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National men's trap shooter Lee Wung Yew turns 43 on March 19, but the athlete got an early birthday present yesterday.

The Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC) named Lee as chef de mission for the inaugural Asian Youth Games, which will be held here from June 29 to July 7.

This is the first time that the SNOC have appointed a current athlete as chef de mission for a major Games.

"When I was approached by the SNOC a few weeks ago about being chef de mission for the Games, I asked them if they were serious," joked Lee, a physical education teacher at Innova Junior College.

"It's an honour to be chosen as the SNOC usually pick very experienced people to lead a contingent. I work with young athletes from different sports in my job, and I'll do my best to make sure the kids get the support they need to perform at their best at the Games."

Lee was appointed secretary of the SNOC Athletes' Commission in 2006. The two-time Sportsman of the Year (1989,1997) won 15 SEA Games gold medals, from 1985 to 2007. In December 2007, he became the first Singapore shooter to qualify for the Olympics on merit, when he made the 2008 Beijing Games after finishing third in the men's trap at the 11th Asian Shooting Championships in Kuwait. He also represented Singapore at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta and the 2004 Athens Games.

According to SNOC secretary general Chris Chan, Lee's experience as an athlete and teacher made him the ideal choice. "Wung Yew is very in touch with what's happening on the ground," he said. "The kids will be able to relate better to him. He's gone through a fair bit as an athlete and I believe he'll be able to balance his chef de mission role with what the athletes want."

Lee's appointment could set a precedent for the Youth Olympic Games, which will be held in Singapore from Aug 14-26 next year. "Wung Yew is the first, but he won't be the last," said Chan. "The chef de mission for the Youth Olympics is likely to be an athlete as well."

About 1,000 athletes from 45 Asian countries will compete in nine sports – aquatics (swimming and diving), athletics, three-on-three basketball, beach volleyball, bowling, football, sailing, shooting and table tennis – at the Asian Youth Games.