



Lin Xinyi

Athletes hate to lose, and Ronald Susilo is no different.

But it was the one loss he suffered outside the badminton court that remains his most painful.

Susilo, who announced last week that he would retire from the national team in March, told The Sunday Times that the months following his split with ex-fiancee Li Jiawei in January 2008 were his darkest.

Almost every day for two months, the Indonesia-born shuttler would hole himself up in his room at the Singapore Sports School hostel and cry.

"I was quite depressed and it possibly affected my badminton," he said. "During training I would lose my temper easily and I couldn't concentrate much."

Beijing-born national paddler Li and Susilo became Singapore's most famous sports couple when they started dating after the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

But the language barrier, as well as cultural and personality differences, eventually took their toll on the relationship.

Li spoke mostly Mandarin and little English while Susilo could communicate with her only in English and hanyu pinyin.

Their break-up was much publicised after it threatened to turn into a legal dispute over money issues, as they had shared a car and an apartment.

Susilo, 30, admitted that he even thought of returning to his native Indonesia when the five-year relationship ended.

It was only the second time the 2005 Sportsman of the Year had contemplated leaving his adopted country.

The first was in 1995 – two years after arriving in Singapore to study at Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) – because he felt homesick. But, ultimately, he chose to remain in Singapore, which he now calls home.

Support from his family and friends were crucial in helping him get back on his feet.



PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

Break-up was worst moment of my life



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"I thought she was the one. That was the lowest point of my life. Thankfully, there were a lot of people who gave me moral support."

RONALD SUSILO, kissing then-fiancee Li Jiawei after winning the Sportsman of the Year award in 2005

"...someone who doesn't give up easily in the face of problems, and someone who can stand up again after a fall."

SUSILO on how he wants to be judged

CAREER HIGHS AND LOWS

2002

■ Ronald Susilo wins a team silver at the Commonwealth Games.

2003

■ Wins his first international title at the Thailand Open, and bronzes in the SEA Games singles and team events.

2004

■ Claims his biggest career title win at the Japan Open.

■ Becomes the first Singaporean to reach the semi-finals of the All-England Championships since 1968.

■ Is Singapore's flag-bearer at Olympics. In Athens, defeats then-world No. 1 Lin Dan in the round of 32. But Susilo is beaten by Thailand's Boonsak Ponsana in the quarter-finals.

■ Rises to a career-high world No. 6.

2005

■ Wins his first and only Sportsman of the Year award.

■ Achilles tendon snaps at the 2005 World Championships and threatens to end his career.

2006

■ Suffers an elbow injury, the latest of his injury-plagued career.

2007

■ Wins a SEA Games men's team silver.

2008

■ Makes his second Olympic appearance. His opening-round opponent is world No. 2 Lee Chong Wei, who beats him.

2009

■ Plays his last competitive match against Vietnam in the SEA Games men's team quarter-finals.

After losing in the third singles, Susilo teams up with Hendri Saputra in the second doubles to win the deciding tie. The 3-2 victory secures Singapore a bronze.



PHOTO: ST FILE

Ronald Susilo after losing to Boonsak Ponsana (right) at Athens 2004.



PHOTO: WORLD BADMINTON PHOTO

Ronald Susilo's Achilles tendon injury at the 2005 World Championships.

"I thought she was the one," he said, looking away as his eyes started to tear. "That was the lowest point of my life. Thankfully, there were a lot of people who gave me moral support."

The agony was worse than the pain he felt when his Achilles tendon ruptured at the 2005 World Championships, and the thought of his career ending there and then.

It also proved more heartbreaking than losing to Thailand's Boonsak Ponsana in the quarter-finals of the 2004 Athens Olympics – the only time he wept after a loss.

"The pressure was too great," he said of his best chance of Olympic glory. "I couldn't handle it. I was too eager to win, too impatient."

But, like all the other disappointments, Susilo knew he had to come to grips with himself and move on.

Even though he no longer keeps in contact with Li, who married Chinese businessman Li Chao in September last year and gave birth to their son Terry three months ago, he still considers her a friend.

Susilo, however, remains unlucky in love.

He recently came out of a relationship with an insurance agent – his third relationship in all – and is not seeing anyone at the moment.

"Somehow, my relationships just don't work out. It's not anyone's fault. That's just the way it is. All that is in the past and it's time to move on again," he said. "Now, I want to focus on my career."

These days, he is busy with school and preparing for life after retirement.

He plans to open a badminton academy after completing his full-time diploma course in management studies at the SIM University in March.

In his free time, he enjoys singing karaoke and has mastered tunes like Wang Lee Hom's Heartbeat even though he cannot read Chinese characters.

"I memorise the lyrics in hanyu pinyin," he revealed. "I like it because it poses a challenge. There's a sense of achievement after singing a Chinese song."

Having been a shuttler for 11 years, Susilo is not short of achievements.

The last time he donned national colours, he helped Singapore to win a bronze in the SEA Games men's team event.

But it is the five-star 2004 Japan Open that remains the highlight of his career.

"I can still remember, in the quarter-finals with Shon Seung Mo, I won the rubber 15-0," he recalled the victory with a chuckle.

"It was a tournament where everything felt so right. I felt an extra energy in me – I'd more speed, strength and power... and beating (then world No. 5) Bao Chun Lai in the final felt so great."

That year, he also rose to a career-high sixth in the world ranking.

However, it is not his Japan Open win nor his victory over then-world No. 1 Lin Dan in the round of 32 at the 2004 Olympics that he hopes to be remembered for.

Instead, he wants to be judged for the way he responded to the tough times.

Said Susilo: "I hope people see me as someone who doesn't give up easily in the face of problems, and someone who can stand up again after a fall."

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