

Interviewing Lim Jeck

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Interviewing the established top in the world of his age at Mathematics might not be as intimidating a task as one had thought. Although sometimes you do wonder if his attentions are on complicated, unfathomable problems rather than this particular conversation.

I flip through my notes, smile and begin. A simple question, just to get him warmed up. “So, do you enjoy solving math problems?”

“...Maybe.”

Attentions most probably elsewhere. Then again, the noncommittal response is his answer to most questions, so I forge on.

Fortunately as the questions go on Lim Jeck (17) gets slightly more comfortable. It’s as much as I’m going to be able to get, given that it was an uphill task getting him to agree to the interview in the first place. But for one who has made the national team thrice and won two gold, one silver and one bronze medals in the last four IMO competitions, this is probably one out of the many interviews which he has had to do since his achievements on the world stage have brought pride to his school and country. Even before the 2009 IMO Lim Jeck has taken part in numerous math competitions and emerged at the top for most of them, dating back to his Perfect Score and First Place in the 2006 American Math Competition 8 (AMC8). From his father I glean that this talent in numbers was discovered pretty early, when he found it quite easy to score full marks in Math exams and top his level for the subject.

His passion, however, lies much more in mind-boggling mathematical puzzles, especially those of his favourite subjects, Geometry and Combinatorics. When staying in hostel it would not be unusual for his roommate to find him come back from lessons, draw a complicated diagram that represented a problem, and not move until the solution comes to him in a flash of brilliance or minutes of gesturing. He also trawls Art of Problem Solving, an online forum where top minds in Olympiad maths worldwide gather, and occasionally posts problems of his own. His identity as the top IMO scorer has led many math enthusiasts to dissect his solutions to various conundrums online, seeking to know how his brilliant mind works.

To get selected for the national training team, he first had to ace the Singapore Mathematical Olympiad, a task which was quite simple for him. Together with the 20 other members in the team, he was then subjected to another round of selection tests before he emerged among the best six chosen to represent the country. It was only then that their intense preparation started. Beginning with weekly three-hour maths practice sessions on Saturdays at the National University of Singapore in September 2011, it culminated in an intensive two-week training camp in June.

To date Lim Jeck has won more than 50 medals, awards and accolades in just as many contests—and not just Mathematics competitions but also national level competitions in Physics and Informatics. Even the historic achievement of triumphing over 547 of the world’s brightest pre-university level students from 100 countries is not enough for him, as he seeks to take part in next year’s Olympiad, the last that he will qualify for.



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His life is not all about math and competitions, however. The teenager is a great fan of many computer games, especially JuBeat and osu!. Both games are based on tapping a screen in time with rhythmic music to score points, and the quick-paced nature of the games give the player a good workout with finger reflexes. The need for spatial recognition and some memory work means that Lim Jeck excels at and thoroughly enjoys games like these. His other hobbies include reading and watching anime, and solving jigsaw puzzles.

When asked what his future plan for himself was in university, with reference to the fact that he was, already, taking two undergraduate math modules in NUS—Complex Analysis (S) and Probability, he is silent. It takes some time before he reveals that the modules are really quite easy for him—not entirely a shock, even with the fact that (S) means that the module of a much higher level than the “normal” Complex Analysis. He still plans to make Math and Computing, two of his greatest interests, as part of his career, though, and I end the interview by wishing him all the best.

Major Mathematical Competitions Lim Jeck has taken part in.

Year	Competition	Awards/Ranking
2006	AMC 8	Ranked 1st
2007	SMO (Junior/Open)	Ranked 8th
2008	SMO (Junior)	Ranked 6th
2009	SMO (Junior/Open)	Ranked 1st / 5th (resp.)
2009	IMO	Bronze
2010	APMO	Bronze
2010	CMO	Bronze
2010	CWMO	Gold
2010	SMO (Senior/Open)	Ranked 8th (both sections)
2010	IMO	Silver
2011	APMO	Gold
2011	SMO (Senior/Open)	Ranked 1st (both sections)
2011	IMO	Gold (ranked 2nd)
2012	APMO	Silver
2012	SMO (Open)	Ranked 1st
2012	IMO	Gold (ranked 1st)

AMC 8: American Mathematics Contest 8
APMO: Asian Pacific Mathematical Olympiad
CMO: China Mathematical Olympiad
CWMO: China Western Mathematical Olympiad
SMO: Singapore Mathematical Olympiad
IMO: International Mathematical Olympiad



At SMS Annual Prize Presentation 2012, with Ms Ho Peng, Director-General of Education

The author and interviewer is a student journalist at the NUS High School of Mathematics and Sciences.

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