



# TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

**Husband-wife Arthur Tong and Elaine Young's successful coach-athlete relationship has resulted in stellar personal and professional achievements**

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**It might be a bit hard to believe that in the past, you were more likely to find two-time Ironman World Championship qualifier Elaine Young in the library than out for a run.**

"Sports wasn't encouraged or endorsed by my parents as something I should be spending my time on. Academics was prioritised instead, which was fine with me since I loved to read and study," said the 32-year-old international tax advisor who was born and bred in Canada.

Her fitness journey started in university, when she picked up running as a way to stay healthy. "I did

some running on my own just to keep fit. I enjoyed this because unlike team sports, I didn't feel like anyone was counting on me or watching me. It was also easy to do without knowing much about anything – you just need a pair of shoes!" she said.

After graduating from University of British Columbia with a Bachelor of commerce specialising in accounting, Elaine started work as an international tax advisor with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) in Canada. During this time, she was running about two times a week leisurely.

It was only when she decided to relocate to Singapore to be with her husband Arthur Tong that her triathlon quest began. They maintained a long-distance relationship between Canada and Singapore for six years before Elaine moved to Singapore, with an internal transfer in PWC.

Arthur had just started doing triathlons and signed Elaine up for fun so they could do it together. "Triathlon wasn't something I knew very much about but I knew it was something he was

getting into in Singapore. At the time I was only a recreational runner living in Canada and wasn't what I would call fit. I participated in running races here and there if it was convenient or if others were doing it, but by no means was I a cyclist or a swimmer," Elaine shared.

"However, I am generally a curious person and enjoy challenges so part of me wondered whether I could do something like that, despite how scary it seemed at the time!"

Without a bike or knowing how to swim, Elaine took the plunge anyway. Arriving in August

2012, Arthur signed her up for the Singapore International Triathlon (sprint distance) in September, which meant she only had a month to get up to speed. He bought her a bike and taught her how to swim in her hotel pool – and she did it.

Despite such a short period of training, Elaine clocked a time of 1:35:42 for the sprint and that was the point where Arthur recognised the talent in her. From there, the both of them progressively fell in love with the challenge that the sport gave and continued this multisport adventure.





"When we first started training, Elaine would get frustrated and cry because she wasn't able to swim freestyle properly or she would get dropped when she rode with the boys. But she kept working hard and now we boys get dropped by her!" said Arthur, 32, a full-time triathlon coach.

With his guidance, Elaine has racked up numerous age group wins in Ironman and Ironman 70.3 races, as well as qualified for the Ironman 70.3 World Championship several times and twice for the prestigious Ironman World Championship in Kona.

They did their first Ironman 70.3 race together at Canberra in 2013, after doing local races for nearly two years. Taking seven hours over to complete the race, they didn't realise the demands of racing and preparing for an endurance race. Accepting the challenge, they went back to review their training and try different methods.

"You can say Elaine was sort of like my guinea

pig. We did a lot of trial and error – downloading training plans, making adjustments and penning them into excel sheets to fit our schedule. We tried several online training templates but it wasn't tailored to us," Arthur explained.

"The key turning point came when I attended a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Combat Fitness Trainer course in 2017

and it exposed me to even deeper knowledge about personal training. It opened my eyes up to periodisation and individualised training.

From 2017, Arthur wrote custom training plans for Elaine and that was when she had a breakthrough. At the Ironman Korea 2017 in Gurye, Elaine won her age group (30-34 years old) and qualified for the Ironman World Championship 2018.

At the recent Ironman Malaysia 2019, Elaine came in second in her age group and managed to once again qualify for the Ironman World Championship 2020.

"There is a difference between completing and competing in triathlon and Arthur has really brought me to the next level with his knowledge and experience. Of course, while he gives me the guidelines and framework, the work and dedication I have had to put in as an athlete in order to get there has

been equally important," said Elaine.

Having your husband as your coach can get tricky sometimes, but Arthur and Elaine have learnt how to balance the coach-athlete relationship well.

"I love having my husband as my coach! I have someone I trust to consult anytime of the day, someone who knows me, understands what makes me tick, what I'm capable of, knows when I'm at wits' end and need to focus on other things other than training, someone who does what he can to help me sort out life things so I can train, and builds my training plan knowing all of that," Elaine enthused.

"However, sometimes I hate my coach, because he pushes me when I don't feel like it, but unfortunately he happens to be my husband. Also, I can't complain about my husband to my coach or about my coach to my husband!"





### The Husband-Coach: Arthur Tong

Born in Hong Kong, Arthur Tong moved to Singapore with his family at the age of four and got into competitive swimming at a young age. He later swam for the SAF Sports Association and Ministry of Defence swim teams during his years of service.

Arthur left for Vancouver, Canada for his secondary school education and that was where he met Elaine Young – at the age of 15. “I was a high jumper so I was on the track and field team, as vice-captain, and she was the manager of the team, that’s how we got to know each other. We became friends and we hung out a lot as a group, going snowboarding together for example,” Arthur recalled.

Then he received his enlistment letter and returned to Singapore for National Service after he completed Grade 12, at 18 years old. “I fell in love with the purpose of being in uniform and I chose to sign on as an army regular. I was then offered an SAF scholarship, so I headed to Australia to pursue my engineering degree next,” he said.

Coincidentally, Elaine also went to Australia for a university exchange programme and that was how they met up again – and that was also when they officially became an item.

They spent the next six years in a long distance relationship, seeing each other only once a year. Arthur returned to Singapore in 2010 after graduating from university, but he got busy doing his combat tours. Finally in 2012, Elaine made the big shift to Singapore and they got married two years later.

In the force, Arthur’s key role was to prepare soldiers to be operationally ready. “I realised there are a lot of similarities between soldiering and triathlon. Both are performance driven and focuses a lot on physical and psychological aspects,” Arthur explained.

Hence, he was able to take his experience in training soldiers and apply it to coaching Elaine. “My initial knowledge came from reading many triathlon and coaching books. While people were looking at the latest equipment, I would be flipping through coaches’ advice and tips, training methodologies and how old training methods got debunked. Then I read up on a lot on sports science and attended courses,” he shared.

In late 2017, after Elaine achieved her breakthrough and qualified for the Ironman World Championship for the first time, the thought of becoming a full-time coach crossed Arthur’s mind.

“I have a love for triathlon and have established a decent foundation in coaching being in the army for over

a decade, so I started to seriously consider becoming a full-time triathlon coach. It’s applying a different set of technical knowledge, however the foundation of coaching remains largely similar.”

Taking a leap of faith, Arthur fulfilled his calling and decided to pursue his passion in a sport he loved so much and Elevate Performance Coaching was eventually established in March 2019.

Within a year, Arthur has built a team of wide-ranging athletes from Ironman and 70.3 Ironman World Championship qualifiers, special needs (visually, hearing, intellectually challenged) athletes, all the way to master athletes such as a 65-year-old competing in her first triathlon.

“For me it’s important that I’m not just a trainer who churns out training plans or conducts tough training sessions, but a trusted partner to my athletes, someone who invests in their personal journey and ambitions.

“I believe it is my responsibility to share relevant knowledge, provide meaningful

guidance and tough training, taking into consideration each athlete’s ability and personal commitments – hence the name Elevate Performance Coaching.

Believing that ‘more is not more’ when training for an endurance sport like the Ironman, Arthur realised that too many age group athletes validate their success in endurance sports solely by training volume and hours.

He observed that many took what the professionals were doing, watered it down and applied it to their own training without considering other factors in life.

Hoping to change that, Arthur adopts a train-smart approach, where it is necessary to have a well-developed training plan tailored to each individual’s needs.

As for coaching his wife, Arthur absolutely loves it. “Elaine is an easy athlete to coach – she is self-motivated and disciplined. It’s great that I’m her husband too, so advice from me is readily available and she can turn to me for help anytime!” <sup>®</sup>

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Arthur Tong,  
Founder of Elevate Performance Coaching

