

## Olympians are forever

The story of Eric Liddell is celebrated in the film *Chariots of Fire* and in a new book on the athlete by a resident of Tianjin who knew him well. **Wang Kaihao** reports in Tianjin.

**Y**u Wenji, 86, is half-blind. But when he heard the theme music from the 1981 British movie *Chariots of Fire*, in which Eric Liddell is one of the two athlete protagonists, during the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympic Games on TV, the Tianjin resident says he almost burst into tears.

"I watched the movie three times in row when I first got the videotape," he says. "He (Liddell) always leans back his head when crossing the finishing line. That scene is still vivid in my mind."

Yu spent 15 years writing a biography of Liddell, which was published in 2009. He has finished a revised version of the book, which he hopes will be published this year as a celebration of Liddell's 110th birthday.

Liddell, gold medalist in the men's 400m at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, was born to a Scottish missionary family in Tianjin in 1902, and left China at the age of 5. He returned to his birthplace in 1925, when he began to teach at the Tientsin (old spelling of Tianjin) Anglo-Chinese College (TACC) serving the London Missionary Society. His Chinese name is Li Airui.

TACC was built in 1902 as a college. It was one of the first schools established by foreign missionaries in Tianjin, and was changed into a high school in 1930.

In 1938, the 12-year-old Yu was at elementary school, loved singing and occasionally went to a church nearby to join the choir.

"Liddell played tennis on the weekends. I was the last one to leave the church one day and he stopped me to ask if I wanted to be his ball boy."

Yu took the job, and helped Liddell for one year. Liddell often chatted with him when taking a rest by the tennis court.

"He told me people were born on the same starting line, but the results were different, so people needed talent and high expectations for the future so as not to let down the healthy body given by God."

Yu says this amiable former champion gave him several English textbooks and encouraged him to study hard, inspiring him to pass the difficult TACC entrance exam. Fourteen people from three generations of Yu's family studied there. The big and wealthy family then ran a store selling foreign products.

He says Liddell would practice running around school in the morning and sometimes at Minyuan Stadium in the British concession.

Liddell helped design this stadium and based it on the blueprint of

Stamford Bridge, Chelsea Football Club's home ground, shortly after he returned to China. He still sporadically competed after being a teacher at TACC.

Minyuan is where he took part in his last formal competition and won his last gold medal, in 1929. He also trained Chinese athlete Wu Bixian, a high jumper who later participated in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.

Liddell busily shuttled between TACC and the countryside in Xiaozhang, Hebei province, as he also held a position there at a church hospital. Yu regrets that Liddell was never his teacher, though he did occasionally substitute for absent teachers.

"I still remember the first English class he taught us. It was about how to tell time in English," Yu switches from his Tianjin dialect to a British accent English recalling the content in that class.

"His English was simple but very humorous," Yu says. "But he was very serious when protecting students' rights. He once quarreled with the headmaster to ask for more subsidies for students not from wealthy families."

However, after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Yu never saw Liddell again.

The school was occupied by Japanese troops and Liddell was detained in Weihshien (old spelling of Weixian, today's Weifang, Shandong province) Internment Camp, which imprisoned more than 2,000 Westerners living in China, including 300 children.

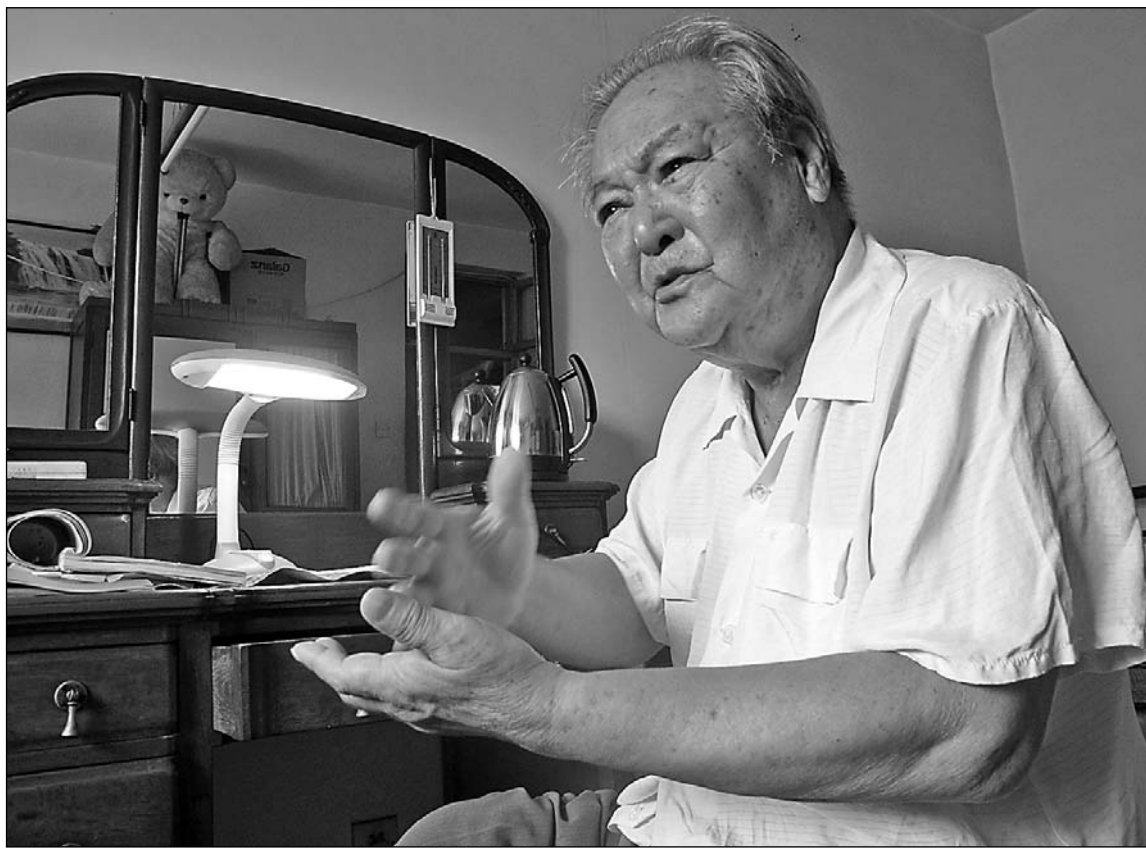
"He had the chance to leave for Canada with his pregnant wife and two children, but he refused to leave his brothers in church behind. I guess that must have been a tough decision for him," Yu says.

Liddell continued teaching class and organizing games in the camp. Norman Cliff, a British Christian at the camp, later wrote a memoir declaring: "(Liddell is) the finest Christian gentleman I have been my pleasure to meet. In all the time in the camp, I never heard him say a bad word about anybody."

Although Japan offered a prisoner-of-war exchange plan after early 1944, three times, allowing about 200 internees to be released, Liddell would not leave. Though on the British government list he gave up his place to children. He died of a brain tumor six months before Japan surrendered.

"His loyalty greatly inspired me," Yu says.

Yu joined the United States Marine Corps, stationed in Tianjin in 1946, as a part-time bar tender at the military



Yu Wenji says his memory of Eric Liddell hasn't faded even as he ages.

WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



**I don't want fame or money, I am 86. I just want to show that Liddell is a good example of someone who can erase misunderstandings between China and Western countries."**

YU WENJI ON HIS BOOK ABOUT BRITISH OLYMPIAN ERIC LIDDELL (LEFT)

club to cover his living expenses at college, as his family's business failed. When US troops left China, his commanders were satisfied with his job and wanted him to go to the US.

"They even promised US citizenship, but I refused. I told them, 'I am Chinese,' Yu says.

However, this experience and his family background caused Yu a lot of trouble during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76). He was an ordinary worker at a post office for decades, even though he speaks excellent English and has finance and engineering degrees.

Yu did not speak about TACC or Liddell for years, until Aug 29, 1993.

On that day, he accidentally met David Mitchell, an Australia-born

Canadian from a Hong Kong-based foundation in memory of Eric Liddell. Mitchell was 9 when he was imprisoned at Weihshien Internment Camp.

"He offered me a photocopy of Liddell's death certificate at the camp," Yu says. "It was supposed to have been destroyed by the Japanese when they retreated."

Mitchell told him a Christian Japanese soldier secretly preserved the certificate when he was supposed to destroy it.

The nostalgic Yu was excited to collect more relevant material and completed the book, *Li Airui's Brief Biography*, in 2008.

Yu has now completed a revised version of the book and expects to

get it published by the end of 2012. He also plans an English version of the book.

"I don't want fame or money," he says. "I am 86. I just want to show that Liddell is a good example of someone who can erase misunderstandings between China and Western countries."

He is delighted to see people paying more attention to Liddell during the current Olympic Games, but he also hopes it is not a fad.

TACC buildings were destroyed in the devastating Tangshan earthquake of 1976. After several renovations, Minyuan Stadium is also being demolished. The only other building related to Liddell that is still standing is the hospital where he was born.

Jin Pengyu, a cityscape and architecture expert in Tianjin, who is helping promote Yu's book, says the municipal government plans to build a sports museum in 2013, which will introduce Liddell's story. Yu says he is happy to provide materials.

Yu also formerly had a brain tumor like Liddell. His life was saved after an operation in 1999. He later got baptized, decades after attending missionary school, to mark his rebirth.

"Maybe my eyesight and brain are not that keen after the operation, but my memory of Liddell is always fresh."

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### what's new

#### China design exhibition

The Ministry of Culture and Shenzhen municipal government recently announced a plan to hold China Design Exhibition 2012.

The exhibition, to be held in December in Shenzhen, will be divided into four segments namely product design, graphic design, space design and crossover design.

The product design segment will focus on the integration of Chinese design and manufacturing. It is aimed at exploring an effective path to upgrade Chinese creativity. Space design segment will use models and videos to demonstrate more than 50 space classifications such as community, transport and shopping space.

Graphic design segment features the subjects of image, magazine and character designs, while crossover design discusses how design work influences the entire society.

The exhibition invites nationwide entries.

#### Tragic thriller

Crime thriller *Lethal Hostage* released a trailer in Beijing on Aug 7. The film, starring veteran actor Sun Honglei and young actress Wang Luodan, claims to be the Chinese version of *Leon: The Professional*.

The movie traces how Sun, a ganglord, is trapped in rivalry with his avengers and his relationship with a girl he kidnapped.

Producer Ning Hao, also a renowned director, believes tragic drama is a genre rarely seen on the mainland screens and will definitely attract audiences.

Directed by rising filmmaker Cheng Er, the film will premiere on Aug 17.



#### Diva in love

Hong Kong singer Joey Young plays a diva, which she is in real life, in her latest big screen work.

Simply titled *Diva*, the film follows a singer whose life changes dramatically when she meets a blind massage therapist. Mainland heartthrob Hu Ge plays the therapist, who develops a romantic relationship with Young's role.

The film uses some backstage scenes of Young's concerts, which were never revealed to the public before. *Diva* will premiere on Aug 16.

#### Ecological camp

China Education TV, National Geographic Channel and Yunnan TV celebrated the opening of a summer camp they initiated together in Beijing on Aug 7.

The camp aims to awaken the public's ecological awareness. Brady Barr, a celebrated reptile zoologist and field anchor for the National Geographic Channel, guides the tour.

More than 10 participants will go into the tropical forests of Xishuangbanna, in Yunnan province, on a journey to discover and film wild plants and animals, including wild Asian elephants.

Two Yunnan TV filming teams will film the journey. Once completed, the film will be shown on Yunnan TV, Channel 3 of China Education TV and the National Geographic's Chinese edition.

CHINA DAILY

## Innovative Think Plus seminar wows participants

By GAN TIAN gan\_tian@chinadaily.com.cn

Author Milan Kundera quoted the ancient Jewish proverb, "Man thinks, God laughs," in his acceptance speech for the 1985 Jerusalem Prize.

More than two decades later and far away in China, Wang Dong in an apparent response, adopts, "Let's think aloud, louder than God's laughter", as his slogan.

Wang founded Think Plus, a motivational seminar consisting of brief and powerful lectures given by elites from different industries. Each speaker is given just 16 minutes to talk about the most interesting things he or she does. They can choose to verbalize their thoughts, act it out, have a dialog or Q&A with the audiences, or use multimedia tools to convey their message.

The event, held for the first time at China Millennium Monument, Beijing, on Aug 4, attracted nearly 500 people from all over the country.

Wang fulfilled his pledge of "inviting different people from different industries". The speakers for the first run included online apparel seller Vancl's founder Chen Nian,

paleontologist Xu Xing, environmentalist Ma Jun, founder of Orange Hotel Wu Hai, anthropologist Xiao Ke, physician Li Miao, firebug analyst Fu Xinhua, and director Zhang Yuan.

Some of the speakers employed unique presentation styles.

When firebug analyst Fu went onstage, the lights were dimmed. He started with a fairy tale about a Chinese scholar, who was too poor to afford an oil lamp and had to resort to catching fireflies to be placed in glass bottles, to brighten up his surroundings. Fu then turned around to ask the audience if they thought the fireflies were bright enough to light up the room for the scholar to read.

Paleontologist Xu Xing showed some pictures of giant dinosaurs. His speech was about the probable existence of flying dinosaurs.

When Orange Hotel founder Wu Hai appeared, the audience gasped and laughed: He was half-naked. His talk was about thinking out of the box.

The seminar borrows its idea from TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design), a global conference by the non-profit Sapling Foundation.

TED conferences, with the tagline "Ideas



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**Think Plus founder Wang Dong says the seminar will help people think.**

Worth Spreading", have invited top-notch presenters such as Bill Clinton, Bill Gates and Google founder Larry Page. It has become extremely popular in the last two years as many of the talks are available online for free and many young Chinese have watched it.

"We are inspired by TED. This seminar is a good platform that encourages people to create, to present their ideas. We want Think Plus to inspire audiences and help them think," Wang says.

Wang came up with Think Plus because of the requirements of his job. As the executive

director of the marketing and commercial business unit of Lenovo China, he and his team were required to launch an event to celebrate ThinkPad's 20th anniversary this year. A fan of TED, Wang proposed the idea of having a Chinese TED conference, and that was how Think Plus came about.

Presenters have to be professionals in their field of expertise and it would be better if they are already household names.

While sourcing for presenters, Wang realized that he knew many professionals in IT, physics, science and business, but not those in the areas of art, society and media. That's when he thought of Chen Mingyang, deputy executive editor-in-chief of Southern Weekend, which has been described as "China's most influential liberal newspaper" by The New York Times. Both decided to work together.

Chen and his team soon started inviting influential speakers they knew. "We laid down the criteria that the speakers should not be limited to one area. They should be cross-disciplinary," Chen says.

Another criteria that defers from TED is — while TED requires presenters to speak for 18 minutes, Think Plus gives speakers only 16

minutes. That's after Think Plus organizers did some research on the Chinese language and discovered that a person needs only 16 minutes to convey what he or she thinks in Chinese, in contrast to 18 minutes in English.

"At the same time, most people have a short attention span, they can only focus for about 20 minutes. So, we decided to limit the presentation time, enough for listeners to think, to interact with the speaker," Chen says.

Unlike TED conferences, which have a history of 28 years, Think Plus is a newborn baby.

The organizers plan to conduct Think Plus in Guangdong's provincial capital Guangzhou, Sichuan's provincial capital Chengdu and Shanghai in the coming months. They have a list of more than 30 professionals who have agreed to be speakers.

When firebug analyst Fu ended his speech, he turned off all the lights in the room. Then, he took out a glass bottle with fireflies inside.

Though the light emitted by the bugs was dim, the innovative presentation style wowed the audience — many of whom are city dwellers who have never seen fireflies. That's exactly what Think Plus hopes to achieve — seminars that wow the audience, and inspire them.