dream big and wanted to give up many times. Finally, in Year 3 of university, Coco won an individual champion at the under 23 Asian Championships, which solidified her belief that she could do well individually after all. Another big challenge Coco faced was watching her DGS friends move on with their lives and progress in their careers, while she was still following her “juvenile interests”. Ultimately, all these struggles were all worthwhile, especially after gaining the rare experience to go to the Olympics. Standing on the highest international sports platform encouraged her to remain an athlete and aim higher for individual breakthroughs.



Action photo from World Cup in Chengdu, China

Covid-19 affected the consistency and quality of Coco’s training. When Hong Kong Sports Institute was in lockdown mode, she trained with weights at home. The biggest impact of the Covid-19 pandemic to Coco was not only disruption to her training during Hong Kong Sports Institute’s closure, but the loss of touch with international players through overseas trainings and competitions. Something significantly positive, however, also came out of the pandemic: the chance for the Hong Kong women’s epee team to qualify for the Olympics for the first time. The most memorable moment at the Tokyo Olympics was watching Edgar Cheung Ka Long win his Olympic gold. Coco and her team went hysterical the moment he won! Coco thinks that the Hong Kong team and fencing in particular achieved amazing results this time partly because with Covid-19 under control in Hong Kong, training resumed earlier than in other countries. Also, a lot more resources such as world-class coaches and scientific research were invested into systematising the sport. It was prime harvest time for Hong Kong fencing.



At-Tokyo-2020 Olympic Games



Having an impressive eight alumnae on the Olympics team is a testament to DGS' support on sports development. Coco was very grateful that DGS encouraged the girls to not give up when overcoming challenges, but more importantly, it fostered their all-round development. This kind of support enabled her to become the athlete she is today. As a full-time athlete, she will continue to train for the Paris Olympics, after which she may retire and enter the sustainability field.

The DGS days were memorable to Coco because she experienced all three campuses: the old, the temporary (in Sham Shui Po), and the new. The Sham Shui Po campus felt like a more tight-knit community due to the physical layout of the school. Coco also fondly remembered the girls having to bring down their \$8 stools to assembly and then hanging them next to their desks afterwards every day.

Coco's advice for young athletes is to try more things and take the time to find their passion; once it's found, they need to have clear goals and pursue them wholeheartedly, but also understand that there will be sacrifices along the way. Having put a high priority on fencing, Coco lost a lot of play time as a child, the chance to do other activities, and even family gathering time. So, prioritising, trusting oneself and having a strong will to fend off distractions are key to success.



Coco won silver medal at interschool fencing competition in S2

## Karen Tam



Grand Slam for DGS in Karen's final year

Olympic swimmer Karen Tam (Class of 2016) began her swimming journey at a young age. "I was not afraid of water. My love of water made me want to jump into a pool whenever I saw one," said Karen. She started swimming at age four and joined the Hong Kong swim team at age 12. She recalled having a packed routine starting with swim training at 5:30 a.m. every day. During secondary school at DGS, Karen found herself juggling swim training and academics, but felt thankful for the support she received from teachers who provided guidance outside class and classmates who shared notes with her for classes she had to miss due to her swimming commitments. To this day, she remains close to her swimming team friends from DGS. Reflecting on what she learned during interschool swimming competitions, Karen said, "It is essential to manage stress and also care about others on the team besides yourself."

Karen became a full-time swimmer in May 2021 after finishing her studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. While at UBC, she continued to balance her studies and swimming. She and her teammates would all catch up on academics while traveling to training or competitions. Even though it was hard work, "it is worth it—not everyone can have a dream come true." Karen's participation in the Tokyo Olympics was a big dream come true. The postponement of the Olympics for one year meant that Karen was able to finish university before returning to Hong Kong for training. Her relay team was able to train for an extra year and achieve faster qualifying times. Facing the uncertainty of whether the Olympics would be held, Karen again encountered stress, but learned the importance of self-discipline and the need to trust the training process. Echoing her past experience in the DGS swimming team, being a good teammate proved to be important as she cheered others on at other events following the completion of the 4x100m freestyle relay race.



Last day at Tokyo 2020 Olympic pool



The moment before Karen dived into the pool for her first Olympic race

Currently, Karen continues to work towards her future goals in both swimming, such as preparing for the World Championships, and academics, with the ambition of being a physiotherapist and working in the healthcare field. "As long as you put in the effort, you will get results," said Karen. She feels that staying positive and trusting the process are very important. Even amidst uncertain and stressful circumstances, she finds that doing what she thinks is right and truly enjoying it is key. Indeed, these are lessons learned early in life in her relationship with water—not being afraid, and loving it.



# Toto Wong

Do you know anyone who learned all four swimming strokes just by imitation? Starting at the age of three, Toto Wong (Class of 2017) mimicked her older sister's swimming strokes and learned all four on her own eventually. Seeing such talent, and also for good health, Toto's parents encouraged her to continue with swimming. She started receiving proper coaching at Primary 4.

However, Toto's true passion was ballet. Ironically, she "hated" swimming and would cry whenever she was asked to train with her sister. Toto balanced ballet and swimming until her early teenage years when schedules conflicted and her physique could no longer support both. She made the difficult decision to give up ballet because she felt that with hard work, there was a higher chance of success at swimming than ballet, which is a more subjective performing art form.



Toto loves training outdoors

But the real motivation to focus on swimming came from the bells and whistles of the sport. Toto had long admired the new sets of uniforms, beautiful pictures and new friendships her older fellow trainees brought back from overseas competitions. This motivated her to enjoy swimming. Being in the water was her way of meditation amidst the stress of daily life. Toto chose to focus on backstroke because it is a unique stroke where she could feel the freedom of looking up at the sky. In S3, Toto joined the DGS family where swimming is valued and healthy competition is encouraged, and in S5, she joined the Hong Kong team. "DGS's healthy competitive spirit made me want to excel in everything," said Toto.



Toto was asked to compete in interschool swimming A grade relay when she was 13



The swim team hoped to build a taller pyramid each year

The path to the Tokyo Olympics was uncertain. When Covid-19 broke out, Toto packed her bags in Australia, where she was taking a gap year to train, and came back to Hong Kong hastily. With an immense amount of self-regulation, Toto trained, albeit a bit inconsistently and without a coach, with workouts at home and swimming in the open sea, under her own schedule until spring 2021 when the Hong Kong Sports Institute reopened. It was not until a month before the Olympics that she found out she was chosen to represent Hong Kong. At the Olympics, the quietness of having no spectators calmed her and allowed her to "get into her zone" more quickly, especially when swimming the first leg of the relay, which was rather nerve-racking.



The 4x100m Hong Kong Medley relay team at Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Toto believes that the increased opportunities for athletes to go abroad for competitions and trainings to gain international exposure played a significant role in the stellar results achieved by Team Hong Kong at the Tokyo Olympics. This achievement will be a big booster to rising athletes and proves that this small city can have a place on the podium as well!

In her journey to become a star swimmer, other than ballet, which Toto might have pursued as an alternative path, Toto did not have to give up much else in her life. Perhaps this is due to her high ambitions. One time, after she tore her tendon from playing dodgeball, Toto continued swim training with a waterproof cast in the water. As a full-time athlete, Toto is also studying optometry at Polytechnic University and is hoping to become an optometrist one day when she retires from swimming. It is not easy juggling both, but her desire to do well in everything takes over.

Lastly, Toto wanted to leave a piece of advice for DGS girls, "As long as you put your mind to something and prioritise it, you will find the time to do it. DGS is great and gives you a lot of freedom, but that also calls for self-discipline; you need to be clear about what you want to do." This mentality moulded Toto into who she is today.



## ACTIVITIES

### Diocesan Graduate Singers Recording Concert

#### 《萃韻傳情》錄影音樂會

After a long break of almost a year, the Diocesan Graduate Singers finally managed to resume rehearsal in August 2021 and successfully completed their recording concert project in November. This is the group's first ever recording concert and also their first time singing a full Chinese repertoire. The theme of the concert 《萃韻傳情》 incorporated four types of affection – 愉悅之情, 不捨之情, 慨嘆之情 and 懷念之情. The selection of 11 Chinese songs, including 踏雪尋梅, 問鶯燕 and 杜鵑花, were composed by three Chinese composers – 黃自, 黃友棣 and 黃永熙. Under the baton of Mrs. Christina Chiang, over 40 choir members performed the melodious pieces in the form of full chorus, ensemble group and solos at the DGS School Auditorium. The recording concert will be released in Jan 2022.



### Art Club Ribbon Hair Clip Workshop

The Art Club hosted an online workshop on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021 to make Christmas hair clips and school colour ribbon hair clips. All participants were provided with a set of materials prior to the session. Our alumna instructor, Winnie Sze (class of 2004), explained the usage of those materials and patiently guided the attendees to create colourful festive hair clips for the holiday season.

### Congratulations

Congratulations to Professor Vivian Wing-Wah Yam (Class of 1980) for winning the 2022 American Chemical Society (ACS) National Award - the 2022 Josef Michl ACS award in Photochemistry, which is presented to her for achieving outstanding research in fundamental photochemistry. As an elected member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (2001) and Fellow of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) (2006), Vivian's contribution to her field has won her numerous accolades throughout the years, including the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) Centenary Medal (2005/6), RSC Ludwig Mond Award (2015), L'Oréal-UNESCO Women in Science Award (2011) and many more. Vivian is currently the Dean of Science (Interim) and Philip Wong Wilson Wong Professor in Chemistry and Energy at the University of Hong Kong.



### Dr. CJ Symons Scholarship 2021

DOGA is happy to announce that Katrina Liu Tin Nam has been awarded the Dr. CJ Symons Scholarship for 2021. The scholarship, which amounts to HK\$160,000, will go towards her study in Computer Science at the University of Pennsylvania in the US. Congratulations! We wish Katrina every success in her future endeavours.