



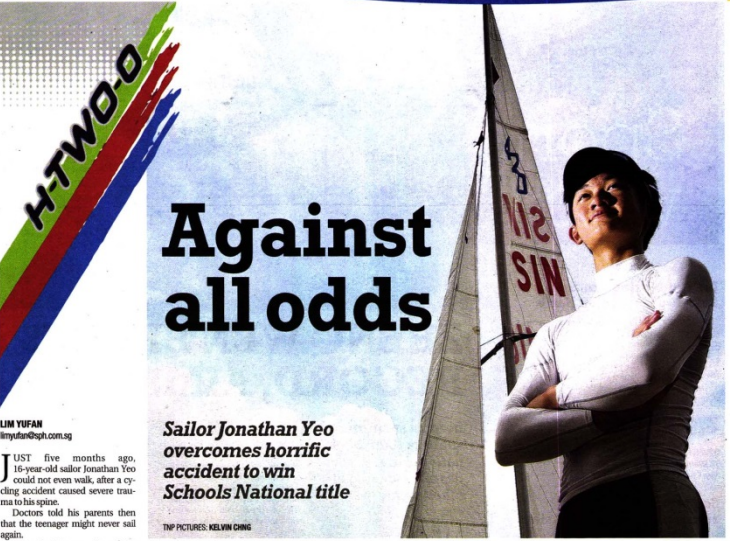
The New Paper featured teenage national sailor, Jonathan Yeo, who *overcame spinal cord injury and paralysis* after successfully undergoing spinal surgery by Dr Chua Soo Yong our Spine Consultant. Jonathan remains our national pride and joy for his courage and determination!



Doctors told RI sports boy after cycling accident:

YOU MAY NEVER SAIL AGAIN

Five months later... PAGE 62



Against all odds

Sailor Jonathan Yeo overcomes horrific accident to win Schools National title

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JUST five months ago, 16-year-old sailor Jonathan Yeo could not even walk after a cycling accident caused severe trauma to his spine. Doctors told his parents then that the teenager might never sail again.

Miraculously, even though he still cannot break into a run, Jonathan, a detested 43 others to win the Schools National Sailing B Division bye class last week.

Jonathan's dramatic tale started on a dark night last November, when the Raffles Institution student was cycling along Changi Coast Road with his brother Jeremiah.

After cycling for more than 45 minutes, Jonathan was "looking down on the road and starting to get tired". The next thing he remembers is crashing headfirst into a stationary trailer truck at full speed.

When Jonathan's mother, Josephine Wong, heard her phone ring that night, she sensed that something was amiss. She said: "I was reluctant to answer because the boys don't usually call when they are cycling, and I had a funny feeling that something was wrong."

On arrival at the accident scene, Josephine admitted that she became hysterical. "He was curled up on the ground and there were two puddles of blood, one under his head and the other around his right knee," said Josephine. "He couldn't move or talk. I was terrified."

The accident caused Jonathan to suffer from Brown-Sequard syndrome, which is a loss of sensation and motor functions caused by injury to the spinal cord.

Paralysed

Immediately after the accident, he lost sensation in his left leg and his right leg was paralysed. He also had a large gash on his right knee, tore some ligaments in it, and fractured his left index finger. His helmet was also smashed, and he needed several stitches on his head.

Jonathan spent the next two months warded in Changi General Hospital, and even had to miss the first week of school this year. Josephine said that the time when Jonathan was hospitalised was extremely stressful on the family.

She said: "It was a time of uncertainty, as we weren't sure if Jonathan could make a full recovery." Doctors warned her that the worst-case scenario would be Jonathan not being able to move his legs in the future.

However, he soon showed signs of recovery, and he was determined to get back on his feet sooner than later.

His parents even renovated certain parts of their home, so that he would be able to move around more easily when discharged from hospital. "The bathtub was converted into a shower," said Jonathan. "And the stairs became a good place for me to do physiotherapy."

The teenager represented his school in the Singapore National Youth Championships and ST Marine SAF Yacht Club Regatta last month.

And even though he had not trained since the accident, he beat the odds and finished third and second overall in the two events.

And, if those results were not impressive enough, he also won the Schools National Sailing B Division Bye class last week.

Amazing

He said: "It's an amazing feeling to win it, even though I sailed with a handicap. The competition was tougher than the previous two events the Singapore National Youth Championships and ST Marine SAF Yacht Club Regatta."

Despite the pleasure he gets from winning, he admits missing training with his teammates. "I like being free in the sea, especially when the weather is nice and breezy," said Jonathan, who used to spend his weekends training at the National Sailing Centre in East Coast. These days, he goes out on a powerboat with his coach to watch his teammates train. "I will be depressed if I stay on the shore," said Jonathan, who started sailing when he was 10. "Anyway, it's good to observe my teammates train as I find that it helps me keep in touch with sailing."



STAYING STRONG: (Right) Jonathan Yeo spent two months in the hospital after his cycling accident. (Above) His teammates from the national team and his school gave him a T-shirt and signed on it to wish him a speedy recovery.

professional too, but I think I'm still quite young and will put more thought into it when I'm older." Despite their strong support, Jonathan knows that his parents always want him to do well in school. "They don't stop me from sailing because they know I like to sail," he said. "But sometimes, they rather I study than sail."

Olympic dream

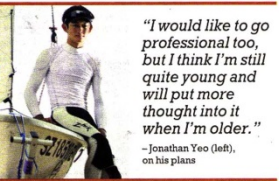
His advice to other youths is to do what they enjoy and to be committed to it. He said: "Do what you have passion for. If not, there's really no point in putting effort into something you don't like to do."

And though he is still not able to run yet, Jonathan plans to be back in a 420 sailboat in time. "Jonathan is very determined and driven. He's a boy of few words, and it's usually reserved and doesn't talk about his feelings," Jonathan said: "I would like to go to competitive sailing on the 420. "I love competing," he said. "And the desire to return to it has kept me going during this period."

Said: "I'm definitely looking forward to partner Jonathan again, and I foresee us doing well in the future."

Andrew had to partner Jonathan's brother Jeremiah instead, and the duo won the gold medal for the men's 420 class. "I felt that if not for the injury, I could have been the one who won," said Jonathan. "But I try not to think too much about it."

His road to recovery has not been an easy one, but he has no intention of giving up on returning to competitive sailing on the 420. "I love competing," he said. "And the desire to return to it has kept me going during this period."



"I would like to go professional too, but I think I'm still quite young and will put more thought into it when I'm older."

—Jonathan Yeo (left), on his plans

he was back in the water sailing again.

PICTURES COURTESY OF JOSEPHINE WONG