

Elsa Suen of Fanling Rhenish Church Secondary School is all set to be Hong Kong's next volleyball star

Dedication, superb hand-eye coordination, and good ball skills have helped the teenager excel in the sport she loves

By Andrew McNicol | April 30, 2017

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Elsa Suen is a key member of her school's volleyball team.
Photos: FRCSS

To be the ultimate setter in volleyball, you need superb hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness and flexibility. Elsa Suen Yee-tung has all of these, and she's only getting started.

The 16-year-old student from Fanling Rhenish Church Secondary School represented the Hong Kong Girls' Youth Volleyball 2nd team at the 2016-17 Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong Inter-port Volleyball Competition held in Hong Kong earlier this year. But preparing for it was no walk in the park, Elsa says. "The fitness training leading up to it was a nightmare. There was one session where we had to run 4,000 metres," she adds.

Putting in the hours was worth it, however. "We felt drained, but relaxed in some ways, a feeling that comes when you have tried your very best over a long period of time," she says. Her team ended up in fourth place overall.

Elsa was exposed to volleyball at a very young age as she and her friends used to sit on the sidelines near her school tuck shop and watch the older players in action. It wasn't until Primary Six that she took volleyball seriously – and she was soon recruited to the North District team. “I was only 1.4 metres tall at the time, but I was selected because of my remarkable game sense. I always know where the ball is going to land, and whether or not it will stay inside the lines,” she explains.

Her sharp eye has helped her become a vital member of her secondary school team. “My position is usually as setter. I am good at controlling the ball and setting up other players,” Elsa says. Her flexibility and balance help a lot, too. Her school is obsessed with volleyball and her coaches, Dick Lok and Christina Au, are very supportive of her development. “I can't count how many hours we have spent together!” she said.

Elsa's greatest achievement so far was competing in the 2015 National Youth Games in Fuzhou, Fujian province. Mainland teams often dominate the volleyball scene so it was a step up for Elsa and her teammates. “We knew it wouldn't be easy. However, we managed to beat three teams in the tournament,” she says proudly.

Their recipe for success? Teamwork! “I am so close to my teammates; we don't even need to talk to understand our next move – we just look at each other and use hand motions,” Elsa says.

Outside the court, Elsa likes to catch up with friends and teammates over a delicious dinner. However, she is currently busy with school assignments and preparing for her upcoming exams.

“The biggest challenge is time management and controlling emotions,” says Elsa, who travels from Sheung Shui to Prince Edward for training. “You need to be able to come back to school and focus, even if you have just lost an important match. I'm slowly getting used to it

Fortunately, dedication isn't an issue for Elsa, because she is playing a sport she loves. Her ultimate goal is to be involved in volleyball full-time, and she has already set her sights on studying physical education at university. She looks up to volleyball powerhouses China and Japan, and dreams of playing them one day. "I would love to see these two teams compete in a tournament where Hong Kong is also represented," she emphasises.

Elsa also wants to take part in the Asian Games, and although there's a lot of work to be done, she knows what she is doing. "I'm learning how to play smart and stay healthy while I'm young," she says.



Elsa Suen keeps her eye on the ball to set her teammates up for a Fanling Rhenish Church Secondary School attack.

Photos: FRCSS

Bench notes

What song best describes you when you're playing volleyball?

Fun by Troye Sivan

If you could have the abilities of any animal during a competition, which would you choose and why?

I'd like to be a quiet housecat. They don't need much care or attention, but they're ready to pounce when the time is right!

Do you have a favourite food that you eat as you prepare for a big game?

I sometimes eat chocolate before a big game. I do this exactly 60 minutes before the game begins. I find it gives me tremendous energy.

Which fictional character would you choose as your teammate?

I would choose Shouyou Hinata [a volleyball player in the popular Japanese manga series *Haikyu!!*] because his enthusiasm and attacking style are worth emulating.

Ten years into the future, you are a famous athlete. What company would you like to be a spokesperson for, and what product would you promote?

I like Asics because they make a lot of innovative products for volleyball players. My volleyball equipment is 100 per cent Asics, so it would be awesome to get all of my Asics gear for free!

Edited by M. J. Premaratne

This article appeared in the Young Post print edition as "Stage is all set for tireless Elsa "