More than just cheerleaders

By Ephraim Loy

AS THE 132 athletes from Singapore compete at the 15th Asian Games in Doha, a group of vociferous youngsters will ensure they are kept in the highest of spirits.

They have travelled all the way to the Qatari capital, either as volunteers or supporters, spurred on by national fervour and a desire to see Singapore do well.

Raffles Girls’ Secondary student Habbah Adham will be one of the Singaporeans cheering the athletes on in Doha.

“This will be my first time helping out at the Asian Games and I’m so looking forward to supporting the athletes,” said the 16-year-old Young Team Singapore Ambassador.

“It is a joy for us when we see the athletes do their best. I want them to know we will be there to support and cheer them on – no matter what.”

Six Young Team Singapore Ambassadors and Team Singapore volunteers – students and working adults – are leading several groups of supporters on trips to the Games and back.

They will seek to promote Team Singapore’s three core values: fighting spirit, national pride and teamwork.

They will also assist the Team Singapore secretariat in Doha to plan supporters’ schedules and handle logistics – from giving out tickets to distributing fan kits.

For Young Team Singapore Ambassador Elaine Gay, this will be the second trip to an international sports event.

She travelled to the South-east Asian Games in Manila last year as a supporter, but she believes the experience will be more exciting this time round.

“The last time, I did a lot of cheering as a supporter. This time, I will be concentrating more on the management aspect. There’s definitely more responsibility involved,” said Elaine, 16.

A group of about 10 supporters reached Doha last Friday, the day the games opened.

Two other groups will leave tomorrow and on Saturday.

One of the youngest supporters is 11-year-old Chong Fu Primary pupil Tay Jit Kiat, who will be travelling with his mother.

The avid sports fan is looking forward to watching Singapore’s table tennis team in action.

“I’m so happy! I will try to catch most of the table tennis matches. I hope to learn some skills – and back the team.”

The athletes appreciate the support.

Swimmer Marcus Cheah, 18, who bagged a gold medal and a bronze medal at the 2005 SEA Games, was happy when he was told Singaporean supporters would be there to cheer him on while he competes in the pool.

“It feels fantastic because, even though you are so far from home, there are still Singaporean supporters in the stands,” said Marcus, who will participate in three relays and three individual events.

“Having supporters from my country makes me feel my efforts are being recognised.”

Team Singapore senior manager Amy Chong hopes the trip will be inspiring for the volunteers and supporters as well.

“I am sure their hearts will swell with pride when they see a Singaporean athlete win. The feeling you get when you sing the National Anthem after a win is heart-thumping.

“I hope the support from Singaporeans will encourage and spur our athletes on to victory.”

The volunteer leaders were selected from a pool of Team Singapore volunteers and the assistant volunteer leaders were chosen from a group of secondary school students who are Young Team Singapore Ambassadors. The students promote sports among their peers.

Most of the 30 supporters are prize winners from various Team Singapore events, such as its fifth anniversary celebrations and a Sports Idol contest.

Team Singapore was launched on April 20, 2001 by then deputy prime minister Tony Tan. It provides an avenue for the sporting fraternity here to work together to realise the vision of a sports-loving Singapore.

The writer is a first-year social science student at Singapore Management University.

GOOD CHEER: Team Singapore volunteer leader Eddy Tay, 29, and Young Team Singapore Ambassador Elaine Gay, 16 (both in grey T-shirts), rally supporters round the athletes at the Asian Games in Doha.

PHOTO: EPHRAIM LOY

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