

Qiu Liming (Dragon Boat Woman)
Captain NUS President Sports Award - Team

Professor Shih Choon Fong, outgoing NUS President; Mr Seetoh Cheng Faye;
Distinguished guests, Fellow athletes, Ladies & Gentlemen,

A very good evening to all. It gives me great honour to stand before you today to deliver a speech on behalf of the TeamNUS Dragon Boat (Ladies).

Firstly, I'd like to thank NUS SRC for awarding us the President's Sports Team award. The award recognizes the achievement of the team over the past three years. Indeed, the last three years have been an exciting journey for our team. It saw us hitting our nadir, back in 2005, and then subsequently picking up again to where we are today. It had not been easy. We spent up to 6 days a week training, sometimes several times a day. People say victory is the sweetest when it comes after you've lost. This cannot be more true. I fondly recall a race during the 2006 Singapore River Regatta, when we came in 1st in the IVP event. Everyone came out of the boat with tears in their eyes. The whole team was ecstatic, not simply because we won the race, but also because we were last the previous year. It was an immense sense of gratitude, and we are grateful that all our hard work paid off and that we did not let each other down. That race marked the first win since our losing streak.

Since then, we've witnessed the joy of winning and disappointment of losing. Each time it feels different – because the makeup of the team is different, and the scale of the race varies. But we've learnt that one thing is clear: passion and the desire to win is what will bring you through to the finish, be it during the race or off the competition. With a minimum of 4 -5 competitions a year, we often find ourselves playing a fine balancing act between academics and training. At times, it was just comforting to know that there are 30 other insane people suffering with you, working hard with the same goal in mind. I guess that is what makes our sport unique: that we can draw strength from our team mates.

Our coach often tells us during trainings: "You are TeamNUS. TeamNUS must be different."

During the competition that we had just last month, I was pondering upon what can make us truly stand out from all other teams who train equally, if not harder than us. And I thought I found my answer: contrary to popular belief that dragon boat simply requires brute strength and co-ordination, our team (boat) is fuelled even more by our hearts. We thrive on passion for the sport and love for one another – and oftentimes I find that this lasts much longer than the time muscles take to fatigue. The desire to win for each other and euphoria of crossing the finish line together with the people you've spent so much time with is something inexplicable.

As competitive athletes, we've also learnt that sports cannot be stagnant. In fact, it will never be. Records are always made, only to be broken. Winning is addictive, but winning does not come naturally. For anyone (or any team, for that matter) to excel in sports, new methods and technology have to be revised regularly to improve performance.

For that, we have many people to thank. Firstly, our dearest coach, Mr Nasiman, whom we all affectionately call "Sir". Sir, thank you for always coming up with new ideas for training; bringing us – in inverted commas – cave-hunting, bird-watching, and enjoying the waterfalls during trainings. You've been a great motivation. Thanks for making trainings so much more enjoyable and something to look forward to. Secondly, Mr Eddy Tan, our sports & conditioning coach, for always challenging us with out-of-the world exercises. They really made us sweat even at the thought of it. But yes, they were effective. Of course, the NUS SRC, Sean and all sports officers, for your continual support and dedication to sporting excellence. Thank you for the opportunities that we've been given to compete both locally and overseas. They were most eye-opening and enriching for us.

To all my teammates present today, thank you for your faith, belief, trust and love. Victory is sweet, but it does not come easily. So like what we always tell each other, "whatever it takes", we must continue to persevere, train hard and best prepare ourselves for races.

Last but definitely not least, TeamNUS and all athletes who've shown support for us in one way or another, especially those who took time off to watch us race. There is an unsung chemistry between athletes, even though we may not know each other well, because we all understand how it feels to be undergraduate athletes, and how it feels to train hard, only for a place to stand at the start line. A sense of pride washes over us whenever we don the TeamNUS jersey. I'm sure you will, too, when you are representing the school in your own field. May we work harder together to fly the TeamNUS flag up high.

Before I end off, may I leave you with a quote from legendary cyclist Lance Armstrong. He said "Winning is about heart, not just legs. It's got to be in the right place." With that, I wish you all the best in whatever sport you may do. With passion, you can do great things.

May I once again present to you these young ladies - proud members of the TeamNUS Dragon Boat (Ladies).

Thank you.