



IN TIME WITH

ROLEX

BY GODFREY ROBERT
I AM ALWAYS COMPETITIVE, WHETHER IT IS SOCIAL OR BUSINESS GOLF

ADPLANET GROUP BOSS TAN IS A MULTI-TITLE WINNER WHO LOVES THE CHALLENGES ON COURSE



Adrian Tan, 64, is a busy man who runs an advertising agency. But the affable hardworking personality always finds time to play golf with his friends and business associates.

A winner of many local golf titles, he has also shone in football and squash in his younger days. Here, he also talks about how he has overcome his dyslexia and ADHD to present himself as a true sportsman.

How did you get started in golf, and how were your early experiences?

Tan: In the 80s, golf was a bit of an elitist game. Not so much as the game itself but to play golf, you needed to be a member of a golf club.

I was one of the earliest to join Singapore Island Country Club when its memberships became transferable in 1991.

I was drawn by the chemistry of golf. It has all the ticks for me. It's the perfect therapeutic escape for me to be one with nature. After the first drive you are away from the noise of commerce and the city.

The challenge of becoming a single handicapper intrigues and became an obsession for me. I have never seen golf as a recreational sport but as a competitive game.

The game also challenges two of my issues which I find very satisfying.

Being dyslexic, I am constantly having to meet one of the most important demands of the game. Alignment.

For me left is right and right is sometimes left, which often leaves me in a completely confused state. For example, I can see that it's clearly a downhill putt but I am wired as an uphill one.

As for my ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), I am completely distracted. My mind is like

a big satellite dish capturing all the decibels in the golf course. To stay focused is a huge issue.

But I just love the challenges that this wonderful game of golf present to me. I can't change that I am dyslexic nor can I change being ADHD.

But I learn to negotiate, adapt and overcome these issues through compensation strategies which have worked for me so that I can play golf competitively.

My early experiences: Golf is a game that offers many life's lessons.

The No. 1 lesson is about honesty. It offers so many occasions that one can cheat, be it an undeclared air shot, a lost ball, moving the ball to a preferred lie, or declaring a stroke or two fewer than it should. Golf reveals you, so better to have a good reputation than to win the wager always.

The game also teaches you courtesy and to be con-

siderate. Play only when it's your turn and always be aware that there are other golfers around you beyond your flight mates.

From my first romance with golf, it is all about golf as a sport to be excelled. I can't stand the game being recreational. As I see it as a sport, I hate losing.

When I first started, unlike many, I was in no hurry for my first round of golf. I was very convinced that the only way to enjoy golf was to have the basics of the golf swings well honed.

Did you play other sports in school? If so, up to what level?

I didn't just read the Ben Hogan's 5 fundamentals of Golf, I studied it. And I was at the range practising that basic Hogan's swing for three months before I went for my first round of golf.

adrenalin and testosterone surges in competitions. It's hi octane!

Football was my first passion. I was a member of the St Joseph's Institution team that won the National championship.

As a schoolboy, I was recruited to play football for the Singapore Cricket Club team in the National Second Division League. An anterior cruciate tear on my right knee put an end to my football career and I took up squash and tennis.

At squash, I was the University of Toronto's champion in 1980. For tennis, once I captained the Singapore Island Country Club team that became national champions in the B Division.

How often do you play these days? What is your handicap and what was the lowest you have been?

I used to clock in for five rounds of 9 holes plus a

round of 18 weekly. Today it's more like two rounds of 18 a week. The lowest handicap I have been was 6.8. Today, officially it's 8.1 but I am playing more like an 18 and that too if I am lucky.

Any memorable events in golf?

When a brief from my client, Jaguar Cars, came to us that they wanted to deep dive into the golf fraternity, we told them they were rather late as Mercedes and BMW were the early movers in this space and hence have some dominance.

Our advertising agency thought about it and went back to them with the creative block-buster idea of having a Jaguar Golf Marathon, a 54-hole-a-day golf tournament. A first in Singapore!

Three rounds of 18 holes back to back. It was held at the Orchid Country Club as they have night golf. I recalled being in the last flight

and I had a birdie on the 54th hole at 2.15 in the morning.

The Jaguar Golf tournament was a big hit and carried on for four more years.

I look forward to do another Golf Marathon post Covid.

Apart from two "Green Jackets" from Singapore Press Holdings events, what other major victories have you achieved?

Apart from winning the Business Times Golf in 1990 and the SPH Golf Challenge in 2009, I won some fringe events which are really too insignificant to chest-thump about.

I was the Tanglin Club champion in 2010. I was a member of the SICC team that finished national champions for the Senior Division. I have won all the A, B, and C Division medals in SICC championships and was the winner for the SICC's 300 Club Championship.

Who is your favourite golfer?

My favourite all-time golfer is Fred Couples. His swing is sheer poetry in motion. I like Gary Player who I played with a couple of times through the invitation of a bank and my good pal Edmund Koh.

Once at a post-game reception, Player announced that I was the pretty boy because of my red pants.

In the game I gave him a run for his money, he gave me 18 strokes though.

He is truly such a fine gentleman. I remember him saying to me that he does 500 sit-ups a day.

Which is your favourite course (here and abroad) and why?

Two golf courses have my vote.

One, The Commonwealth Golf Club in Melbourne. It is truly a no-fuss, very traditional golf club. I played in the medals there a few times and the wagers among all golfers is but A\$1 and the winner got a sleeve of balls.

Two, The Old Course at The Hong Kong Club. I love it for its heritage and as a very traditional old golf



Tan's tee-off to glory.

course. The club atmosphere is a bit snooty but sophisticated. And they serve the best won-ton noodles soup.

I also enjoyed the Capital Club in Melbourne for its sheer indulgence of serving you lobster noodles after 9 holes and a golf pro as your caddie. Having only up to five flights a day, the course was, of course, immaculate.

Once I had the privilege of playing at the very exclusive Ayuthaya Links in Thailand which I must rate as the most manicured golf course I have ever played on.

The Red Mountain Golf Course in Phuket with the three-storey high drop at hole 17, par-3 is spectacular.

Back home, Sentosa's Serapong posts an awesome golf challenge and for my home club, SICC, I like the Old course best.

I tend to lean towards golf courses that are very traditional and old. Just like wines, I prefer the old world wines. The old Bukit and Sime courses are very special because they are courses carved out of a jungle. The one with nature is pure, the eco system is organic and established.

The new golf courses are but about building the

courses first and then putting in the landscape and the trees. It is very much like posturing Singapore more as a City in the Garden rather than a Garden in the City.

Given a chance to play with three other players in a flight, who would you choose as your flightmates, and why?

I have three groups of regulars with about 20 golfers in each group. I enjoy playing with them as our handicaps are established and the challenge is fair. I hate to gamble but I really like a wager.

As for a fairy-tale flight, I would like the South Korean LPGA golfer Chun In Gee for her very classic golf swing, Fred Couples for the most beautiful golf swing in the world and my wife Shook Wah, who I still have not convinced to take up golf.

Any holes-in-one?

No plural but at least a claim in the singular. It was on the 9th hole of the original New Course in SICC. This hole has since gone after they reconstructed the New Course.

However, I was in at least six flights, when one of my flight mates has had a hole-in-one.



The friendly foursome of (from left) Adrian Tan, Woon Whai Pang, Prof S. Jayakumar and Tracey Woon.

I recall Bill Fung, having played 33 years of pro golf, had his first ace with me at the Sime Course. Two weeks later, again with me, he had his second at the Bukit Course.

Golf is said to be good for networking and business. Do you agree?

Golf is great for networking and business. You have six hours to song-and-dance with your business associates.

However, I have always believed that business should be done more because we bring value to each other's tables.

It is great to initiate the business, but business is business. We must intrinsically enhance each other's equity. Anyway, I do not play diplomatic golf. Even in business golf, I play to win no less and take the wager when I can, intensely, because that's the spirit of competitive sports.

I must relate to you this description when a boss chastised his staff for playing too much golf with business associates.

He said: "What business networking? At the tee box you do not talk when you tee-off. He will hook and you will slice and you go to your separate sides of the fairway. You both end up at the greens and you can't talk when you putt. And this is repeated for the next 17 holes."

If so, do you use it for your company business and client build-up. Can you also give a small description about your company?

Golf is a culture. Besides the round of 18 holes, the

after-game camaraderie built is priceless. It's great for friendship and bonding. Golf bantering in the most witty and sophisticated way is a potent lead generator for business and networking opportunities.

However, I always believe that as for business, it's all about work and more good work for each other that counts.

My company, Adplanet Group, has been around for more than three decades. The charter of the agency was to showcase that local talents can be movers and shakers in the world of advertising.

Some of the fabulous talents that have gone through our conduit have been winners of all the major Oscars in the industry. For more than two decades we have built the Group to be the largest local independent ad agency in Singapore. Today, we have streamlined to just six agencies in the Group.

I am an ardent student on the Law of Diminishing Returns in Economics and the Law of Darwinism has taught me that everything has a product life cycle.

The digitalisation of all things has brought about seismic changes. Consumer behaviour is changed forever. Product life cycle is shortened dramatically.

Technology must be seen as your closest friend and one has to be nimble, fast, flexible, and having the dare to change and see round the corners to catch the new growth curves.

We are going into the new abnormal. Covid-19 can be seen to present many opportunities. We must set up traps to catch them.

Photos: Thum Sook Wai

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