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## Top of Her Game: Mei Sian Tan on why 5am is her “golden time”, the role sport plays in achieving mental clarity and what the Olympics means to her

By Rachel Duffell | Jul 01, 2024



**COVER** Mei Sian Tan currently practises CrossFit and Brazilian jiu-jitsu

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*front & female*

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**Studies have shown that the majority of women in C-suite positions play or have a background in sport. Mei Sian Tan, deputy**

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group CEO of IGB Berhad, talks about her sporting pursuits and their impact personally and professionally

Support can lead to success on the global stage, but this is not limited to the pitch, field, court or track—having a sporting background has the potential to lead to business success too.

Studies have shown that the vast majority—more than 90 per cent, according to a study by consultants EY and women’s sports platform espnW—of women in C-suite positions played sport. Taking up sport later in life can also have a positive impact professionally.

To tie in with Paris 2024, our limited series [Top of Her Game](#) sees women currently or formerly in C-suite positions in a range of industries discuss their sporting journeys, the role of sport in their lives, and why they would encourage other women and girls to pursue sport. Here, Mei Sian Tan, deputy group CEO of publicly-listed Malaysian property company IGB Berhad, opens up.

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## **Have you always been interested in sport or did it come later? What's your sporting journey?**

I've always been interested in sport. My sporting journey started with swimming and playing badminton for Oundle School in Northamptonshire in the UK. I was asked to play badminton for the 1st pair in the Boys' 1st team and to captain the school team.

In university at the London School of Economics (LSE) I was then asked to captain the Women's 1st Badminton Team, be the LSE Badminton Club Captain, as well as to join the Women's 1st Squash Team. We also got to the British University Sporting Association (BUSA) badminton championships in Bath in my final year. These formed the foundation for my love of sport even though I practise very different sports now.

## **What are your current sports of choice?**

My current sports of choice are CrossFit and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I enjoy CrossFit for its aim to develop and improve general physical preparedness, or the ability to be prepared to tackle any physical situation you might encounter. In the past I even used to coach CrossFit. Now, I enjoy it as a time-efficient way to work out in the mornings.

The other sport I currently enjoy learning about is Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I enjoy the strategic aspects of the sport, for example, if my opponent does this, I will do this next, as well as the technical aspects, for example, the use of leverage or using someone's momentum to your advantage in fighting someone bigger and heavier than you are.

## **Do you prefer individual or team sports and why?**

I used to enjoy team sports more especially in school and in university as a great way to get to know people and build camaraderie. Now, I prefer more individual sports as I find it more time efficient to get a good workout and also I enjoy the time to be with myself.

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- Mei Sian Tan -

**When/how often and where do you do sport?**

I wake up at 5am to do CrossFit three to four times a week and I do Brazilian jiu-jitsu over the weekends. 5am is my golden time as there are no distractions or interruptions so it can fully be my time. I feel completely energised afterwards and ready to seize the day.

**How do you make sure you fit sport into your schedule? Any tips or strategies on how to do so as a busy executive?**

Waking up before anyone else gets up means I can fit sport into my schedule even if I have a busy day of meetings ahead. A tip I would give is to schedule workouts into the calendar even if it is just for 30 minutes a day and to be consistent. A good first target would be to do some activity, even if it is just walking, for 30 minutes a day and to try doing that for 30 days and then build on that.

**How has/does sport help you personally and professionally?**

Sport helps keep me physically and mentally fit, and gives me clarity of thought in what I do both personally and professionally. As they say, “A healthy mind in a healthy body.”

**Do you have a proudest sporting moment or achievement?**

My proudest sporting moment would be being awarded the sports team of the year trophy in university amongst all the other sports at the LSE. I will always be grateful to the team for such an achievement.

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**Why do you think people who play sport are more likely to achieve in the workplace and how do you think sport has contributed to your journey to CEO?**

I think people who play sport are more likely to achieve in the workplace as sport helps build grit and discipline. I feel sport has contributed to my journey as Deputy Group CEO of IGB Berhad by keeping me mentally and physically sharp, thereby giving me clarity of thought in what I do. I feel for both work and sport it's important to have a clear vision and be consistent in putting in the hard work doing the right things.

**Why would you encourage girls and women to take up sport?**

I find a lot of women always prioritise those around them and focus on themselves last. I would encourage girls and women to take up sport so that they also focus on and love themselves. To all the girls and women out there, I would say: Believe in yourself and your abilities, cultivate a strong support network, and continuously seek opportunities for growth and development. Embrace challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, and never stop learning.

**What are you most excited about for Paris 2024?**

I am most excited about Paris 2024 as it is an event that unites the world and will be the first Olympics with physical spectators since the Covid-19 pandemic. I find the Olympics a special time as people can put aside their differences and focus on doing their best through sport. It's a great reminder to us all to celebrate diversity and come together as humanity.