

PROFILE



JUST CALL HIM LUCKY!

SRI LANKA'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL TRIATHLETE, TRACES HIS ATHLETIC JOURNEY. **STORY BY SBRSG TEAM**

Ten years ago, Lakruwan Wijesiri and his family lost everything they had in the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami that hit Sri Lanka. Today, Lucky, as he is called by his peers, is one of Sri Lanka's top athletes debuting in his first professional race at the Singapore ITU Asian Cup.

Lucky first started swimming at a pool donated by Canadian pop star Bryan Adams as part of the campaign of the Foundation of Goodness (FOG) to help rebuild areas devastated by the tsunami. The foundation was set up by Kushil Gunasekera to provide essential services to the ancestral village of Seenigama and to help uplift the lives of rural communities in Sri Lanka.

It is at the FOG Sports Academy, in a pool donated by a pop star, where Lucky's talents were noticed. He eventually joined the Sri Lanka Navy Team. Training and racing with the Navy Team, he proved himself further, winning the first triathlon he started in, the Carlton Super Cross in Hambanthota, Sri Lanka. He would proceed to win the next few editions, only missing out on being the champion once, when he had a flat tire.

With the help of FOG, Lucky started racing overseas. He joined the Port Dickson Triathlon, where he placed first in his age category, and the Cold Storage Triathlon. Along the way, a lot of people supported his journey to athletic glory. One of them is Metasport Coach Shem Leong, who not only mentored him, but also lent him a road bike for his competitions.

Lucky says, "Triathlon in Sri Lanka plays a special role, bringing different groups of people together. The local races in Sri Lanka were

organized to bring harmony between the different ethnic groups: the Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. I think this is very important as we are emerging from a 30-year conflict."

As the first professional triathlete in Sri Lanka, Lucky had to forge a path which none of his countrymen had paved. His biggest takeaways so far are learning how to organize his life and how to face challenges. He adds, "The sport has taught me the importance of hard work, and being focused and disciplined."

He was put to the test when his first foray into a professional career came to an abrupt end due to a crash during the bike leg. Lucky is determined to succeed, however, and counts the DNF as a learning experience. Lucky will soon be training in Australia through the assistance of Chandra Mohan, one of FOG's donors.

Coach Shem, who spent a lot of time and effort into grooming Lucky while he was in Singapore, says, "When I first met Lucky, I was drawn by his humble and gentle spirit. After spending some time with him at the training sessions, I also recognized that he had a pure love for the sport and a blind, reckless motivation to take it as far as possible."

When Lucky told him that triathlon is what he wants to do in life, Coach Shem wanted to help him in every way possible. Coach Shem adds, "His single-mindedness and natural talent coupled with the continual support of the Foundation of Goodness and Metasport will see Lucky realize his wildest dreams."

We are hopeful that it won't be long until we see a familiar face on top of the podium and say, "Hey, that's Lucky!" **SBR**



PHOTO BY PRADEEP SURANGA AYYA