

Chen, J. (2017). *Lukas Menkhoff PO '21 is Making a Splash for Sagehen Swimming*. *The Student Life*. Retrieved 29 November 2017, from <http://tsl.news/sports/7056/>



Lukas Menkhoff PO '21 is Making a Splash for Sagehen Swimming

Jacinta Chen | Nov. 2, 2017, 9:36 p.m.

Just four weeks into the Sagehen swimming season, Lukas Ming Menkhoff PO '21 is already making waves. As a former member of Singapore's national team and military, he is no stranger to managing a busy schedule with intensive training – in this case, seven to eight times a week.

Last Friday, he raced in four events against Division II Cal Baptist University, where he cruised to first place by 0.41 seconds in the 100 meter freestyle and finished second in the 100 meter breaststroke 0.3 seconds behind CBU's top performer. In the 400 meter medley and freestyle relays, he swam as a part of Pomona-Pitzer's A relay team, placing second in both events.

During Saturday's meet against La Verne, Menkhoff placed first in the 100 breaststroke, 2.95 seconds ahead of teammate Samuel To PO '18, and also won the 100 IM event, with teammate Nikhil Kundu PO '21 trailing behind by 0.28 seconds.

Beyond swimming, Menkhoff's passions extend to music. He plays five instruments: guitar, trumpet, drums, piano, and bass. He is interested in cartography and British military history, dabbles in photography, explores the design process of music videos and album art, and loves “mentoring, coaching, and inspiring” others when he has the chance.

In Singapore, Menkhoff started swimming at age 12. He notes that this was fairly late, since most Singaporean swimmers begin at age six. “I was like most swimmers in their humble beginnings – just learning how to swim for the sake of water safety,” he said.

Menkhoff's coach noticed how quickly he was improving, and pushed him to join his club team's senior squad. By the time he was 14, he qualified for Singapore's national team for the 50, 100, and 200 meter freestyle events and represented the nation in various regional championships. “From that point on, my swimming career was set in motion and it has been an interesting journey ever since,” he said.

Through the years, Menkhoff said that swimming has provided him with a deep sense of achievement and discipline. “It’s beautiful really. You train, compete, learn from your mistakes and work towards a new goal each time. Once that is fulfilled, the process repeats itself. I thoroughly enjoy this ability, and it gives me a great sense of fulfillment. For me, this is what keeps me going,” he said.

While attending United World College in Singapore, Menkhoff said he represented his high school with much success, and became the most bemedaled athlete in the South East Asian Student Activities Conference (SEASAC).

Even so, Menkhoff added that he “was first and foremost a club and national swimmer,” and had a multitude of opportunities to travel to locations such as Moscow, Berlin, Stockholm, Beijing, Dubai, and Doha to compete for his nation. During his eight years as an international swimming competitor, he raced fourteen times in several events at the FINA World Swimming Cup, swimming’s equivalent of football’s FIFA and basketball’s FIBA. There were many close calls: Menkhoff missed qualifying for the 2010 Commonwealth Games by a mere 0.01 seconds in the 4 by 200 meter freestyle relay.

Though Menkhoff was constitutionally required to enlist in the Singaporean military, his initial enlistment date fell six months after his graduation date from high school and he realized that his service term would end after the standard fall intake period for universities. Up against tough odds, he appealed to defer his enlistment to “train full-time” and was grateful to be one of four swimmers deferred from national service for the first time in many years.

He spent a full year training at what he considered “the highest level [he] had ever done.” After trying to qualify for the South East Asian Games, his new enlistment date arrived in May 2015, and he “went through basic military training, followed by seven months of leadership training in the Specialist Cadet School,” eventually graduating with a sergeant’s rank.

Normally, soldiers in the Singapore military cannot leave their camps Monday through Friday. As an Infantry Subject Matter Expert on an isolated island off the coast of Singapore, Menkhoff worked with his superiors so that he would be able “to train and dutifully serve [his] nation in the military” during his second year of national service. He said that his superiors ultimately granted him the privilege to leave the camp daily to train.

Even with the challenge of balancing his service and swimming commitments, Menkhoff made a strong comeback in March this year. “I surprised myself by coming back really quickly, despite not being able to training full-time for nearly two years, hitting some personal best times.” Though the acclimation period was “rough,” Menkhoff said he was still “extremely grateful” for the support of his coaches and military commanders.

After taking nearly three years off after high school, Menkhoff wanted to study in the UK, but was reminded of the “value of a US education” by his cousins and chose to explore his options in the United States.

On his first stop of college tours in the summer of 2016, Menkhoff visited Pomona, where he said he gained extensive knowledge about American higher education and swimming through his interactions with Head Coach Jean-Paul Gowdy and various members of the P-P team.

In search of the right fit, Menkhoff considered everything from “course offerings to financial challenges, employment prospects, proximity to family, the environment, interactions with coaches, and even [his] NCAA eligibility concerns for Division I programs.” Ultimately, Menkhoff felt that “Pomona checked all the boxes,” and later applied under early decision.

While transitioning to college competition, Menkhoff has also seen how different swimming is in the United States compared to Singapore. “It’s a fresh perspective. Everything’s different in every way, and I’m thoroughly enjoying it and am really looking forward to the next four years,” he said.

After experiencing his first three meets as a Sagehen, Menkhoff is excited about what the team has already accomplished, and is hopeful for the remainder of the season.

“I’m so incredibly proud of the team, especially to see the team swimming this quick just three, four weeks into the season,” he said. With the difficult task of handling both the mental and physical aspects of sports with academics the past few weeks, Menkhoff felt that “everyone took on their challenges head on and still swam with their hearts out,” with several swimmers rounding out the weekend with personal best times.

“Personally for this first season, I want to be the best team player and all-round student-athlete that I can be and as we go through the season, hopefully aim for a national title in March, whilst continuing to put in a hundred and ten percent into every meet,” Menkhoff added.

Since P-P lost the SCIAC title to its CMS rival by just eight points last year, Menkhoff hopes that he, along with P-P’s new group of first-year swimmers, “will help elevate [the team] to the level of other top Division III programs.” With their team’s results from this season in mind, Menkhoff said, “I believe that we’re going to be scoring high this year. I have the utmost belief in every member of the team. I can’t wait to see what we can do.”

With a strong focus on race preparation, recovery, and nutrition, Menkhoff looks forward to drawing from his own experience and imparting his knowledge and personal values on P-P’s team in the next four years. “I realize too that I will be seven years older than the freshman by the time I am senior,” he said. “Despite this, I hope that I will still be able to be in a position to continue mentoring and coaching swimmers when that time comes.”