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SAILING

## Was money the reason for Maxi's resignation?

**But SingaporeSailing denies his mum's claims that it did not take care of him**

By Leonard Lim

WHAT was initially a disagreement over a training regimen has now turned into a spat over finances between SingaporeSailing and the mother of one of the Republic's brightest sporting talents.

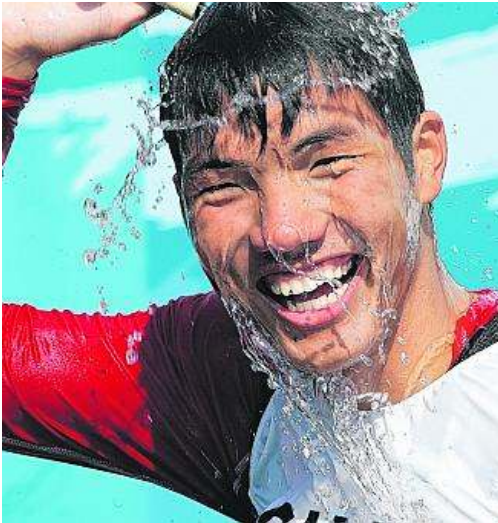
In a press briefing yesterday, the association strongly rebutted a letter sent to the media by Helen Choe, mother of Laser sailor Maximilian Soh.

Among other things, she claimed that her son's withdrawal from the Project 0812 Olympic programme last week was due to 'the environment he was subjected to and the way he was managed, which caused unhappiness and loss of faith'.

She also wrote: 'I would like to ask whether it is right to accord sailors status and preference according to their seniority rather than performance levels?'

In a separate telephone interview yesterday, Choe claimed that her 19-year-old son had been promised a monthly allowance of about \$1,500 but was eventually given only about \$1,200 due to his age.

'To me, they are playing mind games with a 19-year-old,' she said.



HAPPIER TIMES: Maximilian Soh celebrating his Laser Asian Games gold last year. -- ST PHOTO: ALBERT SIM

### CLAIM AND COUNTER-CLAIM

#### Helen Choe

**Claim 1:** Maximilian was promised treatment and rewards in accordance with his performance and time/effort spent training.

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But, countered SingaporeSailing president Low Teo Ping, no promises were ever made.

'It's a pity that money has now become the issue, when the reason for his resignation was because Maximilian could not commit to the gruelling Olympic programme,' he said.

'Like all our Project 0812 sailors, mother and son went into it with eyes open and had an agreement on the programme explained to them, and they signed it earlier this year.'

Project 0812, announced in January and armed with a war chest of about \$7 million, aims to land Singapore an Olympic medal at the 2008 or 2012 Games.

Although a Singapore National Olympic Council brainchild, the project is a tripartite effort involving the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and the Singapore Sports Council.

Maximilian, who won golds at last year's Asian Games and the 2005 South-east Asia Games, had cited differences with the association over his training regimen as the reason for withdrawing.

After media reports on the withdrawal last Wednesday, Choe wrote to the press to 'expound the truth' behind his resignation.

She claimed that SingaporeSailing failed to deliver on promises of rewards for his good performance. She added that disparaging remarks about his youthfulness resulted in the sailor falling into depression.

But Low has 'categorically denied' everything in the letter 'except the part about how we have a tiered system to remunerate our sailors'.

Elaborating on this system, he said that since May, national sailors have been grouped into three bands and given different monthly allowances.

The banding was based on factors such as educational qualifications, whether they had completed National Service, and even whether they had a driving licence.

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He said these criteria were established with the Singapore Sports Council, a point verified by its chief of high performance Wayde Clews, who was present at the briefing.

Said Low: 'The system is not so much based on seniority but skills you possess.

'You must understand that there's a high level of logistics requirements in our sport.

'During overseas training camps, our own sailors drive the trailers carrying the boats across Europe, from Holland to Germany, for instance.

'Sometimes, this is even done at night. Naturally, they should be recognised for the responsibility and certain amount of inconvenience to them.

'We believe this is only right, because other organisations around the world use such methods too.'

The likes of Koh Seng Leong, 24, and Chung Pei Ming, 25, help out in this way and are rewarded financially.

Maximilian, who has no driving licence and has not served NS, was placed in the middle band.

The difference between his monthly allowance and that of the top-ranked sailor in the upper band is \$380, said Low.

Low dismissed another claim in Choe's letter - that she and her husband had sent their son overseas for over a year at their own expense so that he could train with world-class sailors.

He retorted: 'They paid only for his school fees in Melbourne.

'Maximilian's training, coach, and equipment there were all provided for and facilitated by the association.'

Maximilian, who is now serving as a coach with the national Optimist team, declined comment.

All he would say was: 'I have always been passionate about sailing. Through coaching, I hope to give back some of what I've learnt and groom an Olympic champion.

'So, even if I don't win an Olympic medal for Singapore, maybe someone else will.'

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