



FACTFILE

- **Name:** Timothee Yap
- **Event:** 100 metres sprint
- **Date of birth:** Nov 5, 1994
- **Previous Olympic experience:** Nil
- **Did you know?** Yap was the boys' winner of The New Paper's inaugural School Sports Star award in 2011 (left).
- **Competition schedule:**
 - Preliminaries, first round (Aug 13)
 - Semi-finals, final (Aug 14)
- **Singapore's other track and field representative:** Neo Jie Shi (women's marathon, Aug 14)



The New Paper profiles seven Rio-bound athletes who talk about their preparations and goals for the 2016 Games. Featured today is sprinter Timothee Yap.

From TNP School Sports Star winner to Olympian, sprinter Yap juggles law school and his passion for sprinting

A NEED FOR SPEED

Report by SAZALI ABDUL AZIZ
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He's in Rio only because of a technicality, some argue.

He's not even the fastest man in Singapore at the moment, others might say.

You can say what you want about national sprinter Timothee Yap, but one thing you cannot say is that he hasn't worked hard enough to deserve his ticket.

After all, here is a 21-year-old who juggles his law studies at the National University of Singapore with his ambition of being Singapore's fastest man over 100 metres.

Yap, who is the Republic's only male track and field representative at the Olympics, admits his academic pursuits are one of his biggest

challenges as an athlete.

"It's not easy to excel in law school while excelling in sports," he said, with a wry smile.

"It's not the same as in junior college or secondary school. The level of commitment you need to study law is immense... (and) sometimes I ask myself, 'Why am I still running?'."

"When I'm training, I sometimes think, 'Wah, I'm here training for three to five hours, while my peers are studying that much more. They'll keep pulling away from me, every day'."

"Plus, I can't sleep late, because my body needs to recover, so I lose that (time) too."

But, without skipping a beat, Yap explains why he continues to juggle academics and sport. He even squeezes in power naps during lunchtime in university just to help his body recover better for training.

"The answer is always the same: Passion," he said, eyes lighting up.

"I love what I'm doing. I love the adrenalin, I love the speed. I love exerting myself."

"I love giving my 100 per cent in one explosive burst. That's the 100m for you."

"I'm young now, and I'll never be young again. Right now, my body is fit, I'm healthy. This is the time for me to run fast."

"So, basically, YOLO lah – You only live once."

He even quotes Mahatma Gandhi to illustrate his point.

"Live like you're going to die tomorrow and learn as if you'll live forever," he said.

Yap's journey to compete in the most prestigious race on sport's grandest stage is a remarkable one.

CRUSH

He had joined the track and field team in Rosyth Primary only because he had a crush on a schoolmate.

He started out as a jumper, then excelled as a 400m hurdler, and focused on the 100m dash only after completing National Service 17 months ago.

As a student-athlete at Hwa Chong Junior College, he even won the inaugural TNP School Sports Star award in 2011.

But there were rumblings of discontent when he was handed the wildcard slot for the Rio Games, based on the 10.62sec personal best he clocked in Lisbon, Portugal, in June.

Fellow sprinter Calvin Kang is fast-

er with a season's best of 10.58, but was ineligible as he had already competed at the 2008 Beijing Games on a wildcard, and Singapore Athletics' new regulations, introduced last December, ruled him out.

Wildcard entries are available to countries that do not have athletes qualifying for the Olympics on merit. In Singapore's case, no man has made the cut.

Yap is unperturbed by the drama that surrounds his selection.

"It's a dream come true, and I'm

preparing well for it," he said.

"The pressure is not getting to me. In fact, even when I'm on the track, I don't think I'll feel the pressure at all."

"Regardless of whether it's the Olympic Games, the SEA Games, or a 100m time trial in school... When I'm on the blocks, all I see is the finishing line."

"When I'm in the zone, it's just me and the clock. I just need to focus on what I need to do, execute my race, and the times will come."

Yap hopes to clock a good-enough time in the preliminary race to qualify for the heats, where he hopes the competitive element will help push him to a new personal best.

He hopes to build on the Olympics experience by helping a new-look 4x100m team compete for a medal at next year's SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, and then, having matured as a 100m sprinter, go for UK Shyam's 15-year-old national record.

RECORD

"To say I'm not aiming for it is a lie," he said.

"But it's not going to be easy. 10.37 is a really, really fast time by UK Shyam. He's a guy I really respect a lot."

"I guess I have to work a lot to reach that timing... I don't want to be a one-hit wonder. I want to run consistently that fast."

"So, maybe in the next few years, with consistent training and good support from Singapore Sports Institute and Singapore Athletics, my coach, my family, my university... I think it's possible."



Live like you're going to die tomorrow and learn as if you'll live forever.

— Timothee Yap (left), quoting Mahatma Gandhi