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YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES: SINGAPORE 2010

FROM LANDING ON FEET TO HEADS

Three gymnasts turned divers make the switch to ex-teammates' horror

By JEFF ANG

AS FORMER gymnasts, Timothy Lee, Chloe Chan and Myra Lee have been drilled from young to land on their feet.

But, since making the switch from gymnastics to becoming Singapore's divers for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), they have been trained to land on their heads to ensure a good entry into the water.

Myra said some of her gymnastic teammates, who were not familiar with the sport of diving, were surprised, even shocked, by the need for divers to land on their heads.

Still, the trio, all 16, have had to learn their new sport fast as they started to dive only last year.

Myra and Chloe picked up the sport last May and Timothy in September.

Naturally, they face a mammoth task ahead. Their combined diving experience of about three years pales in comparison to their opponents, some of whom have been diving since six years old.

Singapore's national diving coach Orla Gilmore said: "Most divers take about five years of training before participating in a meet of the YOG's scale."

"I understand Chinese divers spend four to five years alone just working on basics like core strength and flexibility."

Apart from their early start, only about five out of a training squad of 200 get selected after two years of basic training.

And that is only at the provincial level. China have 23 provinces.

Singapore started with seven divers in the training squad, with the final three emerging after three selection trials.

Because of the disparity in duration of training, the Singapore Swimming Association (SSA) roped in gymnasts for the training squad owing to their inherent flexibility and strength.

Singapore's three divers have been trained at an accelerated pace to get them up to speed for the YOG.

But training six times a week, four hours each time, has taken a toll on the three teenagers.

Myra, a student at Singapore Chinese Girls' School, suffered a bloodied toe after hitting the wall of the pool during one of her first few dives.

Timothy paraded a bruised face and chest for weeks after he landed face first into the water during a failed front double dive.

And Chloe narrowly avoided serious injury when she nearly hit her head against the springboard after a mistimed front dive.



NIKON YOG MOMENT:

From left: Singapore's YOG divers Chloe Chan, Timothy Lee and Myra Lee have their work cut out against some of the more experienced competitors from the region, especially China. ST PHOTO: AIDAH RAUF

But all three have soldiered on, not just in the face of physical harm, but academic challenges as well.

Myra, together with Timothy, a student from St Joseph's Institution, will be up for the O Levels in October. Chloe had to apply for concession to excuse herself from a school test so as to focus on training.

Despite all that, giving up has never been an option.

Timothy said: "Some of my teachers advised me to concentrate on my studies but I'd never give up diving because it's the most fun sport ever."

And plans are already in place for the divers beyond the YOG.

Damien Ler, the SSA's sports manager

for swimming, open water and diving, said: "The YOG is a stepping stone for Singapore diving. What we're aiming for is a medal at next year's South-east Asia Games."

The trio are also looking forward to rubbing shoulders with some of the world's best divers, like China's Olympic gold medallist Guo Jingjing, who will be

DIVING

DIVERS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Tom Daley (Great Britain, below) Champion, 2009 world championships



- Qiu Bo (China) 2008 world junior champion
- Pandelela Rinong (Malaysia) 5th at 2009 world championships
- Singapore's athletes Myra Lee (10m platform) Timothy Lee (3m springboard) Chloe Chan (3m springboard)

SCORING SYSTEM

- Seven judges will award marks for each dive from 0 to 10 points in half point increments. The two highest and two lowest judges' scores are not considered. The remaining three judges' scores are added and multiplied by a degree of difficulty.

EVENTS

- 3m springboard and 10m platform (boys and girls)

VENUE

- Toa Payoh Swimming Complex
- Dates: August 21 to 24



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

making an appearance at the Sports Initiation Programme for diving enthusiasts from Aug 23-24.

And Chloe cannot wait for the YOG to start, saying:

"I feel really privileged to be representing Singapore. It's a once in a lifetime experience."

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Single again and celebrating

Women put aside their sadness to throw parties after breakups and celebrate their new-found freedom with friends

Yip Wai Yee

It could look like a regular party, with food and drinks and friends. Or it could resemble a hen party, with baroque outfits and male strippers giving lap dances – except that it ushers a woman out of a relationship instead of into a marriage.

In the wake of failed relationships, some women in Singapore have been rounding up their friends to join them in celebrating a new lease on their social life. Breakup parties are thrown to mark the end of a relationship while symbolically giving the host the strength to move on with their lives.

For some, they are treated as emotional renewal sessions while for others, it is simply an excuse to party.

These parties are not yet a big business in Singapore like they are in the United States, where pop star Katy Perry threw one to mark her divorce from English comedian Russell Brand.

According to a report published in New York Magazine last month, divorce parties – or parties that celebrate the end of a marriage – have a “growing market” in the US, with one party planner there saying that her divorce party business has tripled since 2003.

Such parties have just started to take root here. District 10 Bar And Restaurant at UE Square launched a breakup party package last week.

Ms Serina Lim, co-owner of The Bonta Group of restaurants that owns District 10, says: “We think breakups should be celebrated as they mark a new beginning in one’s life. Instead of crying, why not celebrate this new chapter with your friends, families and colleagues?”

The package, which starts from \$18+ a person, can be customised to include special-themed food and drinks, such as the My Ex Sucks cocktail.

Singapore-based Vietnamese club-deejay Angie Vu Ha was the first to buy the package. The 25-year-old invited 10 of her friends to the restaurant to help mark the end of her eight-month relationship to a man who she says is “in the oil and gas industry”.

“When I first told my mother about throwing a breakup party, she tried to convince me not to do it as around telling everyone that you have broken up,” she says.

“But I’ve been so busy with work and travelling lately, and I have already felt sad about the breakup for two weeks all by myself, so why not get my friends together and just have a good time? It’s a good chance for me to catch up with them as well.”

At the party last week which SundayLife attended, the only obvious indication that it was more than just a regular get-together was a banner that read: “Finally it’s over! Cheers to a new beginning!”

Less in-your-face was a TV screen playing a slideshow of pictures depicting celebrities who had gone through breakups, including Jake Gyllenhaal and Taylor Swift.

Ms Vu Ha says the party made her “feel good about myself” and adds: “I’m not ready for a new relationship yet but this has been a great chance for me to meet my friends and just relax. I feel refreshed, like an independent woman.”

While her breakup party was more subtle, local party planners have seen wilder ones.

Ms Shirley Toh, business manager of party planning outfit Buddyline, says her company has organised five breakup parties in the past year.

All her clients declined to be interviewed but Ms Toh recalls one particularly fun party that involved a life-sized cutout of the client’s ex.

She says with a chuckle: “The client gave us her ex’s photographs and we had three cutout boards made, with the ex in different poses.”

“The client and her friends then proceeded to ‘torture’ the cutouts in all sorts of ways, from throwing darts at them to smearing food on the face. By the end of the night, the cutouts were in such a bad condition that we had to leave them behind in the restaurant.”

Other activities that her clients had done at such parties include getting lap dances from male strippers and having everyone dress up in baroque outfits.

Most of the clients, she says, appeared to have already got past the most difficult post-breakup time and were ready to simply let loose and have fun.

Only one client, whose party was thrown for her by her friends, looked like she was “still depressed”.

Ms Toh recalls: “It was quite a normal party with food and drinks, but this girl had not left her house for two weeks before that.”

“At this party, surrounded by her closest friends, she felt a little better, but she told me at the end that she definitely felt better because of it and the party. It was like a healing session for her.”

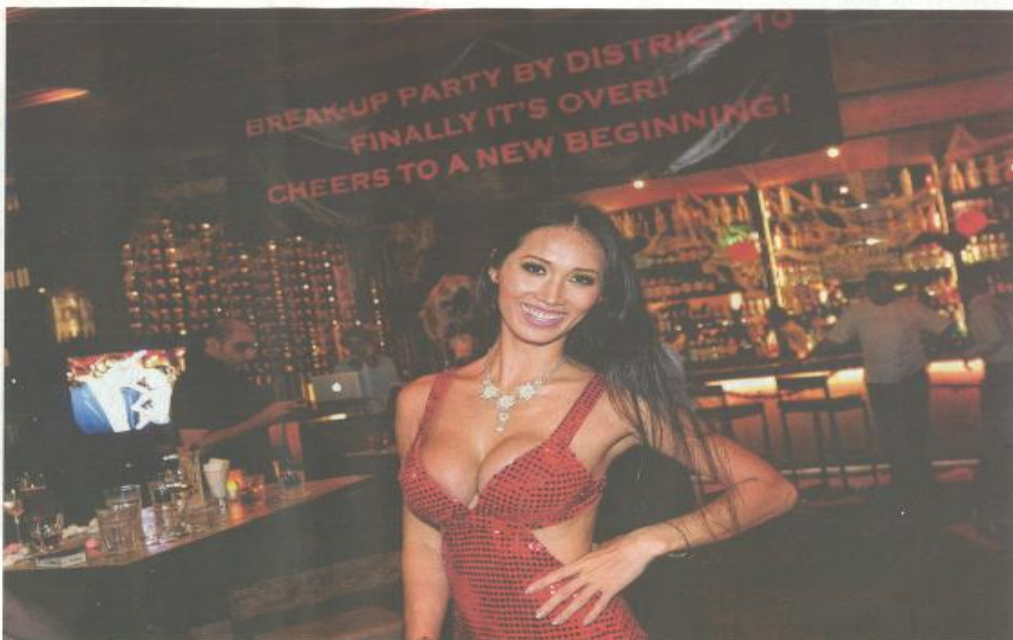


PHOTO: MARK CHENG FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

but when you do a party like this, you have your closest friends and family with you, all doing nice things and celebrating you as a person. So why not?

MS ANGIE VU HA (above), 25, a Vietnamese club-deejay based in Singapore, invited 10 of her friends to her breakup party at District 10 recently

If breakup parties mark a new start for women, it makes perfect sense to hold one at a place where you can look your best for a new relationship.

Nail salon chain Pink Parlour has been offering a Freedom Party package since 2010. It starts from \$83.45 a person with a minimum booking for four persons, and includes finger food, manicures and pedicures, as well as one Brazilian wax “for the liberated star”.

Ms Wendie Chan, director of Pink Parlour, says: “A few years ago, I was reading about the increasing divorce rates in Singapore and realised that since we do a lot of hen parties for weddings, why not freedom parties for divorces and breakups as well?”

“Giving these women a place to celebrate their newfound freedom seems like a perfect way to empower them.”

The salon group has held five freedom parties in the past year. Nail salon Thumbelina in Bukit Timah Road, which does customised manicure parties, held one breakup party in May

this year.

For that, salon owner Zoe Toh prepared a specially curated playlist of songs including Justin Timberlake’s Cry Me A River and Dixie Chicks’ Goodbye Earl, which played in the background while the group of eight women had their nails done. It cost \$100 a person, which also included some finger food.

She says: “It was a relaxing mood and pretty chill, and the women drew up lists of why it was good to be single. They also brought along the ex’s photo and tore it up.”

Alycia Mobile Spa, which organises spa parties, was asked to hold a surprise breakup party for a newly single woman by her friends in April this year. This was its first breakup party.

Ms Salimah Aliffah, owner of the spa, says: “Our mission was to pamper the girl and make her feel wonderful. During the party, the girlfriends talked about letting go and moving on.”

“I don’t recall them digging into the past, such as the events leading to the breakup. But I do remember the girlfriends taking turns to say one nice thing about the girl to cheer her up and make her feel very special.”

Ms Vu Ha adds: “I think these breakup parties are a good idea if you just want something to help you move on in your life. It’s not easy dealing with a breakup but when you do a party like this, you have your closest friends and family with you, all doing nice things and celebrating you as a person. So why not?”

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