

# Meet Sri Lankan Olympians to London



## Anuradha Indrajith Cooray

London 2012 Games will be the second Olympiad for veteran Sri Lanka marathon champion Anuradha Indrajith Cooray.

He made his Olympic debut eight years ago, competing at the Athens 2004 Games. As Sri Lanka's national record holder in men's marathon and men's 10,000m, Cooray is probably the best marathon runner produced by Sri Lanka after the late K.A. Karunaratne, who competed at Barcelona 1992 Olympics.

Cooray has been familiar with the weather conditions in London and is looking forward to a grueling race throughout the streets of London, ending near Buckingham Palace in Central London on August 12.

He is one of the four Sri Lankans to reach qualifying standards and booked his passage to London Games after an impressive performance at the 2012 London Marathon in May. He was initially a 10,000m specialist who later opted to concentrate on marathon running.

Prior to that, he held Sri Lanka junior national record for 5,000m. He began his school career as a 5,000m runner at Divulapitiya Central College. Having joined the Sri Lanka Army in 1999, Cooray came under the watchful eyes of the late Brigadier Parry Liyanage who sharpened the skills of the talented lad.

At the 2003 South Asian Games in Islamabad, Cooray clocked two hours, 16 minutes and 36 seconds to take the gold medal. He won the Singapore International marathon for three successive years since 2001.



### Olympian fact file:

**Full name:** Anuradha Indrajith Cooray  
**Age/date of birth:** 34 years / March 24, 1978  
**School/University:** Divulapitiya Central College  
**Home town:** Divulapitiya  
**Sport:** Athletics  
**Event:** Men's marathon  
**First major title won:** National marathon  
**First represented Sri Lanka:** -  
**Major events representing Sri Lanka:** 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, South Asian Games, London Marathon, Several Asian Championships.

**Current coach:** -  
**Achievements/Titles won:** Gold medals in men's marathon at 2004 South Asian Games in Islamabad, won Singapore Open marathon on several occasions, Silver medal in men's 10,000m at 1999 South Asian Games in Kathmandu, placed sixth at 1998 Asian Games marathon in Bangkok, placed fourth in two Asian Grand Prix meets.

**Event and your best personal achievement:** 2012 London Marathon

**Your target at London Olympics:** To improve on my personal best and make my presence felt.

**Ambitions:** Do my best for Sri Lanka athletics before I retire.

**Special comments/observations:** Every time I represent Sri Lanka is a special and a memorable occasion for me.



## DINESH WEERAWANSA

Sri Lanka will field a seven-member contingent for the XXXth Summer Olympic Games which begins in London on Friday (27).

The Lankan contingent includes two athletes, two swimmers, two badminton players and a shooter. The Sri Lanka contingent for the London Olympics is led by national men's singles badminton champion, Niluka Karunaratne.



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## Niluka Karunaratne

There was a time Sri Lanka had a champion shuttler in Niroshan Wijekoon who made it to the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games in Spain. Exactly 20 years later, Sri Lanka has produced yet another champion shuttler who

would take Sri Lanka's challenge to Olympic arena as national men's singles champion Niluka Karunaratne competes at the London 2012 Games.

Niluka has been Sri Lanka's undisputed shuttle king for over a decade, winning many titles. His trophy cupboard is filled with almost all men's singles champion trophies that were on at all major badminton tournaments in Sri Lanka.

A proud product of Royal College, Colombo, Niluka will be the overall captain of the Sri Lanka contingent for the London Olympic Games. Niluka's powerful smashes and impressive net killings have been the hallmark of the champion



shuttler who has been playing in many international tournaments to be ranked within the top 50 men's badminton players in the world.

Niluka is among the top 38 men's badminton players who will be seen in action at Wembley Arena. In his lead up to the Olympiad, Niluka played in international ranking tournaments in South Africa and America before moving on to Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

### Olympian fact file:

**Full name:** Edirimuni Niluka RUSHAN PERERA KARUNARATNE  
**Age / date of birth:** 27 years / February 13, 1985  
**School / University:** Royal College, Colombo.

**Home town:** Balapitiya  
**First major title won:** Under-11 All Island Age Group Championships. At the age of 16, he won both the Junior and Senior National Champion simultaneously while he was also the Junior Triple Crown champion.

**First represented Sri Lanka:** 2000 Asian Championships in Indonesia

**Major events representing Sri Lanka:** Had represented Sri Lanka at all major international events for almost 11 years.

**Current coach:** Louvie Karunaratne

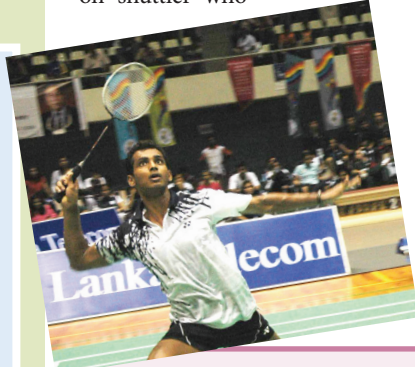
**Achievements / Titles won:** Sri Lanka national champion for 10 years since 2001. Has won many international ranking tournaments during the past decade. On his lead up to London Games, he won five other international titles in major ranking tournaments.

**Event and your best personal achievement:** Qualifying to play at 2012 Olympics after being ranked 47th in the men's singles world rankings.

**Your target at London Olympics:** To make the best use of the opportunity I got to compete at the highest level and perform something extraordinary to make my country proud.

**Ambitions:** Bring more glory to Sri Lanka and make my country proud as a sportsman.

**Special comments / observations:** This is the big break and the memorable moment that I have been looking forward to and I thank my family, coaches, officials and more importantly my sponsor for all the support they have extended.



## Mangala Samarakoon



Mangala Samarakoon of the Sri Lanka Army has already proved his mark in Sri Lanka shooting. Having bagged the gold medal in his pet event at the South Asian Shooting Competition, Samarakoon of the Army Small Arms Association struck another gold medal at the 2006 South Asian Games in the 50m prone shooting event with a record score.

He narrowly missed a medal at the 16th Asian Games in 2010, finishing fourth. At the last Asian Games in China, Samarakoon scored 592 points and also scored full 100 points in one round for the first time in his career.

In London, Mangala will represent Sri Lanka in the 50m Rifle Prone event, which means he will aim at a 10-ring target from 50m away, while in a lying down position. Only shooters who have attained the Minimum Qualification Score

(MQS) can be entered in an event on the Olympic shooting program. The National Olympic Committee of Sri

Lanka was awarded a re-allocated quota place by the International Shooting Sport Federation, and as a top shooter in this country, Samarakoon secured the Olympic berth.

Coached by Brigadier Kenneth Edema, Samarakoon has come a long way in Sri Lanka shooting and will be looking forward to set a new Sri Lanka record during the London Olympics.

### Olympian fact file:

**Full name:** Samarakoon Mudiyansele Mangala Samarakoon

**Age/date of birth:** 32 years / August 26, 1980.

**School/University:** Medawala Central College

**Home town:** Uva Paranagama

**Sport:** Shooting

**Event:** Men's 10m air rifle

**First major title won:** First represented Sri Lanka:

**Major events representing Sri Lanka:** 2010 Asian Games, South Asian Shooting Championships, South Asian Games.

**Current coach:** Brigadier Kenneth Edema

**Achievements/Titles won:** South Asian Games gold medal, South Asian Shooting Championships gold medal.

**Event and your best personal achievement:** Men's air rifle - 592 points

**Your target at London Olympics:** To register my personal best score and improve on my performance.

**Ambitions:** I would like to serve as a shooting representative even after my retirement.

**Special comments/observations:** It is a rare opportunity I got to compete at Olympics.

## Heshan Unamboowe

A promising youngster who has already proved his mark in the local arena and looking forward to bring more glory at international level. A recipient of an Olympic Solidarity Scholarship, awarded by the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka, that gave him an opportunity to train at the Nunawading Swimming Club in Melbourne, Australia.

He was also selected as the male athlete from Sri Lanka for the Asian Swimming Talent Identification Project organised by the Olympic Council of Asia, providing further training opportunities in Bangkok. His performances at the 14th FINA World Championships led them to an invitation by FINA to compete at the Olympic Games on universality places (formally wild card system).

The backstroke specialist started his swimming career at the age of 8 years and has set over 75 records at school, national and international level. He has won National Age Group Swimming Championship and the Pentathlon Championship eight times in-a-row. He became cham-

pion in under-10 (twice), under-12 (twice), under-14 (twice) and under-16 (twice) - a creditable feat.

He came out with a remarkable performance in 2007 to become the best male swimmer in the country. He established national record in the 2007 All-Island Schools Swimming Championships in the 200 metres individual medley and erased the national record held by Andrew Aberynghe.

Though his initial hope of competing at Beijing 2008 Olympic Games were shattered, young Unamboowe did not give up. In the following year, he came out with his personal best timing of 58.66 seconds in Japan. During his training stint in Australia, Unamboowe was able to better that and climb a step ahead clocking 57.47 seconds in Malaysia.

The best ever male swimmer produced by Sri Lanka Julian Bolling, who competed at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, coaches Unamboowe, along with U.H. Pemlath. As the youngest Sri Lanka overall swimming captain, Unamboowe became the first swimmer to win the prestigious Lion Award at Trinity College in 2008.



### Olympian Fact file

**Full Name:** Heshan Bandara Unamboowe

**Age/Date of Birth:** 20 years / 19 May 1992

**School / University:** Trinity College Kandy/ Miami University, Ohio

**Hometown:** Kandy

**Sport:** Swimming

**Event:** 100m backstroke

**Personal best:** 57.47 seconds

**First Major Title:** National Pentathlon Championship 2000 (Under 10)

**First Represented Sri Lanka:** 4th Asian Age Group Swimming Championships 2005 in Bangkok Thailand

**Major Events:** Youth Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, FINA World Championships, Commonwealth Youth Games, Asian Youth Games, Asian Age Group, South Asian Games, Asian Schools Swimming Championships

**Current Coach:** U.H. Pemlath / Julian Bolling

**Achievements:** Gold at South Asian Games with new South Asian Record. Total of 17 South Asian Medals and 5 Asian Age Group medals. Captain of the Sri Lankan contingent to the 1st Youth Olympic Games. National Swimming title in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011. National Pentathlon Championship for 10 years, National Age Group Championship for 11 years.

**Target at London Olympics:** To achieve a personal best time and establish a new national record.

**Ambition:** In swimming, to do the best for my country. In life, to become an engineer.

## Thilini Jayasinghe



Sri Lanka National women's singles 'crown'.

A banker by profession, she has been working hard to gain Olympic qualification by playing in several international ranking tournaments all over the world in the past year.

Having won the Under-13 junior national title in 1998, Thilini went on to win the national women's singles title in 2004. She won her first title at the age of 13 in a Kandy under-13 tournament and soon became the national champion in the same age group. She continued her success, winning national age group titles until she was 19.

Not all the sports stars would become lucky to create history but Thilini Jayasinghe is one of them who had that rare honour of becoming the first ever woman shuttler to represent Sri Lanka in the centenary-old history of the modern Olympic Games.

She represented Sri Lanka at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Having made it to the last 48 in the women's singles draw for London 2012 Games, Jayasinghe has the distinction of qualifying for back to back Olympic Games on merit.

A product of Mahamaya Girls School, Kandy, Thilini has won all major women's badminton titles in Sri Lanka, including the



### Olympian fact file:

**Full name:** Thilini Sudhara Jayasinghe

**Age/date of birth:** January 15, 1985

**School/University:** Mahamaya Girls School, Kandy

**Home town:** Kandy

**Sport:** Badminton

**Event:** Women's singles

**First major title won:** Under-13 Junior national champion in 1998

**First represented Sri Lanka:** Asian Junior Championships in India, 1998

**Major events representing Sri Lanka:** Olympic Games, Beijing in 2008, Commonwealth Games in 2006 and 2010, Asian Games in 2006 and 2010, South Asian Games in 2004, 2006, 2010, Badminton World Championships in Malaysia 2007 and many open and international meets.

**Current coach:** Shankar Annamale

**Achievements/Titles won:** South Asian Games silver medallist on three occasions - in 2004, 2006 and 2010

**Event and your best personal achievement:** Sri Lanka national women's single champion 2004

**First ever woman shuttler to represent Sri Lanka at Olympic Games**

Has won almost all women's singles titles at all major tournaments in Sri Lanka

Has won many titles and medals at international ranking tournaments.

**Event and your best personal achievement:** Women's singles - participating in Olympics 2008

**Your target at London Olympics:** To come out with my best ever performance.

**Ambitions:** To give out my best for my country until I retire. In personal life, to excel in my career as a banker and to become a good housewife in future.

**Special comments/observations:** Thank all those who have helped me, especially the CEO of Sampath Bank Aravinda Perera and bank management for all the encouragement given.