



Midday Update

June 27, 2007 Wednesday

[Home](#) > [Free](#) > [Story](#)

June 27, 2007



His big heart touched friends and family

By Jeanette Wang

HIS name is an Aramaic expression meaning 'heart', and the late national triathlete Thaddeus Cheong certainly had a lot of it.

So say friends and family members of the 17-year-old, who on Sunday collapsed after crossing the finish line in a South-east Asia Games selection trial and died of heart failure soon after.

'When he wanted something, he would work hard to get it,' said his mother Angeline Cheong, 46.

Best friend Julian Foo, 17, Thaddeus' schoolmate since their Catholic High Primary days, said: 'He was very determined to prove himself.'

On Sunday, the first-year Raffles Junior College student had moved a step closer to fulfilling his dream of representing Singapore at December's SEA Games in Thailand.

At Changi, he swam 1.5km, cycled 40km and ran 10km in a personal-best time of 2hr 9min and finished third, just minutes behind race winner Mok Ying Ren, 19.

National coach Guo Weidong, who had coached Thaddeus since 2004, called the boy 'a rare find'.

'He wasn't the best swimmer, cyclist or runner but, with all three disciplines combined, he was one of Singapore's best,' said Guo.

'I was certain that in one or two years, no one would be able to match him.'

What began as a hobby for the former school swimmer in 2004 grew into a passion over the past year.

From trailing the girls during training, he began to pull the pack during the daily swim, cycle and run sessions.

He improved his time by almost 20 minutes in two years.

At the 2005 Osim Singapore International Triathlon, he finished in 2:26. The next year, he clocked 2:16.

He had kept aside a new race suit and running shoes for next month's Osim Singapore Triathlon, at which he hoped to shine.

He was also on course to qualify for the SEA Games duathlon - a 10km run, 40km cycle and 5km run race - after finishing as the second-best Singaporean at last month's Oakley City Duathlon at Marina Bay.

Teammate Elaine Chan, 20, said: 'He matured a lot recently, and was a lot more motivated to train. He was very strong mentally, and quietly determined and confident.'

Another teammate Dexter Leong, 16, said: 'His determination was very inspirational.'

Thaddeus' heart extended beyond the sport to his family and friends, who fondly remember a caring, considerate and cheerful boy.

Grandmother Lucy Wee said: 'Every Saturday, when we went to the church, he would hold my husband and me.'

Said Julian: 'He was like a brother I never had.'

When Thaddeus went overseas for races, he would always buy gifts for his loved ones - such as a T-shirt from the Philippines for his mother and a can of worms from South Korea for Triathlon Association of Singapore official Robert Choy, 48.

Choy called Thaddeus 'a damn nice boy' who looked after the younger kids in the team.

Aspiring triathlete Samantha Ho, 13, said: 'During the trial on Sunday, he encouraged me by shouting 'Go Sam!' as he rode past.'

Her father, Calvin, 44, said: 'He was a well-mannered boy. He would always smile and greet you.'

John Tung, 17, his classmate from Sec 2, wrote in his blog: 'He asked me out last week. I regret not going.'

'My friend suggested I should run at the speed of light to go back in time and tell him not to cycle that day. I should start training towards that goal.'

Bus-loads of RJC schoolmates and teachers, including principal Winston Hodge, were at his wake at his Jalan Girang home, off Upper Serangoon Road, on Monday.

Hundreds of other friends, relatives and members of the local triathlon community also paid their last respects.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHEONG FAMILY



'I didn't know my son was so popular,' said his mother.

Ironically, it was Thaddeus' heart that failed him in the end.

His spirit, though, lives on - in his younger brother Thomas, 13, who hopes to compete in the SEA Games one day to fulfil his brother's dream.

The cortege will leave his home today at 2.30pm for a funeral service at the Church of St Francis Xavier at 3pm. It will then proceed to the Mandai Crematorium.

'He matured a lot recently, and was a lot more motivated to train. He was very strong mentally, and quietly determined and confident.'

TEAMMATE ELAINE CHAN, on Thaddeus Cheong

Latest comments

God bless

Posted by: username.2 at Thu Jun 28 11:14:07 SGT 2007

Condolence to the Cheong family. Please take care.

Posted by: heathcliff_sg at Thu Jun 28 11:05:41 SGT 2007

I feel terribly saddened by the news.

Posted by: Fox_KiloGRAM at Wed Jun 27 10:49:24 SGT 2007

My heart goes out to the family and friends of this special young man who was struck down in his prime. It used to be that the more one exercised the healthier one became. Everything we know is being turned on its head.

Posted by: shobhav at Wed Jun 27 09:03:50 SGT 2007

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