



Lakruwan Wijesiri goes ahead of a rival



The competitors line up with Wijesiri (second from right)



Wijesiri at the start of the Triathlon

Thunderbolt from the blues

A hitherto unknown Sri Lankan drives fear into hardcore athletes away from home in an amazing story of courage, promise and dreams

BY ANJANA KALUARACHCHI

International Triathlon may be alien to Sri Lankans as far as the outside world is concerned, but one Sri Lankan stood up to be counted with a message that he has come to stay.

Lakruwan Wijesiri, a young man from the south of Sri Lanka, Seenigama to be precise, turned heads in Singapore last week where he finished fourth at an International Triathlon that was contested by athletes from the UK, the US and Australia.

It was the first time that he rubbed shoulders with hardcore foreign athletes and there was nothing to unsettle his bravery and determination away from home.

"I have never participated in an event with international athletes even in Sri Lanka before

the Singapore Triathlon", an unassuming Wijesiri told *Ceylon Today*.

"So I'm very happy with the performance as I finished fourth in the speed Triathlon behind British, Singaporean and Australian athletes who finished ahead of me for the first three places".

The event was unlike anything he had competed in his country and Wijesiri was able to learn many important aspects of the Triathlon on the world stage.

In Singapore, Wijesiri had to swim 750 metres in the sea, cycle 20 kilo metres and run five kilo metres.

Very little has been said about the 23-year old Wijesiri whose success story was borne out from the devastating tsunami of 2004.

His success can be attributed to the Foundation of Goodness (FOG) in Seenigama

a humanitarian project undertaken by former first class cricketer now turned crusader of the underprivileged and less fortunate Kushil Gunasekera.

"At school my father persuaded me to go for the triathlon at Tissamaharama representing the Carlton Sports Club which was my first taste of a triathlon and I won", Wijesiri recalled.

He was a student of Seenigama Vijayaba Central College and trained at the FOG pool created with funds provided by Canadian pop star Bryan Adams who auctioned his guitar to raise funds for Sri Lanka after the tsunami.

"We wanted to gauge his international standard and as such thought of sending him to Singapore for the event and how well he performed to be placed fourth", said

Gunasekera.

"Of course never is it possible to make it all happen without our kind donor network world-wide and now with this achievement the door opens to another level hoping that he can be the first ever tri-athlete to advance internationally from our nation".

Gunasekera and his FOG have saved many downtrodden sportsmen and women straight from the heart without strings attached who would have otherwise had none to lend them a hand.

Among them are cricketers, one of whom was Pulina Tharanga who represented Sri Lanka at the last Youth World Cup in Brisbane, Australia.

Tharanga lost his mother in the tsunami and his father two years later, presumed dead after going out to sea.

Wijesiri will be the first to acknowledge the part played by Gunasekera who has provided him with the facilities and equipment to train in a country where there is no Triathlon coach available.

Wijesiri has now enrolled as a member of the Navy Sports Club where Vice Admiral Jayanath Colombage, the commander of the sea-going force, has taken a personal interest in him.

Wijesiri has now even begun to think like a professional and is targeting the regular world stage where the Triathlon at the Olympics covers 1.5 kilo metres of swimming, 40 kilo metres of cycling and 10 kilo metres of running.

"There is the Asia Cup, South Asian Games and Commonwealth Triathlon coming up and I'm targeting all these events", said Wijesiri.



Wijesiri finishes the swim