

For my father

Goh Teck Phuan

1921-2006

A Man Who Loved Athletics Passionately

&

All athletes, officials and the common man for their passion
and devotion to the sport

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LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

When my father passed away in 2006, so many athletes and officials as well as those in other sports turned up to bid him farewell. They even did the traditional yum seng at his wake just the way he – ever the sociable man - would have wanted it anyway! While clearing his things, I came across many of his sports photos and memorabilia. I discussed with Maurice Nicholas, Loh Lin Kok, Tan Eng Yoon and other athletes and officials the idea of a book. It became evident that with so much support from the athletic fraternity, I could try to publish a book. It would be dedicated not only to him but also to all the athletes and officials who were devoted and loved athletics as a sport passionately.

My father's life, over eight decades, included his years as a top athlete in Anglo Chinese School in the late 1930s; founder and coach of Swift Athletes Association in the 1940s and 1950s; and the first sports promotion officer in the 1960s during which he organised the Singapore Grand Prix, Pesta Sukan, World Cup Golf as well as other sporting events. He retired from the civil service in 1971 with two public service awards but was still deeply involved in athletics as a patron with Swift Athletes Association and Singapore Athletic Association. In the early 1980s, he, in true pioneering spirit, became the organiser of the Singapore Marathon when it was a relatively unknown event, raising funds each year to hold it until it became a corporate brand name from 2000 onwards. Today, the Singapore Marathon is an annual event that attracts some 30,000 plus participants both international as well as local. It is no wonder that those in the athletics circle know him as the father of today's Singapore Marathon.

But more importantly, his life touched many officials and athletes, whether well known or otherwise. It is thus apt that, in publishing this book, we use his life as a road map in each decade to bring out the highlights of dedicated athletes and officials. Like him, they were passionate about athletics and willingly sacrificed time and money to achieve recognition for our country at regional and international competitions. These are the unsung heroes and heroines that we pay tribute to in this book. The athletes and officials that were associated with my

father over his life time came forward to provide materials to piece together the stories for this book. At the same time, some of my father's close friends provided financial support. I have had the good fortune of being able to count on these supporters to put together, in our own modest way, the story of Singapore athletics in this book - with a chapter in the middle as a tribute to my father.

In particular, I would like to thank Singapore Athletic Association, Singapore Sports Council, Swift Athletes Association, Loh Lin Kok, Maurice Nicholas, Lau Teng Chuan, Tay Boo Jiang and the various athletes and officials who have given their valuable time to be interviewed to provide the content for the book. Special thanks also go to the financial sponsors who are listed in the book. Their financial support has enabled us to raise funds for this publication. It has also given us excess funds to donate to Swift Athletes Association (the first multi racial Club which my father co-founded in 1947) to manage for athletes in need of financial assistance. I would also like to thank the editorial team, especially Chua Chong Jin, for believing in the concept right from the start. This was despite the fact that I had no money, no writing or publishing experience, and was living thousands of miles away from Singapore. They simply believed in the concept and was willing to "just do it"

Hopefully this book brings out the story of Singapore athletics with a glimpse of my father and his love for the sport. We will be giving the book to all schools, libraries and public institutions so that our young will become more aware of some of our home grown athletes. They may be of a different generation. But the way these trail blazers competed with passion to reach the regional and international stage despite obstacles can be an inspiration to today's youths. In this sense, this project – the book and the fund created to support athletes – is as much about looking ahead as it is about looking back in fond memory of my dear father and his work.

Ivan Goh

Publisher

THROUGH THE YEARS

The 1930s marked the beginning of Singapore athletics with the formation of the Singapore Amateur Athletic Association – Singapore’s governing body in track and field. In the early colonial days, training and athletics meets were centred at the Jalan Besar Stadium and Farrer Park Sports Complex – icons that would continue to host lots of action and drama for the next few decades. In terms of athletes, a few, including sprinter Ali Ahmad, created interest. While not everyone could be so talented, many found joy in the simple pleasures of track and field – a sport which was accessible regardless of one’s status in life.

A turbulent era, the 1940s witnessed the breakout of World War II in Singapore and Malaya. Post-1945, Singapore struggled to pick up the pieces after the war. There was a breakthrough when high jumper Lloyd Valberg made local history by taking part in the 1948 Olympics in London. At home, athletics enjoyed a revival with the founding of the Swift Athletes. In June 1947, Yeo Choon Bee, E. A. Sears, Goh Teck Phuan, Chin Lye Heng, Tay Boo Jiang, Choy Yew Mun, Lam Kah Poh, Ng Gim Seng, Ang Kian Guan and Miss Tham Quee Sim formed the Swift Athletes Association with Yeo Choon Bee as President and Goh Teck Phuan as Honorary Secretary. Going against the prevailing trend then, the club felt that sports should have no distinction in race, class or creed. Its immediate goal was to promote athletics in Singapore. With improved coaching

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and the enthusiasm of the pioneers, it became very popular. It competed actively in competitions like the Mercury Trophy Championships (Kuala Lumpur), Mercury Triangular Athletic Meet (Malacca) and Malacca A.A.A Relays Championships.

Indeed, the formation of Swift was the beginning of a new era in athletics in Malaya and Singapore. Its impact on local athletics history would prove to be tremendous: the association, with its motto “Faster, Higher, Further”, produced many top athletes who went on to represent the country at regional competitions.

The 1950s witnessed some new developments. During this decade (which saw the rise of top athletes like Chan Onn Leng, Tan Soo Liat, Tan Soo Hian, Lim Jit Imm, Ronnie Sng and Daniel Sng), a vibrant club scene emerged in both Singapore and Malaya. Clubs like Swift Athletes Association, Mercury Athletic Club, Klang District Amateur Athletic Association and Selangor Chinese Recreation Club competed in various meets, including the Pan-Malayan Inter Club Invitation Athletic Relay Championships for the Mercury Trophy. The era was not without controversy and conflict. For example, in 1950, the Singapore Chinese Amateur Athletic Federation barred Swift athletes like Tan Eng Yoon, Yeo Choon Bee, Ronnie Sng and Daniel Sng from competing in the Malaya Chinese A.A.A. Championships. Passionate letters to The Straits Times ensued, with the colony champion sprinter Tan Eng Yoon writing to the paper to criticise the

attitude of the S.C.A.A.F. In his letter, he praised Swift Athletes Association for helping him to win, citing the training, facilities and sportsmanship among athletes. The tense relationship continued into 1951 when Swift, stressing that athletics should be non-communal, refused to lend S.C.A.A.F their Chinese athletes for the Singapore A.A.A.

Yet obstacles in terms of finance, training facilities and strong opposition from communal organizations did not deter the pioneers of Swift Athletes Association from making their mark. They answered their critics in the best possible way – through solid results on the track and in the field. Winning at competitions such as the Mercury Trophy Championships in Kuala Lumpur and the Mercury Triangular Athletic Meet in Malacca, they soon built up a premier club.

At the junior level, competition was intense. The schools scene was lively and colourful. Anglo Chinese School, for instance, enjoyed much success with its many star performers, including the young Chan Onn Leng who shone in events like the 440 yards, 880 yards and the mile. Other young athletes with much promise included Daniel Sng, Alfred Wee, Khoo Boon Seng, Charles Hannam, and Tan Soo Liat. Often these boys could take on the seniors confidently. ACS athletics captain Tan Soo Liat, for example, once finished second in the high jump at the Malayan A.A.A. meet in Kuala Lumpur, losing only to the experienced Lloyd Valberg. Other noteworthy junior

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athletes included distance runner Harpal Singh, middle distance runner Dason Mani and sprinters Chan Kai Ming and John Fernandez. In the jumping events, the likes of Lim Tiang Quee, Koh Kia Hua and Lim Cheng stole the show. For many athletes, one of the highlights of the decade was the visit to Singapore by the legendary Jesse Owens in 1955. Apart from those in the limelight, others contributed quietly. For example, the survival of Swift Athletes Association in the beginning was made possible through generous sponsors such as Richard Eu Keng Mun, Wee Aik Koon, Yeo Kee Loon and Ng Ghim Seng.

The 60s brought a wealth of talents, many of whom continued to be in the limelight till the 70s. Athletes like sprinters Mani Jegathesan, C. Kunalan, Ho Mun Cheong, Loh Chan Pew, Low Sin Chock, Yeo Kian Chai and Glory Barnabas started to show tremendous potential. Others like hurdler Wong Fey Wan, long jumper Evelyn Lee, middle distance runner Mirza Namazie, high jumper Noor Azhar Hamid, pole vaulter Pal Singh and cross country runner P. Pillai also began to make their mark. The 60s were a crucial decade for Singapore athletics as the foundation built during this era led to our subsequent success in the 1970s at not only the SEAP Games but also at the much more competitive Asian Games. The role of Swift Athletes Association in Singapore's track & field was underlined by its success at the Malacca AAA Relays Championships in 1964 when it won all the events for both men and women.

The 70s proved to be a fruitful decade. The era yielded track stars like hurdler Heather Siddons, 400m/800m champion Chee Swee Lee, long distance stars P. C. Suppiah and K. Jayamani, and sprinters Ong Yeok Phee and Eng Chiew Guay. Other athletes from the era included middle distance runners S. Surendra and Tan Ming Jen, decathlete Tang Ngai Kin, marathoner S. Kumaravelu, javelin thrower Ng Bock Huat, shot putter Fok Keng Choy, hammer thrower Sankaran Gawade and high jumper Chan See Huay. Meanwhile, emerging faces of the 60s like C. Kunalan and Glory Barnabas – by now seasoned athletes - continued to shine with breakthrough performances. The powerful combination of experience and youth was best manifested at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran where our athletes put in the best performance ever at this level, with Chee Swee Lee leading the way with gold in the 400m. Adding more colour to the era was the vibrant schools scene, with athletes like sprinters Richard Seow and Yvonne Cornelius as well as 400m/800m/1,500m runner Sandra Deans among the most prominent. The role of Swift Athletes Association as breeding ground for talents was underlined by the club's phenomenal success in various competitions such as Team Championships for Cross Country, Open Relays and Road Relays. In addition, Swift members like C. Kunalan, P. C. Suppiah and Noor Azhar Hamid did the club proud by winning the country's Sportsman of the Year award while Maurice Nicholas shone with his Coach of the Year award. There were also the many dedicated officials working on the bitumen and cinder running track at the Farrer Park Sports Complex, a site for

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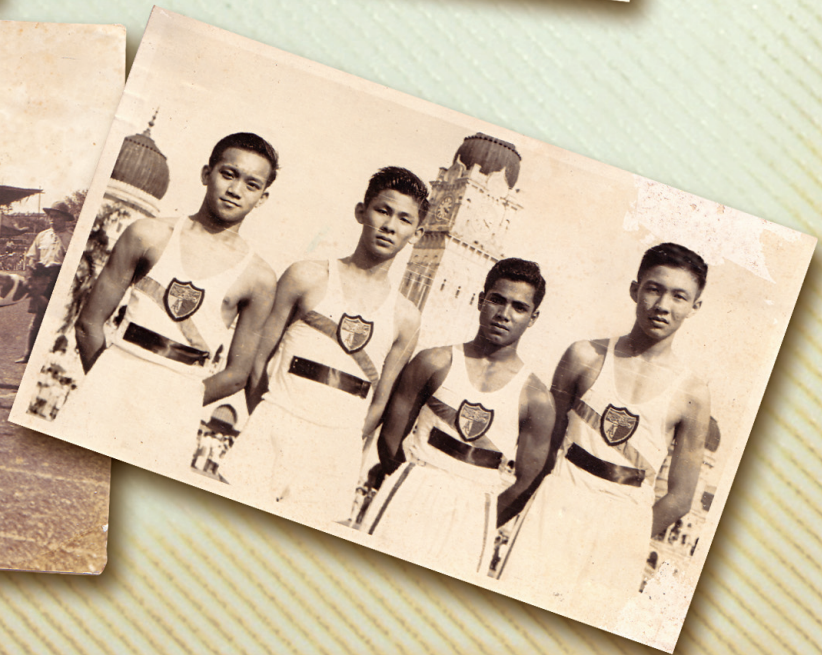
Singapore athletics entered the 1980s with high hopes but it was soon evident that the glorious 1970s would be hard to match.

many local track and field meets. Also there were the meets held on the grass at Jalan Besar Stadium, Victoria School and St Joseph's Institution. As oil was forbidden, white lines used in competitive races had to be drawn by hand with chalk. Technical officials were deployed to draw the lines before races, and sudden downpours meant that the lines had to be redrawn before the event could start. Yet no one seemed deterred and the show always went on.

Singapore athletics entered the 1980s with high hopes but it was soon evident that the glorious 1970s would be hard to match. Providing the much-needed continuity were athletes like distance runner K. Jayamani, high jumper Noor Azhar Hamid and decathlete Tang Ngai Kin. Other athletes from this era included marathoner Toh So Liang, high jumper Ranjit Kaur, steeplechase runner M. Maran, 1,500m specialist Perumal Pugalenti and sprinters Hong Jinsheng and Mona Kunalan. While the exploits of the athletes didn't rise to the level seen in the 1970s, they certainly tried their best. Meanwhile, in terms of organization of international sports events, Singapore began to make its mark. For example, led by the indefatigable Goh Teck Phuan, the Singapore Marathon, which started modestly, grew from strength to strength as a global event, with American publication, Runner's World, describing it once as "fast becoming one of Asia's most competitive races." The club scene also saw competition among clubs like Lotto Track and Field Club, Flash Sports Club, Police Sports Association, Prisons Sports Club, United Malayan Banking Corp and Swift Athletes Association.

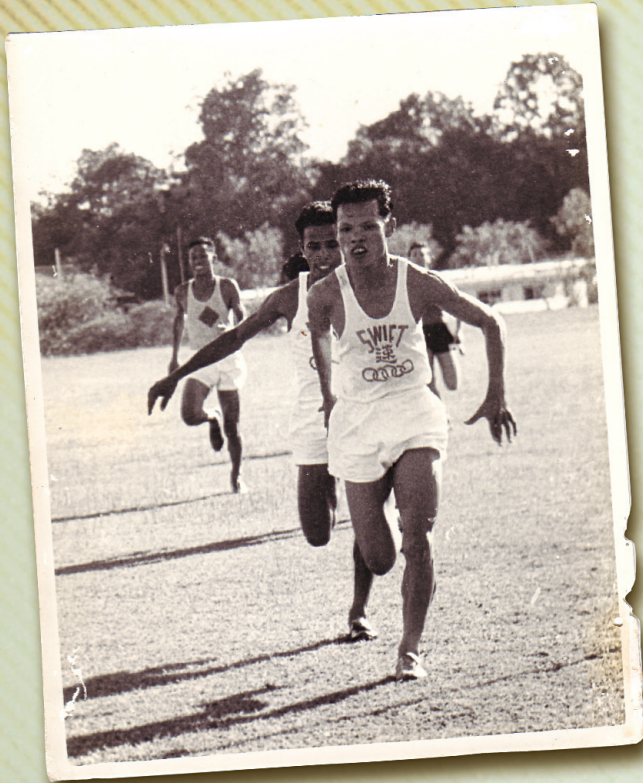
The 1990s brought to the fore some fine talents, including sprinter Mohd Hosni, marathoner Yvonne Danson, high jumper Wong Yew Tong and thrower James Wong. James, for example, started his reign as SEA Games discus champion with his win on home ground in 1993 – a feat he would repeat every two years without fail throughout the 90s and even beyond. Other athletes of note during this decade included heptathlete Yu Long Nyu, marathoner Toh So Liang, sprinters Hamkah Afik and Yusuf Alias, and pole vaulters Mok Hay Foo and Chan Chin Wah. The walkers too made an impact, including Khoo Ching Mong and Helen Low. At the junior level, it was a good era for local sprinting, with names like Timothy Yeo, U. K. Shyam, Nurulaini Arifin and Lim Joo Lee showing promise. Meanwhile, the Singapore International Marathon continued to enjoy phenomenal growth among both the locals and overseas athletes. As for the club scene, from the 90s onwards, those that kept it alive included Swift Athletes Association, Wings Athletics Club, Singapore Masters, MR 25, SAFSA, Flash Athletics Club, Prisons Sports Recreation Club, National University of Singapore, Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, and Nanyang Polytechnic.

The Singapore International Marathon continued to enjoy phenomenal growth among both the locals and overseas athletes.









THOSE WERE THE DAYS

“In terms of competitions, the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, was a special moment for me. I ran in the 800m heats with the American runner, Thomas Courtney, who eventually won the finals. Over the course of my career, C. Kunalan stood out among local athletes. He was one of those chaps who persevered. He wasn’t big or tall but made up for it by trying very hard.”

- M. Harichandra

“At the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur, I competed in the 10,000m as a new Singaporean citizen and former minister Mr E. W. Barker was there to wish me the best of luck before the race. After I won my first race as a Singaporean, he hugged me and said, ‘You are my citizen.’ I remember that race (the 10,000m) vividly. It was at 3.45pm and I was running barefoot. In the last lap, the runner from Myanmar was about 70m to 80m ahead of me but I caught him in the last 100m. He made the mistake of turning back frequently to look at me and I knew I had to go all out. I overtook him in the last 50m and set my best lap time of 55 secs. Also memorable for me was how I created a stir by running barefoot at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. I was used to running barefoot as I couldn’t afford shoes when I started running. Psychologically, I felt I could run faster without them. Sportswear companies like Adidas, Puma and Nike gave me track suits and spikes after learning about my situation.”

- P. C. Suppiah

“Winning for Singapore on home ground at the 1973 SEA Games was one of my proudest moments as an athlete. Representing the country at the Olympics in Munich in 1972 was another proud moment as the Olympics is the furthest one can go as an athlete.”

- Noor Azhar Hamid

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“One of the proudest moments in my athletics career was being able to represent the nation in the SEA Games and other major competitions. I was also delighted to be named Sportswoman of the Year in 1976 and 1980 as the award is one of the biggest achievements for every athlete. The biggest competition I competed in was the IAAF World Cup in 1977 in Düsseldorf, Germany. It was a continental event and I represented Asia in the 3,000m. While I didn’t win any medal, I was happy that I set the national record of 10:03.”

- **K. Jayamani**

“ACS coach Tan Soo Hian was instrumental in developing me as an athlete. He was not a strict coach but he was effective. Also he was very kind. I came from an ordinary family and didn’t have any money to buy spikes. But he bought me a pair of spikes with his own money.”

- **Tang Weng Fei**

“There were two significant moments in my athletics career. The first was when we won a bronze medal for the 4x100m relay at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok. The relay team comprised C. Kunalan, Bava Natahar, the late Gunasena Migale and I. At that time, I was only 18 years old and it was my first Asian Games. The second big moment for me was winning the bronze medal for the 400m at the Asian Track and Field in 1973 in Manila. I set a national record of 47.8 secs for that event. Overall, I remember we were like a happy family. We looked forward to our training at Farrer Park Stadium. After training, we would sit at the sarabat stall to chat. There was camaraderie as all races, Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian, sat at the stall enjoying our tea, coffee and Indian prata. When we were selected to represent Singapore, we felt very honoured.”

- **Ho Mun Cheong**

“In the early days, coaches like Patrick Zehnder, Chow Weng Kai, Ng Liang Chiang, Tan Kim Seng, Osman Merican, M. Harichandra and I had different squads and we trained the athletes at Farrer Park. We were all friends but we were also very competitive. Because of this, the standards were very high. For example, Singapore athletics’ best performance was at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, Iran, where Chee Swee Lee won the gold in the 400m, the 4x400m women’s relay team finished second, and the 4x100 men’s and women’s teams won bronzes. The NSPB (National Sports Promotion Board) had helped the athletes get time off from work to train. Under that system, the results showed.”

- Maurice Nicholas

“One of my best races was at the 1973 SEAP Games in Singapore where I beat the Burmese runner, Than Than, in the 200m. My gut feeling told me that I would do well. I knew I had to come out of the blocks fast and beat her around the bend. She was in lane 1 while I was in lane 3 so I couldn’t see her. I had to benchmark myself against Myanmar’s second fastest runner. Coming around the bend, Than had caught up with me and I told myself I couldn’t let the race go. I had to lunge forward at the finish line. It was a photo finish. They took 30 minutes to decide the winner. Another memorable race was the 4x400m relay at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. I ran the first leg while Lee Tai Jong, Maimoon Bakar and Chee Swee Lee ran the other three legs. The Japanese team had led us by quite far. We were about eight to 10m behind in the last leg. Swee Lee caught up and the Japanese beat us by only a hair’s breath for the gold. We won the silver and set the national record of 3:43.85. It was very special.”

- Glory Barnabas

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“As for significant moments in Singapore’s athletics history, I would single out Chee Swee Lee winning the 400m gold in the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran.”

“Personally, my involvement in track started in mid 1963. That year, we went to Kuala Lumpur to compete in the Merdeka Games. I just couldn’t believe it as I had come from nowhere to represent Singapore ‘state’ in the Malaysian games. Running against the rest of the Malaysian states and coming in 2nd in the 200m in the Merdeka Stadium was just a great feeling. As for significant moments in Singapore’s athletics history, I would single out Chee Swee Lee winning the 400m gold in the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. Outstanding! I know how much she sacrificed and trained. For me, the 1974 Asian Games was also significant. Winning the bronze in the 4x100m against the best in Asia was memorable. I helped to set the national record that stood for 20 years, only to see it broken in 1994 by a team I coached. In 1974, our 4x400m relay team also set a national record which still stands today.”

- C. Kunalan

“Some of the moments in my athletics career were winning the sprint double at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok and earning the accolade of the ‘fastest man in Asia’.”

“Every phase of one’s life has defining moments. Some of the moments in my athletics career were winning the sprint double at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok and earning the accolade of the ‘fastest man in Asia’. Another moment was qualifying for the 200m semi finals of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964. The athletics scene in my time was quite exciting as there were few distractions then. The competition was very keen and there were many enthusiastic followers and spectators. It was all entirely amateur, with no monetary support or rewards. Officials were mainly teachers who volunteered. They took us to races in their cars, often at their own expense. In those days, Farrer Park was the gathering point. Its opening was a big boost to Singapore athletics. For many years, it was the centre stage for athletics drama. Most athletes gathered there as a daily ritual. Many friendships were forged and many champions were born.”

- Mani Jegathesan

“For many years, my goal was to go to the Olympics as it represents the highest level that an athlete can aim for. I set this target as the Olympics was the only major competition that I hadn’t been to. At the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the feeling was just something that I cannot describe. The Olympics is the most prestigious event in the world and I was so proud. As for my best races, they took place at the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur. I was second in the 100m and 4x100m relay, and third in the 200m and 4x400m. I ran in four races. It was tough physically but I overcame the challenge by being mentally tough.”

- Yeo Kian Chai

“In those days, there were not that many overseas competitions. At the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo, I got a culture shock. I had spent all my time in Singapore and was shocked by the different kinds of food and the chilly weather. In terms of personal memories, I have a few which remain vivid even today. I was the first schoolboy to win the 100m and 200m at the Malaysian Open in 1957. I was just 18 years old then. I was also the only schoolboy to qualify for the Olympics in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia. It was quite an awesome experience and I met big names, including American athlete Robert Morrow, who went on to win the 100m gold. Earlier, in 1955, the great Jesse Owens came to Singapore for a seminar. He saw me running in the field playing rugby and asked me to do a demonstration. After that, he told my teacher that I had potential and the school got me a personal coach, Ali Ahmad, who was a former champion. I was 15 or 16 at that time and didn’t even know who Jesse Owens was!”

- Kesavan Soon

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“At that time, we all ran for sportsmanship, for country, and for the love of sports.”

“My favourite event as an athlete was the 1,500m which I enjoyed for its strategy and tactical acumen. Among those I would credit for my progress were Maurice Nicholas, who started coaching me when I was 16, and Goh Teck Phuan whose guidance was much valued. As athletes, we used to train at Macritchie Reservoir, Farrer Park and Rifle Range Road. There was a strong sense of belonging to the running fraternity then. With opportunities for bonding, it was natural for us to treat the running circle as our extended family. The most eventful moment for me was winning the first Singapore Marathon in 1976. Over 10,000 people took part. I was then a middle distance runner. So winning a long distance event was a surprise. In terms of coaching, one memory I treasure would be K. Jayamani winning the marathon gold at the 1983 SEA Games held in Singapore. I felt proud to be able to play a part in building on the good work her former coach Maurice Nicholas had done with her when I started coaching her in 1981.”

- M. Sivalingam

“Two moments stand out for me. In 1954, I was selected for the Asian Games in Manila. It was so memorable for me because I was the dark horse, yet I won the silver medal in the 100m. The Japanese runner and I finished with the same timing of 12.5 secs but she was awarded the gold. Representing Singapore at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne was also memorable. To don national colours as a sportsman or sportswoman, you must think first of doing well for your country. At that time, we all ran for sportsmanship, for country, and for the love of sports.”

- Mary Klass

“The athletics scene in the 50s was very different. Everyone wanted to run and represent his school at the interschool relays. There were five big teams – Anglo Chinese School, Raffles Institution, St Joseph’s Institution, St Andrew’s School, and Victoria School. There were no other attractions in life for us. We just wanted to run and make the team. One of the significant moments in my career was meeting American Olympian Jesse Owens in the 50s. It was truly inspiring to meet such a great runner. After my retirement, I joined SAAA as the vice president of training and selection – organising training programmes, overseeing preparations for the SEA Games, and talent spotting athletes with potential. I developed a rapport with youngsters like Hamkah Afik, Mohd Hosni and James Wong.”

- Lim Jit Imm

“Athletics has given me some great memories and developed in me some positive traits. In terms of memories, I can recall how my time as an athlete started when I was a schoolboy in Chinese High. We didn’t have a coach. There were only seniors to guide us. Once I ran 47.8 secs for the 400m at the Singapore Open. That was exciting as it was my personal best. Also, at the triangular meet between Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau in 1983, I put in good timings for my races and won medals. I will not forget how I enjoyed myself so much. This is partly why I’m a supporter of Swift Athletic Association as a sponsor today. I really respect this group of die-hard volunteers. It’s not easy running the association but they keep going. As for traits developed from my sport, I will single out discipline. If you want to succeed, you need discipline. Because of it, I’m quite deadline driven. If I fix a time to finish something, I will keep to it and not postpone it.”

- Sng Sze Hiang

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“One significant moment for me was when I managed to qualify for the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. I was a schoolgirl runner then and it was the first time I was away from Singapore. It was overwhelming to be a part of a huge event like the Olympics. At that time, it was intimidating. But it was an eye opener as well to see what there was beyond Singapore. There was a great feeling of friendship and camaraderie among the athletes.”

- Janet Jesudason

“The team spirit we developed has remained with me up till now.”

“One of my fondest memories was when our team made the annual trip up to Malacca to participate in the annual Inter-State Competition in 1963. That year, the team drove up in 6 cars, won 6 events and broke 6 records. It was almost magical. The team spirit we developed has remained with me up till now. Today, as a coach, I try to instill life skills and build athletes who are willing to fight against the odds.”

- Loh Chan Pew

“Training in Germany was such an eye-opener as things were so professional.”

“I first took part in the SEA Games in Singapore in 1973. It was my first time taking part in the decathlon and I came in second, breaking the national and SEA Games record. In the 1980s, I was sent to Germany to train and was attached to the German sports university in Cologne. Training there was such an eye-opener as things were so professional. After returning from Germany in the late 80s, I didn't have time for decathlon and my coach was in Germany. He suggested that I try doing sprints instead. At the ASEAN Cup in Jakarta, I almost beat the top Thai sprinter and finished second with a time of 10.56 secs.”

- Tang Ngai Kin

“Winning three gold medals in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay at the Merdeka Games in Kuala Lumpur had to be one of my proudest moments. It was such a good feeling to hear the national anthem being played three times at the Merdeka Stadium. As for team mates, I remember, among others, Chan Onn Leng, who was one of Asia’s best hurdlers, as well as my seniors Tan Soo Hian and his brother, Tan Soo Liat. We were all Swift members and used to run at Jalan Besar Stadium. That was a colourful place. Then there was the Beatty Secondary School field where I also trained. It couldn’t even fit in a 200m track, so we had to run round and round. That trained me in running the curves on the track. The guys used to joke that I was so good on the curve because my left leg was shorter than my right leg.”

- Low Sin Chock

“I didn’t make it in football as I was too short and skinny. But I was doing well in cross country and was discovered by Tan Soo Hian. Looking back at my athletics career, I must admit there were some personal disappointments due to unfulfilled potential. For example, I didn’t make the team for the 1981 SEA Games and left for the United Kingdom in 1982 for my studies. Still, there were some memorable races. In 1981, for instance, I raced against some of Asia’s best, including athletes from Japan, at the Thailand Open. It was scary as I went into the race knowing they were fast runners. I led the pack for about 550m and came in fourth eventually. For me, it was satisfying as I had a sense of what it meant to be competitive even when racing against top athletes. Apart from the running, I would always appreciate my track career for the good memories as well as wonderful friends.”

- Tan Ming Jen

“The guys used to joke that I was so good on the curve because my left leg was shorter than my right leg.”

“Apart from the running, I would always appreciate my track career for the good memories as well as wonderful friends.”

AGAINST THE BEST

In major sports competitions like the SEA Games, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics, track & field – alongside swimming - enjoys a certain prestige and visibility which other sports often envy. This is perhaps why some of the most recognizable Olympic champions come from track and field. Indeed, the likes of USA's sprinter Jesse Owens, Australia's 400m runner Cathy Freeman and China's 110m hurdler Liu Xiang are household names. At the Asian Games and SEA Games levels, our stars in track & field are well recognized among Singaporeans. For example, even after all these years, sprinter C. Kunalan, middle distance champion Chee Swee Lee and long distance queen K. Jayamani are personalities sports fans are familiar with.

Often, at major meets, fans pay close attention to the performances of our track & field representatives. The sheer drama, excitement and glamour of events like the 100m, 800m and 4x400m relay make athletics the sport which hogs the limelight during competitions like the SEA Games or Asian Games. And purists do argue that gold medals in other sports mean little if we fall too far behind in a major sport like track & field.

Perhaps this is why some of the best moments in Singapore's sporting history come from athletics. So take your little trip down memory lane as we bring you some of the highlights from track & field during major competitions.

REGIONAL FORCE

SEA Games

Bangkok 1959

In the 1959 SEAP Games (now known as SEA Games) held in Bangkok, Singapore did well with a harvest of four golds, 2 silvers and 3 bronzes. Tan Eng Yoon was the undisputed star as he won gold medals in the 400m hurdles and the “hop, step, jump” as well as bronze in the 110m hurdles. A. Pal Singh and Wong Fey Wan shone too with golds in the pole vault and 110m hurdles respectively. M. Gunasena, silver in the 400m hurdles, and Ernest Frida, bronzes in the 100m and 200m, were the other individuals who made their mark. In the 4x100m relay, Ernest teamed up with Cedric Monterio, Chai Ling Fook and Low Sin Chock to clinch the silver.

Rangoon 1961

In the next SEAP Games, held in 1961 in Rangoon, Singapore continued its fine showing with its 3-3-4 haul. The three gold medallists were Wong Fey Yan in the 110m hurdles, Tan Eng Yoon in the hop, step & jump and A. S. Gill in the high jump. Fey Wan also won silver in the 400m hurdles while Eng Yoon clinched a bronze in the 110m hurdles. On their part, Low Sin Chock (100m) and A. Pal Singh (pole vault) earned individual bronzes. Sin Chock and Eng Yoon also teamed up with Benedict Gomes and V. K. Nathan for the 4x100m relay silver. But the breakthrough – in terms of the strides made by Singapore women - came in the medals earned by Evelyn Lee Yuet Yong who won a silver in the long jump and a bronze in the 80m hurdles.

Kuala Lumpur 1965

At the next SEAP Games held in Kuala Lumpur in 1965, Singapore collected four golds, five silvers and five bronzes. Leading the way with the gold medals were Osman Merican in the 110m hurdles, E. Mane in the hammer throw, M. Gunasena in the 400m hurdles and Cheong Wai Hing in the high jump. The silvers came from Parameswaran Pillai in the 5,000m, Wong Fey Wan in the 110m hurdles, Major Singh in the 3,000m steeplechase, the men's 4x100m relay quartet (C. Kunalan, Osman Merican, Natahar Bava, Wong Fey Wan) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Evelyn Tan, Heather Siddons, Chia Lee Meng, Glory Varam). Bronzes were earned by A. Pal Singh in the pole vault, Natahar Bava in the 200m and marathon, Cheong Wai Hing in the pentathlon and the team of Osman Merican, A. Saddayapan, Kenneth Perera and M. Gunasena in the men's 4x400m relay.

Bangkok 1967

At the 1967 SEAP Games in Bangkok, where Singapore walked away with a creditable 5-9-7 haul, the attractive Heather Siddons came into the limelight and made a statement for the ladies with gold in the 80m hurdles. Joining her as gold medallists were Osman Merican (110m hurdles), Mahmood Mansur (pole vault), Ekanth Mane (hammer throw) and Cheong Wai Hing (pentathlon). Wong Fey Wan (110m hurdles), Cheong Wai Hing (80m hurdles), C. Kunalan (100m, 200m), Avtar Singh (1,500m), P. Pillai (5,000m), Mirza N. Namazie (3,000m steeplechase) and Hali Singh (10,000m) earned silvers. The men's 4x100m relay team of C. Kunalan, Yeo Kian Chai, Wong Fey Wan and Nathar Bava also earned a silver. Clinching bronzes were Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Glory Barnabas (100m, 200m), Cheong Wai Hing (high jump) and Mirza N. Namazie (5,000m). The men's 4x400m relay team (Nathar Bava, Gunasela Migale, Ho Mun Cheong, C. Kunalan) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Glory Barnabas, Eng Chiew Guay, Rosalind Chan, Maimoon Bakar) also won bronzes. Significantly, though athletes like Glory Barnabas, Noor Azhar Hamid and C. Kunalan didn't win gold medals here. This was just the beginning of their long association with Singapore athletics – an association which would soon bring them many moments of glory.

Rangoon 1969

In the 1969 SEAP Games in Rangoon, where Singapore recorded a 6-8-7 haul in terms of medals, C. Kunalan emerged as the undisputed star with two individual wins. His times of 10.5 secs and 21.3 secs in the 100m and 200m respectively caught the eyes of fellow athletes and coaches. In addition, he teamed up with Cheah Kim Teck, A. Sadayappan and Ho Mun Cheong to win the 4x400m relay gold. Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), M. Mansoor (pole vault) and Gan Bee Wah (100m hurdles) shone with gold medals. Ho Mun Cheong (400m), Avtar Singh (5,000m), Osman Merican (110m hurdles), Lim Boot Hiang (long jump), Glory Barnabas (100m, 200m), Chee Swee Lee (400m) and the women's 4x100m relay team of Eng Chiew Guay, Madeline Teo, Christine Chung and Glory Barnabas accounted for the silvers. Bronzes went to P. Pillai (5,000m and 3,000m steeplechase), A. Sadayappan (400m hurdles), Arumugam Kannan (50km walk), Lee Tai Jong (800m), Gan Bee Wah (pentathlon) and the 4x100m relay team of Andrew Chee, Aminuddin Kassim, Yeo Kian Chai and C. Kunalan.

Kuala Lumpur 1971

In the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur, P. C. Suppiah and Lim Hong Kang emerged as the new stars of Singapore athletics with golds in the 10,000m and long jump respectively. Apart from these two wins, our athletes also brought home 12 silvers and seven bronzes. Among those who contributed the silvers were Yeo Kian Chai (100m), P. C. Suppiah (5,000m), Francis Sengol (20km walk), Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Lim Boot Hiang (long jump), Leslie Shepherdson (triple jump), Eknath Mane (hammer throw), Lee Tai Jong (800m) and Chua Kim Tee (javelin). Teams for the men's 4x100m relay (Illyas, Aminuddin Kassim, Loh Chan Pew and Yeo Kian Chai), women's 4x100m relay (Eng Chiew Guay, A. Latchemay, Maimoon Bakar and Sheila Fernando) and women's 4x400m relay (Chew Kim Hua, A. Latchemay, Maimoon Bakar and Chee Swee Lee) also won silvers. The bronze medallists were Wong Chong Sai (pole vault), Eng Chiew Guay (100m), Chee Swee Lee (400m), Mirnigar Begum (1,500m), Jeanette Gaffney (200m hurdles), Yeo Kian Chai (200m), and the team of Cheah Kim Teck, Ong Yeok Phee, Ho Mun Cheong and Yeo Kian Chai (4x400m relay)

Singapore 1973

The 1973 SEAP Games held in Singapore marked a breakthrough, with our athletes winning an unprecedented number of medals – 7 golds, 16 silvers and 8 bronzes. The women stole the show, with wins by Heather Merican (100m hurdles, 200m hurdles), Eng Chiew Guay (100m), Glory Barnabas (200m) and the team of Eng Chiew Guay, Glory Barnabas, Gan Bee Wah and Sheila Fernando (4x100m relay). Our men too did their part, with Tang Ngai Kin (decathlon) and Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump) striking gold. In winning medals, athletes like Sergit Singh, P. C. Suppiah, A. Mahalingam and S. A. Kannu did their part to boost middle distance and long distance running in Singapore while R. Nadarajan and S. Dorairaj did well in the walking races. Other athletes who put up a good show included Lim Hong Kang, Wong Chong Sai, Jaw Tee Jang, Eknath Mane, Chee Swee Lee, Mirnigar Begum, Gan Bee Wah, Leow Nam Fang, Goh Li Kian, Koh Hong Phang, Chua Kim Tee, Kok Yin Ping and Jennifer Moss. Relay teams made up of runners like C. Kunalan, Yeo Kian Chai, Ong Yeok Phee, Andrew Chee, Loh Chan Pew, Ho Mun Cheong, Cheah Kim Teck, Godfrey Jalleh, C. Madathi, Chew Kim Hua, Maimoon Azlan and Chee Swee Lee also contributed to the rich harvest. For young Chee Swee Lee in particular, the success of 1973 was just part of a bigger quest. A year later, at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, she performed admirably on a much bigger stage and was crowned 400m champion.

Bangkok 1975

Repeating the phenomenal success of 1973 on home ground was going to be tough. Even so, our athletes performed well in the next SEAP Games, held in 1975 in Bangkok, reaping 5 golds, 6 silvers and 3 bronzes. Flying the national flag high with golden performances were Cheah Kim Teck (400m), Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Chee Swee Lee (400m, 800m) and Heather Merican (200m hurdles). The silver medals came from Lim Hong Kang (long jump), R. Nadarajan (20km walk), Heather Merican (100m hurdles) as well as from our relay teams. Chew Kim Hua (400m), Lee Tai Jong (1,500m) and Chia Swee Kim (high jump) also shone with bronzes. In all, it was a good meet after the high of 1973. Other athletes who did their part were C. Kunalan, Ong Yeok Phee, Mohd Illyas Bujai, Yeo Kian Chai, Quah Kim Tiong, Godfrey Jalleh and Low Yock Peng. Again, Chee Swee Lee's performance was the highlight. Her two gold medals affirmed her status as one of the region's best athletes.

Kuala Lumpur 1977

In a relatively quiet outing after the success of 1973 and 1975, Singapore clinched 3 golds, 3 silvers and 5 bronzes at the 1977 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur. Bringing in top honours were Sankaran Gawade (hammer) and K. Jayamani (1,500m, 3,000m). Heather Merican (200m hurdles), Chua Kim Tee (javelin) and the 4x100m relay team brought home the silvers while C. Kunalan (100m), S. Kumaravelu (marathon), R. Nadarajan (10 km walk), R. Maniam (20 km walk) and K. Jayamani (800m) won bronzes.

Jakarta 1979

In yet another difficult outing marked by big improvements on the part of regional rivals, Singapore won 2 golds, 5 silvers and 3 bronzes at the 1979 SEA Games in Jakarta. The 2 golds came from the valiant efforts of K. Jayamani, who triumphed in the 1,500m and 3,000m to establish herself as the rising star of distance running in South East Asia. Winning the silver medals were R. Nadarajan (10km walk, 20km walk), Sankaran Gawade (hammer throw), Hamzah Barik (110m hurdles) and Krishnasamy Chandriga (5km walk) while Chua Kim Tee (javelin), Heather Merican (100m hurdles) and Surendra Subramaniam (1,500m) earned bronzes.

Manila 1981

After the glory of the 70s, an era when talents were well groomed and team spirit high, Singapore's athletes found the going tough. The team returning from the 1981 SEA Games in Manila managed a silver and six bronzes. It was the first time we didn't win a gold medal. Putting in valiant efforts was R. Nadarajan (silver in 20km walk, bronze in 10km walk). The bronze medallists were Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Tang Ngai Kin (100m), Margaret Tan (5km walk, 10km walk) and the 4x100m relay team of Ganesan Kasee, Andrew Toh, Tang Ngai Kin and Haron Mudir.

Singapore 1983

In 1983, the SEA Games returned to Singapore. As host country, much was at stake. Some lost pride felt after the 1981 SEA Games in Manila when we didn't win a single gold was salvaged, thanks to the winning performance of K. Jayamani in the women's marathon. Her efforts were all the more appreciated as she was not a specialist in this event. Through sheer will power and the determination to make sure we would not end up without a gold again, she managed to hold off her regional rivals. Apart from this single gold, we also won 2 silvers and 6 bronzes. The silvers came from Haron Mundir (200m) and Margaret Tan (10km walk). Jagtar Singh (10,000m), D. Selvarajoo (3,000m steeplechase), R. Nadarajan (10km walk, 20km walk), Ng Yee Ming (long jump), K. Jayamani (3,000m) and the men's 4x100m relay team of Haron Mundir, Ong Yeok Phee, Alan Koh and Tang Ngai Kin won bronzes.

Bangkok 1985

If a revival was what we were hoping for after the encouraging results of the 1983 SEA Games on home ground, it didn't happen in 1985 when the event was held in Bangkok. In what was easily Singapore's driest outing, only pole vaulters Chan Chin Wah and Ng Kean Mun (bronzes) came home with medals.

Jakarta 1987

The next SEA Games, held in Jakarta in 1987, produced slightly better results for the Singapore track and field team which won five bronzes. Haron Mundir showed promise with bronzes in both the 100m and 200m and teamed up with Hong Jin Sheng, Francis Nathan and Sandy Ang to finish third in the 4x100m relay. The other medallists were James Wong (discuss) and Helen Low (5km walk).

Kuala Lumpur 1989

Haron Mundir continued to hold the fort in the 1989 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, clinching silver in the 100m and bronze in the 200m for Singapore's only medals in track & field. The gold medal remained elusive since K. Jayamani last won it in the 1983 SEA Games in Singapore.

Manila 1991

Things got even more challenging for Singapore in the 1991 SEA Games in the Philippines as our neighbours improved while we tried to keep up. Only Yu Long Nyu managed a medal – a bronze in the heptathlon.

Singapore 1993

Things improved when the Singapore hosted the SEA Games yet again in 1993. James Wong finally broke a 10-year dry spell in terms of gold medals with his win in the discus. He also clinched a silver in the hammer throw. There were commendable performances too by silver medallists, Hamkah Afik (200m) and Toh So Liang (marathon). Winning bronzes were Tan Kheik Tiong (10km walk), Khoo Ching Mong (20km walk), Helen Low (5km walk, 10km walk), Mok Hay Foo (pole vault), Toh So Liang (10,000m) and Yu Long Nyu (heptathlon). They were joined by the men's 4x100m relay team of Firdhouse H. Saiyat, Mohd Yusof Alias, Hamkah Afik and Mohd Hosni.

Chiangmai 1995

James Wong continued to fly the national flag at the 1995 SEA Games in Chiangmai, winning gold in the discus and silver in the hammer. In all, Singapore collected one gold, three silvers and two bronzes. The other silvers came from Yvonne Danson (marathon) and Wong Yew Tong (high jump). Chan Chin Wah (pole vault) and Yvonne Danson (10,000m) won bronzes.

Jakarta 1997

Continuing what had become a tradition of sorts, James Wong won the discus yet again at the 1997 SEA Games in Jakarta. He went one better this time with gold in the hammer as well. Apart from his two golds, Singapore also won bronzes, courtesy of Toh So Liang (marathon), the men's 4x100m relay team (Yusuf Alias, Hamkah Afik, Timothy Yeo and U. K. Shyam) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Nurulaini Arifin, Mona Kunalan, Tan Shieh Li and Hiranisha Rasimudin).

Brunei 1999

The reliance on James Wong was obvious at the 1999 SEA Games in Brunei. Both our medals – gold in the discus and silver in the hammer – came from him.

Kuala Lumpur 2001

James Wong delivered yet again at the 2001 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur where he clinched gold in the discus. Sprinter U. K. Shyam, who showed much promise in the build up to this competition, proved his worth with silver in the highly competitive 100m. Dong Enxin collected silvers in the shot put and discus to bring Singapore medal tally from track & field to 1-3-0.

Vietnam 2003

In a much-welcomed change, Singapore's track & field team didn't just depend on James Wong to deliver the gold medals at the 2003 SEA Games in Vietnam. Sure the gentle giant did his part with gold in the discus again. This time, however, he was joined by Dong Enxin (shot put), Du Xianhui (shot put) and Zhang Guirong (discus) as gold medallists. Winning silvers were Du Xianhui (discus), Zhang Guirong (javelin, shot put) and the men's 4x100m relay team of Lin Jingze, U. K. Shyam, Hamkah Afik and Poh Seng Song. In a valiant effort, Chamkaur Singh took bronze in the 1,500m.

Manila 2005

In the 2005 SEA Games in Manila, James Wong ruled in his pet event, the discus, again while Zhang Guirong and Du Xianhui won the shot put and discus respectively. Du Xianhui also won the shot put silver while bronzes went to James Wong (shot put), Zhang Guirong (discus and javelin) and the men's 4x100m relay team (Mohd Firdaus, Alfred Sim, U. K. Shyam and Poh Seng Song).

BIG STAGE

Asian Games

The transition from SEA Games success to Asian Games glory has never been straight forward as there is a big gap between the standards of these two competitions. This is because, at the Asian level, there are some world class athletes. For instance, among the Asian Games champions today are Olympic gold medallists like China's 110m hurdler Liu Xiang and Japan's hammer thrower Koji Murofushi. As such, some of Singapore's finest athletes like Chee Swee Lee and C. Kunalan can take pride in the fact that they once stood tall as among Asia's best. Here's a look at some of the best performances of Singapore's athletes at the Asian Games over the years.

New Delhi 1951

Our athletes started off on a high with one gold, two silvers and two bronzes at the very first Asian Games, held in New Delhi in 1951. Ng Liang Chiang was the toast of the team with gold in the 110m hurdles (15.2 secs) to go with bronze in the 400m hurdles (57.6 secs). Lloyd Valberg also clinched bronze with his time of 15.7 secs in the 110m hurdles. Laura Dowdswell shone with two silvers – in the 200m (27.2 secs) and 80m hurdles (13.5 secs).

Manila 1954

The competition became more intense in the 1954 Asian Games in Manila. Still, our athletes held their own, with two silvers and a bronze. The women in particular did well. Mary Klass clinched silver in the 100m (12.5 secs) while Tang Pui Wah won bronze in the 80m hurdles (12.1 secs). Chan Onn Leng continued our tradition of excellence in the hurdles with his silver in the 400m hurdles (54.8 secs).

Tokyo 1958 & Jakarta 1962

There was a dry spell for Singapore's athletes at the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo as well as the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta.

Bangkok 1966

Thankfully, things improved in 1966 when the competition was held in Bangkok. C. Kunalan showed tremendous potential with his silver in the 100m (10.5 secs). He also teamed up with Bava Natahar, Gunasena Migale and Ho Mun Cheong to win bronze in the 4x400m relay while Cheong Wai Hing clinched the high jump bronze.

Bangkok 1970

In the 1970 Asian Games in Bangkok, C. Kunalan continued his good form with two bronzes – 100m (10.5 secs) and 200m (21.5 secs). The best performance for Singapore came from the women's 4x100m relay team. Glory Barnabas, Wadhupal Schushila, Gan Bee Wah and Abu Bakar Maimoon Bakar combined well to win the silver in 48 secs.

Tehran 1974

In the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, Chee Swee Lee was easily the star of the Singapore team. Running a well judged race, she clinched gold in the 400m (55.08 secs) despite stiff opposition. She was supported by team mates who also did well. For example, the women's 4x400m relay team clocked 3:43.85 to win silver while the women's 4x100m relay team managed to clinch bronze with their time of 47.10 secs. On their part, the men's 4x100m relay team of C. Kunalan, Ong Yeok Phee, Tan Say Leong and Yeo Kian Chai were rewarded with the bronze with their effort of 40.34 secs. Overall, the performance of our athletes in 1974 earned them praise. Known for their dedication and fighting spirit, they held their own against opponents from top countries like China, Japan and South Korea.

Since then, Singapore has not earned a medal in track & field at the Asian Games level (1978 Bangkok, 1982 New Delhi, 1986 Seoul, 1990 Beijing, 1994 Hiroshima, 1998 Bangkok, 2002 Busan and 2006 Doha). There were, however, valiant efforts, with some athletes coming close. Beyond the Asian Games itself, athletes like Zhang Guirong and Du Xianhui have put up fine performances in recent years. For example, at the 2005 Asian Championships in Incheon, Zhang Guirong more than held her own in the shot put against top rivals like China's Li Meiju and Li Ling.

WORLD CLASS EXPOSURE

Commonwealth Games & Olympics

At the levels of the Commonwealth Games and Olympics, Singapore's athletes have never won a medal. This is not surprising given the exceptionally high standards in these competitions. The Commonwealth Games' track & field competition boasts world class athletes from countries like Australia, Jamaica and England while the best from all over the world take part in the Olympics.

For Singapore athletes, places for these competitions have been much coveted over the years. Among those who were selected for the Commonwealth Games were 400m and 800 specialist Chee Swee Lee and sprinter C. Kunalan.

In terms of the Olympics, regarded as the pinnacle of any sporting career, a small group of Singapore athletes can take pride in being selected. Lloyd Valberg, for example, had the honour of being Singapore's first representative when he took part in the competition in 1948 in London - the very stage where the great Fanny Blankers-Koen of Holland shone with four gold medals as a 30 year-old housewife and mother of two just as the world was emerging from the shadows of the Second World War.

Tang Pui Wah made history and a statement for local women when she donned national colours at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. There was more breakthrough for women when Janet Jesudason and Mary Klass joined Kesavan Soon and Tan Eng Yoon as our track & field representatives at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. For the 1960 and 1964 Olympics in Rome and Tokyo respectively, Singapore didn't field anyone in athletics.

Then in 1968, C. Kunalan was selected for the Mexico Olympics. He made his "moment in the sun" count, setting a new national record of 10.38 secs in the 100m which stood for 33 years before U. K. Shyam broke it in 2001. Then Yeo Kian Chai, P. C. Suppiah and Noor Azhar Hamid took part in the 1972 Munich Olympics while Asian Games champion Chee Swee Lee made the team for the 1976 Montreal Olympics before we entered a quiet phase.

No one represented Singapore in track and field for the following Olympics - Moscow 1980, Los Angeles 1984, Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992. The dry spell was broken when long distance runner Yvonne Danson and high jumper Wong Yew Tong headed for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. There was another miss for our athletes in the 2000 Sydney Olympics before Poh Seng Song and Zhang Guirong earned the selectors' nod for the 2004 Athens Olympics.





Christa King
Athletic Union
1920

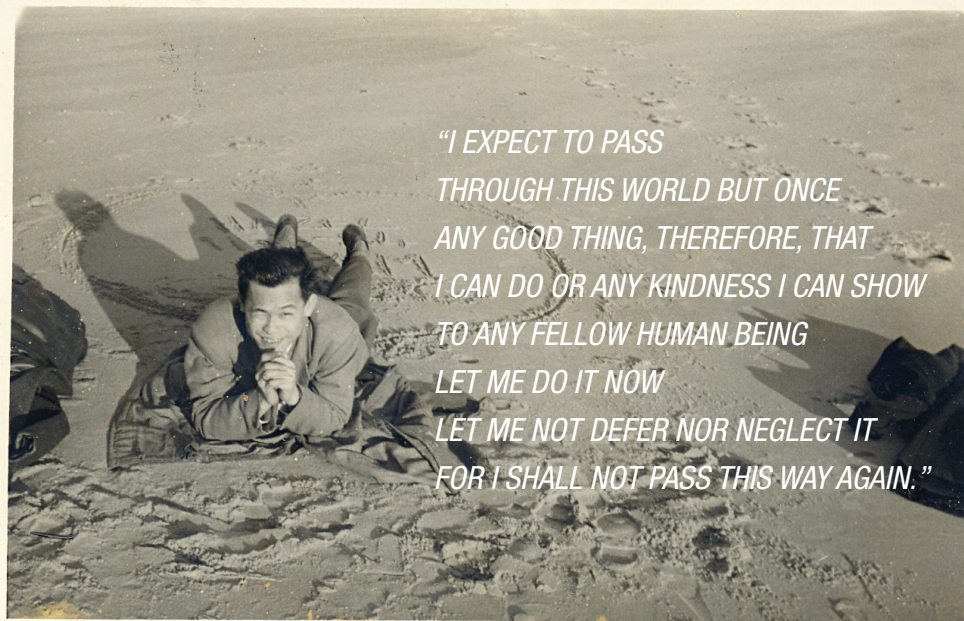


1947 A.A.A. Athletic Team



A MAN FOR ALL REASONS

Goh Teck Phuan



*"I EXPECT TO PASS
THROUGH THIS WORLD BUT ONCE
ANY GOOD THING, THEREFORE, THAT
I CAN DO OR ANY KINDNESS I CAN SHOW
TO ANY FELLOW HUMAN BEING
LET ME DO IT NOW
LET ME NOT DEFER NOR NEGLECT IT
FOR I SHALL NOT PASS THIS WAY AGAIN."*

FITTING TRIBUTE

As the Minister of Social Affairs from October 1963 to June 1977, one of my many roles was promotion of sports in Singapore. At that time, sports did not have the priority it now enjoys. Instead, for any progress to be made, a lot depended on individuals who were willing to go beyond the call of duty.

Goh Teck Phuan was easily such an individual. He was one of those staff who, filled with passion for sports, was full of ideas. More importantly, he was able to translate a lot of his ideas into reality with his enthusiasm, drive, initiative and high energy level. His love for sports was so strong that he didn't allow things to get in his way. If there weren't enough funds, he would think of ways to raise money. If others around him were less than excited, he either tried to win them over with his persuasion or he would lead by example first and slowly gain converts.

Working at the Sports Division under the Ministry of Social Affairs, he, along with others, contributed to many milestones in our

nation's sporting history from the 60s to the 80s - the setting up of the National Stadium, the introduction of the Toto lottery to fund major sports projects, the organization of the first Singapore Grand Prix, the establishment of Pesta Sukan as part of the local sports calendar, the successful hosting of the World Cup Golf and the founding of the Singapore Marathon.

Lasting Strides, initiated by his son Ivan Goh, is a most fitting tribute to him. Its centrespread celebrates his achievements, many of which were ahead of his times and which continue to influence the Singapore sporting landscape today. The fact that the rest of the book takes a look at the history of athletics in Singapore and highlights top athletes over the years is also apt. After all, Goh was an avid runner who took much pride in the success of his fellow athletes.

Othman Wok

Former Minister of Social Affairs

For any progress to be made in sports, a lot depended on individuals who were willing to go beyond the call of duty. Goh Teck Phuan was easily such an individual.”

“The traits which led him to initiate and organise major sporting events were already evident to many of us in our early days of friendship. And we were quick to ride on his strengths to promote track & field.”

TRUE PIONEER

I was never a star athlete. But athletics developed in me the qualities needed for success in my business as the founder of Sincere Fine Watch and Fountain Pen Dealer back in 1954. It instilled in me the spirit of healthy competition, developed in me a sense of perseverance and tenacity and gave me the outlet to meet many outside of the watch industry. Many of these individuals grew to become my close friends and important associates. One of the most memorable was the inspiring Mr Goh Teck Phuan. Indeed, the man who, along with a few other key figures, pioneered many of Singapore's pivotal events, including the highly successful Singapore Marathon, was a figure of inspiration.

The traits which led him to initiate and organise major sporting events were already evident to many of us in our early days of friendship. And we were quick to ride on his strengths to promote track & field. For example, I remember how, in June 1947, a group of us formed the Swift Athletes Association. Given Teck Phuan's natural talent for organisation and immense drive, it was not surprising that he became Honorary Secretary, with Yeo Choon Bee as President.

In the years that followed, what he did for Singapore sports and especially athletics (and athletes) only reinforced our strong belief that here was one special individual willing to work behind the scene to make a big difference.

Apart from making a name as literally the man behind some major events (like the Singapore Marathon), he also left his mark as a coach and as a friend to athletes. There are many stories of how he, with his soft touch for the athletes, went out of his way to help them in concrete ways, including recommending some for relevant jobs to ensure they had a life after their glorious days on the track or in the field.

I am delighted to be part of this project to honour a special individual among us. Today, as Singapore plans and embarks on the many projects it wants to undertake to develop itself as a sports hub and as we witness the growing success of some of our events (eg the Singapore Marathon), it is only right that we recognise the pioneers who laid the ground work. Goh Teck Phuan – a true pioneer - was, in my opinion, one of these key individuals.

Tay Boo Jiang

Founder
Sincere Watch Limited

A GOOD FIGHT

In the early 60s, it was upon Goh Teck Phuan's request that I took over the presidency of the Swift Athletes Association. From the time I knew him, he had always shown his complete dedication to athletics and the Swifts in particular. Nurtured from the stables of the Anglo Chinese School which produced many top athletes such as Yeo Choon Bee, Tan Soo Liat and his brother Soo Hian, Chan Oon Leng, Chen Yew Wah and others, Teck Phuan epitomised the kind of deep passion for track & field few can match.

He was one of the founders of Swift who built up a great tradition of competitive athletics which ensured an endless supply of national champions.

In later years when I was in the Singapore Sports Council and, in collaboration with the Singapore Athletic Association, was promoting the Singapore Marathon, he served as the Secretary of the Organising Committee. In this role, he was the dynamo that drove the committee, pleading with sponsors, writing to various international associations for participation, and persuading the local officials to help with the many duties and responsibilities.

Such was his single mindedness in making every marathon event a success, he worked day and night tirelessly.

Inevitably, the Singapore Marathon became the international attraction that it is today. Many who were associated with the event will remember with deep nostalgia Teck Phuan The Marathon Man, loyal to our nation's hopes and aspirations.

With his passing, we shall miss his fire and dedication to athletics, his friendliness, his strong faith that things will turn out fine even in the face of problems and, most of all, his deep love and inspirational leadership to all young athletes of the Swift AA and the Singapore AA. Like the great athlete who had engaged successfully in life's competition, Teck Phuan merits the biblical quote from Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

(2 Timothy 4: 7)

Lau Teng Chuan

Former Executive Director
Singapore Sports Council

"He was one of the founders of Swift who built up a great tradition of competitive athletics which ensured an endless supply of national champions."

OPENING DOORS

“In many ways, he was my teacher. He encouraged me. He trusted me with responsibilities which were challenging. Often, I had to work hard so as not to disappoint him.”

Lasting Strides is a tribute to the late Goh Teck Phuan. It also takes a look at athletics in Singapore and the many athletes whose lives were touched by him over the years. I am one such athlete. I became a student member of the Swift Athletes Association when it was formed in 1947. Teck Phuan and Yeo Choon Bee, former champions of ACS, came to the Barker Road school field to recruit students to join Swift.

It was from then that a lasting association and friendship developed between Teck Phuan and I. Over the years, I didn't become the top athlete I was striving to be. Instead I dedicated myself to athletics by being a coach and official. Often, the positions I held were thrust upon me by Teck Phuan. I became the Assistant Honorary Treasurer of the Swift Athletes Association in 1951 at the age of 19.

I am now 75 years old and holding the position of Vice President of the Club. As the longest serving member of the Club, I have held different positions over 56 years. Over this period, I have also held positions in the Singapore Athletics Association

(SAA), Singapore National Olympic Council (SNOC), Asian Athletics Association (AAA) and International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). How did all this come about? It started with the belief Teck Phuan had in me and the doors he opened for me.

In many ways, he was my teacher. He encouraged me. He trusted me with responsibilities which were challenging. Often, I had to work hard so as not to disappoint him. I was fortunate to have good guidance from him and people like him.

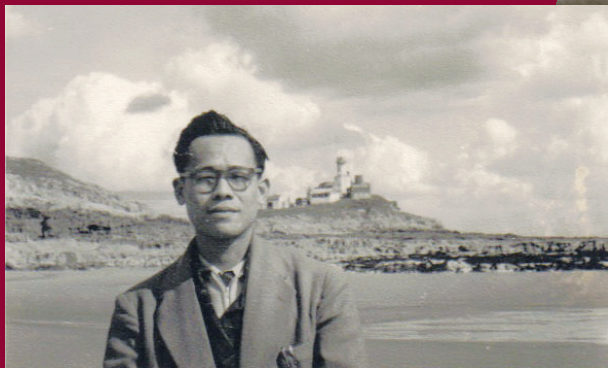
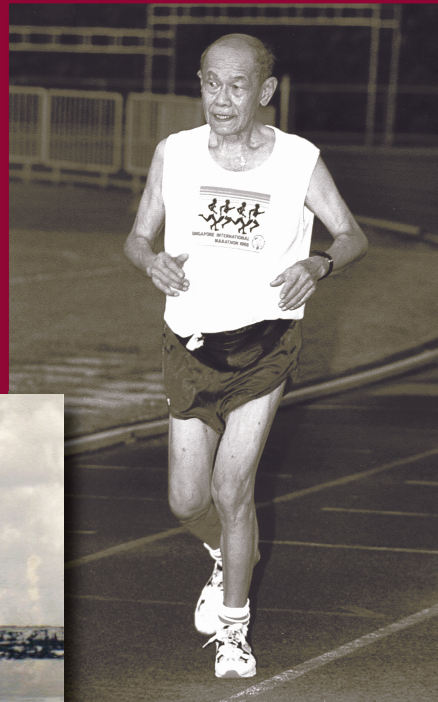
To the young, I want to say this: there is no short cut to anything you want to achieve. To be successful and respected, one has to be diligent. One must have a strong sense of responsibility and be sincere, committed and humble. These are qualities one could see in Goh Teck Phuan and other pioneers of his generation and I am happy there is now a book dedicated to him.

Maurice R. Nicholas

Honorary Secretary
Asian Athletics Association

Goh Teck Phuan

1921 - 2006



Athlete, coach, administrator, organiser, mentor, fund-raiser, he played all these roles to the best of his ability in his lifelong dedication to the Singapore sports scene.

While it is important to acknowledge the contributions of athletes who have won glory and recognition for Singapore athletics, we should never forget the unsung heroes who have made their success possible. The late Goh Teck Phuan was one such person. Athlete, coach, administrator, organiser, mentor, fund-raiser, he played all these roles to the best of his ability in his lifelong dedication to the Singapore sports scene. His energetic persistence coupled with his visionary ideals enabled him to emerge as a leading champion for sports in Singapore in the 1960s and 70s. This tribute highlights his tireless efforts as part of a modest attempt to place on record his contributions to our sports scene.

Early Life

Goh Teck Phuan was born in 1921. His lifelong love affair with sports started at the tender age of 6 when he was already tearing down the tracks whenever he could. As a teenager in Anglo Chinese School, he soon developed into an outstanding sprinter. In those days, it was not uncommon for athletes to be proficient in various events. Goh was one such athlete, often racing in the sprints as well as in middle distance events. When the curtain came down on his athletics career, he moved on to his next role as a coach. He had offered to stay in ACS to groom the next generation of sprinters. One of his most illustrious charges was the premier sprinter of the 1950s, the highly talented Chan Onn Leng.

In the late 1940s, the visionary Goh sensed a need for fundamental change in the local athletics club system. The existing clubs were run on a communal basis. He and others who were ahead of their times felt that this was impeding the progress of the sport in Singapore. Thus in 1947, he formed the Swift Athletes Association together with a few like-minded individuals like Yeo Choon Bee, Tay Boo Jiang and Chin Lye Heng.

Little did Goh and company know that they were starting a mini revolution which was to influence the local athletics scene for decades to come. Swift became a pioneer as the first cosmopolitan club in Singapore run on a non-communal basis. This would set the trend for other athletics clubs. Indeed, even before multi-racialism had become a catchphrase, Goh and his friends had begun to campaign for it in the sports scene! He served as Honorary Secretary of Swift from its inception until 1956, and remained an influential committee member till his death in April 2006.

Sports Administrator

In 1965, Singapore took its first baby steps towards sporting glory with the establishment of the Sports Division under the Ministry of Social Affairs. It was at this point that Goh was given the challenging job of Sports Promotional Officer in this Sports Division, working directly under Minister Othman Wok. With a dogged and persistent fighter like Goh, Singapore sports received a boost. During this time, he had also served as the Honorary Secretary of the SAA for a number of years.

In the late 1940s, the visionary Goh sensed a need for fundamental change in the local athletics club system. The existing clubs were run on a communal basis. He and others who were ahead of their times felt that this was impeding the progress of the sport in Singapore.

Goh and his team managed to introduce the idea of using the Toto lottery to fund major sports projects.

Fund Raiser

Pushing for sports during the immediate post-independence period was indeed an uphill task. The fledgling island-nation was diverting its limited resources to nation-building and economic survival. Sports thus received a very low priority. Nevertheless, it was never in Goh's nature to be undaunted. In fact, he seemed to thrive on challenges. The pressing task then was to raise the necessary funds to build a stadium capable of hosting major international meets. The expenses incurred for sending athletes overseas to compete also had to be raised by depending on the goodwill of private organizations (eg Shaw Foundation). This was a situation which the Sports Division sought to rectify.

Goh and his team managed to introduce the idea of using the Toto lottery to fund major sports projects. The idea took off brilliantly. Toto became so popular that, within a few years, it provided the necessary financial muscle for Singapore sports. For example, the National Stadium project was partly funded by Toto. Goh would also actively canvas for funds and donations from the various private and government organizations. By the late 1960s, he had become so tireless and efficient in his fund-raising that he was known affectionately as "the professional beggar".

Organiser

Goh's tenure as Sports Promotional Officer was clearly associated with a flurry of exciting sporting events in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Sensing the potential of motor-sports, he managed to secure approval and organized the first Singapore Grand Prix in the mid 1960s. Building on that success, he organized the first Asian Highway Motor Rally, from Vientiane in Laos to Singapore in 1969. As we come full circle today and the talk of the town is once again centred on motor-sports in Singapore, it's apt to reflect on how someone like Goh was indeed a visionary ahead of his time.

Many today might not remember or know about the Pesta Sukan. But in the 1960s and 1970s, it was one of the biggest sporting spectacles in the local sports calendar. The Pesta Sukan was an integrated sports carnival which enabled all the major sports in Singapore to organise their championships and games at the same time. The Sports Division would give subsidies to help defray the organisational costs. Once again, this was one of Goh's major projects. It was sadly discontinued soon after his retirement in 1971.

Apart from these efforts, Goh also had a hand in bringing the World Cup Golf to Singapore in 1969. Even after his retirement in 1971, he was called in to take over the organisation of the Singapore Marathon from the Jogging Association of Singapore in the late 1970s. Under his expert handling and administration, the marathon grew in scale. From 8,000 participants in 1982, it recorded 15,000 participants in 1986. Despite stepping down from the hustle and bustle of organising the demanding marathon during the 1990s, Goh remained on the organising committee as a special advisor till his death.

Mentor

Apart from his organisational and fund raising skills, Goh would be fondly remembered as a father figure and mentor to many top athletes and administrators. Indeed, his role in grooming the next generation of administrators to run athletics in Singapore was crucial in helping to put experienced people in charge. Current Singapore Athletic Association (SAA) and Swift President, Loh Lin Kok, credits Goh for giving him a chance to be involved in sports administration during his early days in Swift.

Many athletes received their fair share of Goh's kindness. K. Jayamani, C. Kunalan, Dr Mani Jegathesan and Kesavan Soon, for example, have talked about how he offered crucial advice and support in their times of need.

Even right until the last few months before his death, he could be seen hitting the track at Toa Payoh Stadium in the early morning. He was still actively running six months before he passed away.

Maurice Nicholas, the current Honorary Secretary of the Asian Athletics Association (AAA) and the Vice-President of Swift, was similarly thrust into an administrator's role as a young man by Goh. Today, as one of the top and most respected officials in the Asian athletics scene, Nicholas clearly has not forgotten his roots and reserves the highest praise for Goh (whom he respectfully calls his "shi fu" or teacher). Many athletes too received their fair share of Goh's kindness. K. Jayamani, C. Kunalan, Dr Mani Jegathesan and Kesavan Soon, for example, have talked about how he offered crucial advice and support in their times of need. The man also had an important role to play in providing former athletes with some job options after their sporting careers. One such beneficiary was distance king P. C. Suppiah who was offered a job at Toto by Goh.

After Retirement

In 1971, Goh, who received two public service awards for his contributions, opted for an early retirement at the age of 50. However, that did not signal the end of his involvement in sports. Such was his passion for it that he was constantly ringing up his former colleagues to get the latest updates on the local sporting scene. He also served in sporting organisations like SAA and Swift as well as in various organising committees. Not one to idle away his time, Goh was constantly on the run, literally. From 1980 to 2000, for example, he was a frequent participant at veteran competitions around the world. He often competed in gruelling races like the 400m and 800m. In the late 1990s, there was no one he could compete with in his age category, and so he was grouped with younger veterans!

Even right until the last few months before his death, he could be seen hitting the track at Toa Payoh Stadium in the early morning. He was still actively running six months before he passed away. Late in 2005, he was diagnosed with liver cancer and only given a few months to live. He passed away in April 2006, leaving behind his wife, son and daughter.

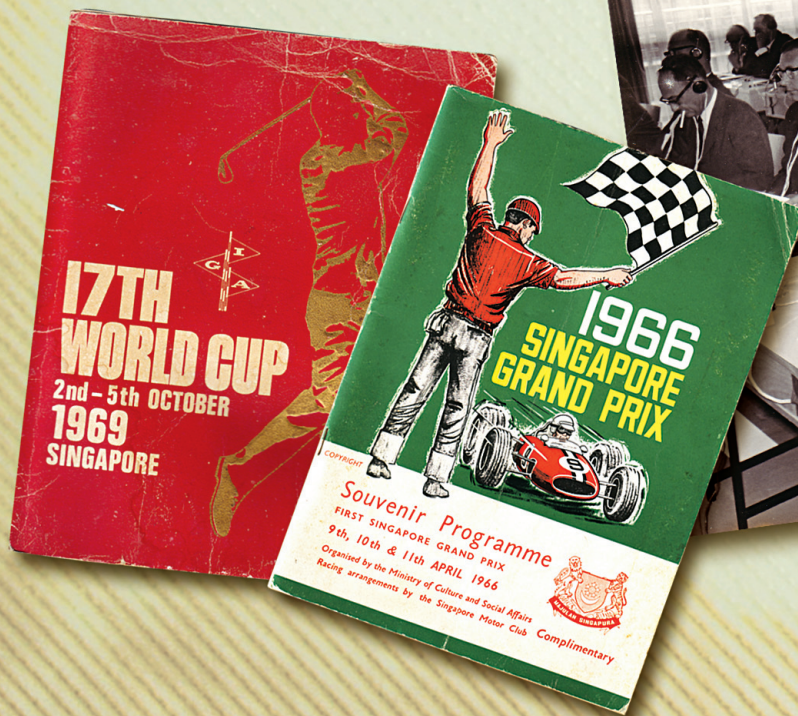
Legacy

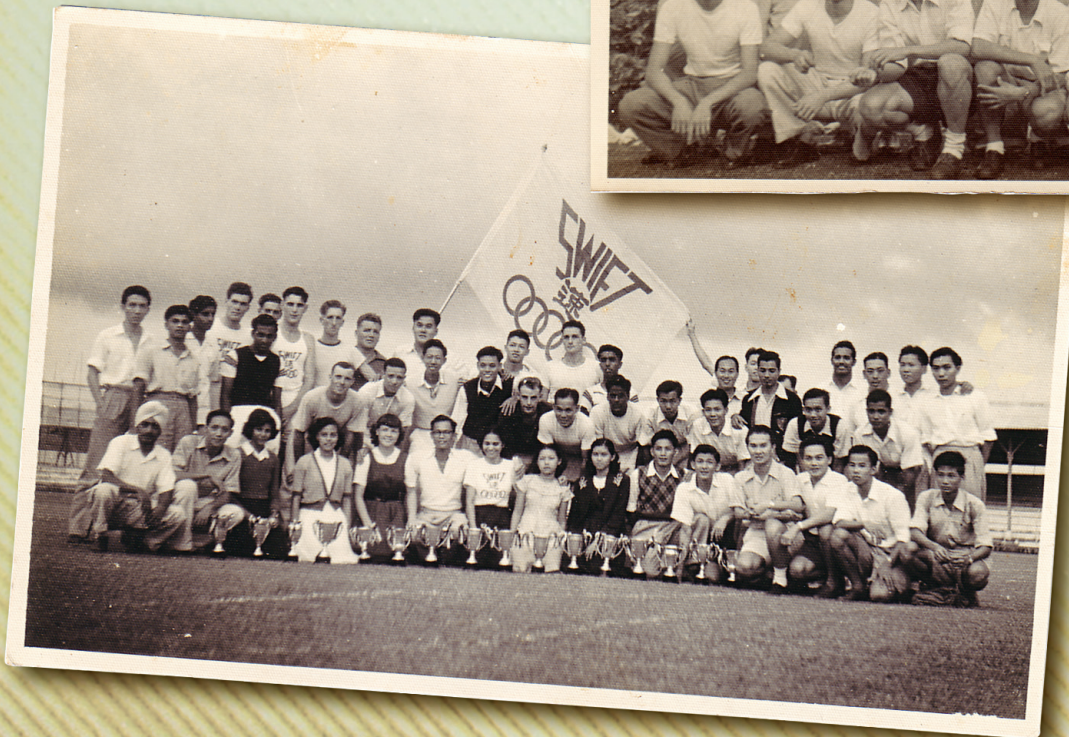
Goh's impact on sports and on athletics in particular still reverberates. The Singapore Marathon is more successful than ever today. Its sheer size and scale, coupled with all its corporate sponsorships and international participation, bear testimony to the groundwork and foundation which he and his team painstakingly laid down in the 1970s and 1980s. The Toto lottery remains popular with the public and continues to generate revenue to fund Singapore's campaign for sporting excellence. Despite the rise and fall of many athletics clubs through the decades, Swift has remained a pillar of strength and a dominant force in athletics even today as it celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2007.

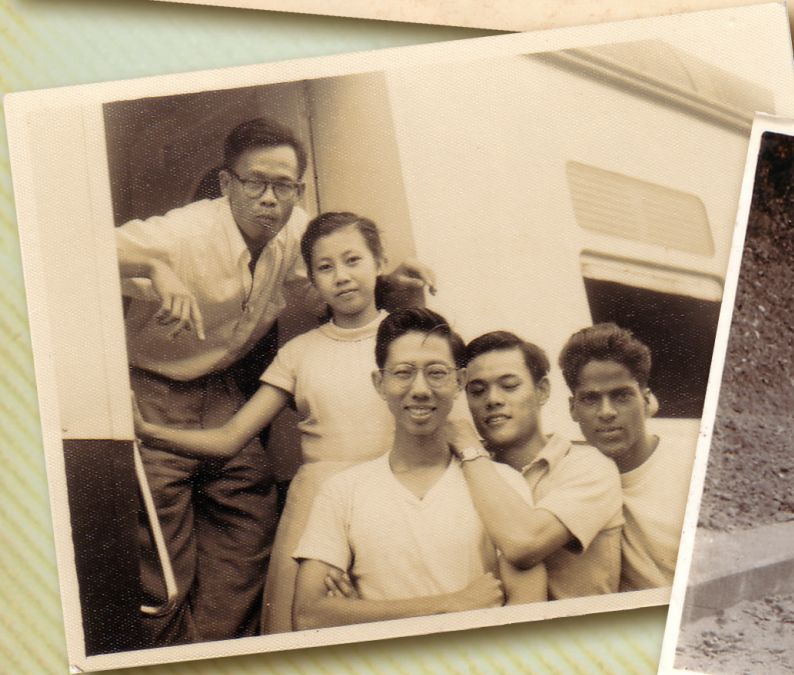
Given his tireless contributions, it was no surprise when Goh was awarded the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) veterans' pin in 2001. He was also conferred the Sporting Singapore Inspiration Award in 2003. Looking back, perhaps the most impressive thing about Goh's achievements is the fact that he had pushed through sweeping changes at a time when the nation's priorities were clearly not on sports. Colleagues, close friends and family members interviewed have all highlighted qualities which clearly made his success possible. These included doggedness, persistence, tenacity, optimism and resourcefulness. And yes, he was one hell of a fighter who never knew when to quit.

A famous quote - delivered by Goh's son, Ivan, at his funeral service in church - reads: "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it for I shall not pass this way again." Indeed, Goh touched the lives of many along his arduous and difficult journey as a devoted lifelong servant to Singapore sports. With his death, the country lost one of its greatest sporting pioneers.

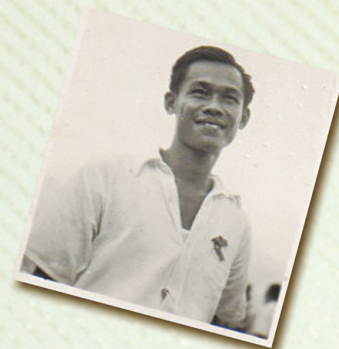
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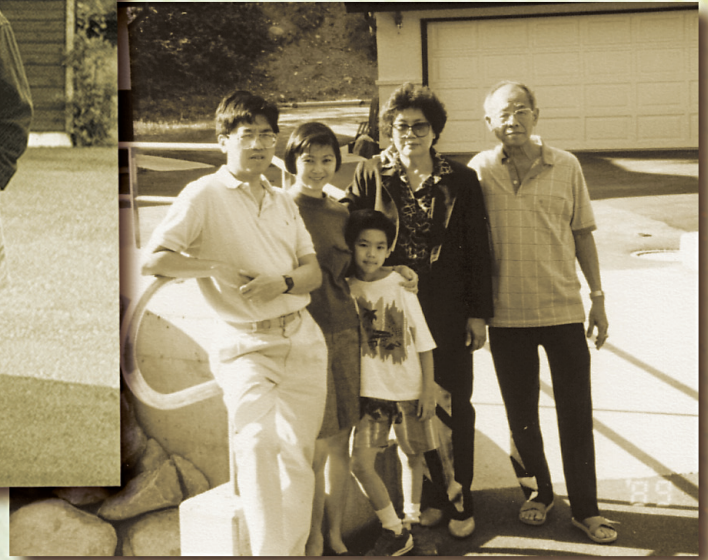












TRIBUTES FOR A GOOD MAN

"I met Goh Teck Phuan when I was a 15-year old boy in Anglo Chinese School. He was then the president of Swift Athletics Club. Over time, my relationship with him became one of master and disciple. He handpicked me for an administrator's role in Swift. I had a lot of respect for him and we developed tremendous understanding in our relationship. He had a fire cracker temper but I knew him well enough to handle him. He had the trademark of a fighter, and never let adversity hold him back. He was the SAA's vice patron for many years and became known as Mr Marathon (for his work in promoting marathon in Singapore)."

- Loh Lin Kok

"The whole Swift team of Maurice and Raymond Nicholas, Tan Eng Yoon and Goh Teck Phuan used to train at Victoria School and I would follow and run behind them. They were very good, but never looked down on people. Goh Teck Phuan was my mentor. He helped me and gave me pointers even though he was from Swift and I wasn't. He set a very good example as he never brought politics into sports. He was only interested in athletics."

- Kesavan Soon

"Goh Teck Phuan was one of the key influences in my life. As chief sports officer at the Ministry of Social Affairs, he gave me opportunities to learn from him. Many people do not know that he was the one who organised Singapore's Grand Prix (motorsport) and Pesta Sukan events. It was through him that I developed as an administrator."

- Maurice Nicholas

"I always saw Goh Teck Phuan on the track. He was a very friendly person and encouraged athletes to do well. He was very pro-athletics and was very involved in his club, Swift Athletics."

- Evelyn Tan

"When I was moving up in my athletics career, Goh Teck Phuan was an influential sports official. As a leader of the Swift Athletics Club, he took a particular liking to me and was always there to give advice and support. At one stage when there was a possibility of difficulty in financial support to continue my university studies, he did not hesitate to assure me that he would find a solution. Although the need did not materialize, the moral support he provided was indeed a strength at a time of uncertainty."

- Mani Jegathesan

"Goh Teck Phuan played an important role in my development as an athlete. I was studying in the afternoon session at Victoria School and had to train on my own in the morning while most trained in the evening. I looked towards him for guidance and he gave me moral support. He was like a father to us and used to treat us to dinner at the satay club at Esplanade. It was a luxury for us then. We would cycle there and wait for 'father' to come before ordering our food."

- Lim Jit Imm

"Goh Teck Phuan was a hands-on person. He would attend to the welfare of the athletes and was always present at the various sports meets. Sometimes, he even used his own money to help out. We athletes benefited from him."

- Ho Mun Cheong

“Goh Teck Phuan was a great man. He was very sports minded and was always organising marathons and getting sponsorships and funds for events. He did a lot in those aspects.”

- Glory Barnabas

“Goh Teck Phuan was there for us all the time. He was always there to see us train. He was a jovial and happy-go-lucky guy. There was no generation gap between us and he talked to everybody.”

- M. Sivalingam

“Goh Teck Phuan was so dedicated and passionate. I remember one time in the late 1960s. I was born in Johor and someone told me that when I reached 21, I had to take a citizen’s oath. But I had never done anything like that in 1964 when I turned 21. So I was very anxious about my citizenship status and went to see Goh at the Ministry of Social Affairs with a very heavy heart and sense of foreboding. He put an arm around my shoulder and said, ‘No such thing. Who was the one who frightened you?’ I still remember the great sense of relief. Goh was also a go-getter who could get just about anything done. He enjoyed accomplishing things and paid attention to the smallest task. Years later, I asked him to help arrange for a job for one of the ex- national runners. Without hesitation, he made arrangements to employ this athlete in his security firm.”

- C. Kunalan

“Goh Teck Phuan was a great organiser of sports events. He believed in going to the ground to talk to everyone.”

- Yeo Kian Chai

I would always remember the late Goh Teck Phuan as the founder of Swift. Things were informal but they moved along well. It was never a case of all talk, no action. Officials came down for training sessions to encourage athletes. In turn, former athletes volunteered their time to assist those in management. Personally, I got along very well with Goh. He once introduced a job at the People's Association to me just after I left school. Though I eventually didn't take up the job, I appreciated his help. Later, when we were both officials, we also had good times together. For example, I remember he was my roommate in London, Spain and Stuttgart when we made a bid to host the Track and Field World Cup."

- Loh Chan Pew

"Goh Teck Phuan was a father figure to me. He was my coach Maurice Nicholas' closest friend. Whenever we met each other, he was always very happy to see me. He was such an encouraging person."

- K. Jayamani

"Goh Teck Phuan was one of those die-hard sportsmen who contributed a lot to Singapore sports. He organised meets like the marathon and no one else could take his place."

M. Harichandra

"I knew Goh Teck Phuan through his work at SAAA and Swift. He always looked after all of us and invited us to his house for barbeques. While he was an official, he didn't sit in his VIP chair. Instead, he mingled with us. I will never forget him."

Low Sin Chock

COLOURS OF PASSION

Ng Liang Chiang. C. Kunalan. Chee Swee Lee. K. Jayamani. These are some of the names which readily come to mind whenever one talks about track and field in Singapore. This is hardly surprising as they, in their hey days, were among the best athletes in the region. Whether it was Liang Chiang reigning supreme in the 110m hurdles at the 1951 Asian Games in New Delhi or Chee Swee Lee making her mark as a champion in the 400m at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, these athletes kept the Singapore flag flying high.

Often they did this while also endearing themselves to fans. For example, Kunalan, who won three gold medals (100m, 200m and 4x400m relay) at the 1969 SEAP Games in Rangoon, was known as much for his likeable nature as his exploits on the track. On her part, Jayamani, who emerged as a star with gold medals in the 1977 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur as well as the 1979 SEA Games in Jakarta, was unfailingly modest about her achievements.

Behind the success of these athletes were dedicated coaches whose careers were so intimately linked to those of their athletes that their names were uttered in the same breath. For instance, mention C. Kunalan and Chee Swee Lee and one thinks almost immediately of coaches Tan Eng Yoon and Patrick Zehnder. Similarly, the feats of athletes like Jayamani and P. C. Suppiah were often associated with the hard work and dedication of their coach, Maurice Nicholas. Other coaches with impact over the years included Goh Teck Phuan and Chin Lye Heng.

Then there were officials and their work behind the scenes, including Goh Teck Phuan promoting marathon and bringing the Singapore Marathon to the international level it is enjoying today. Indeed, as the following pages reveal, the history of Singapore's track & field is filled with distinctive personalities, whether athletes, coaches or officials. Whatever their roles and across the decades, what they had in common was an undying passion for track & field and the values it imparted.



Tay's success can be attributed in part to his single-minded focus which enabled him to keep going whatever the circumstances.

STAYING FOCUSED

Tay Boo Jiang

Compared to some top athletes, Tay Boo Jiang may not be a well-known name in Singapore's track & field circle. But his role in promoting the sport should not go unnoticed. Plus he, with his success as a businessman, has contributed financially to its cause and set an example of how the positive values from sports can enhance one's career.

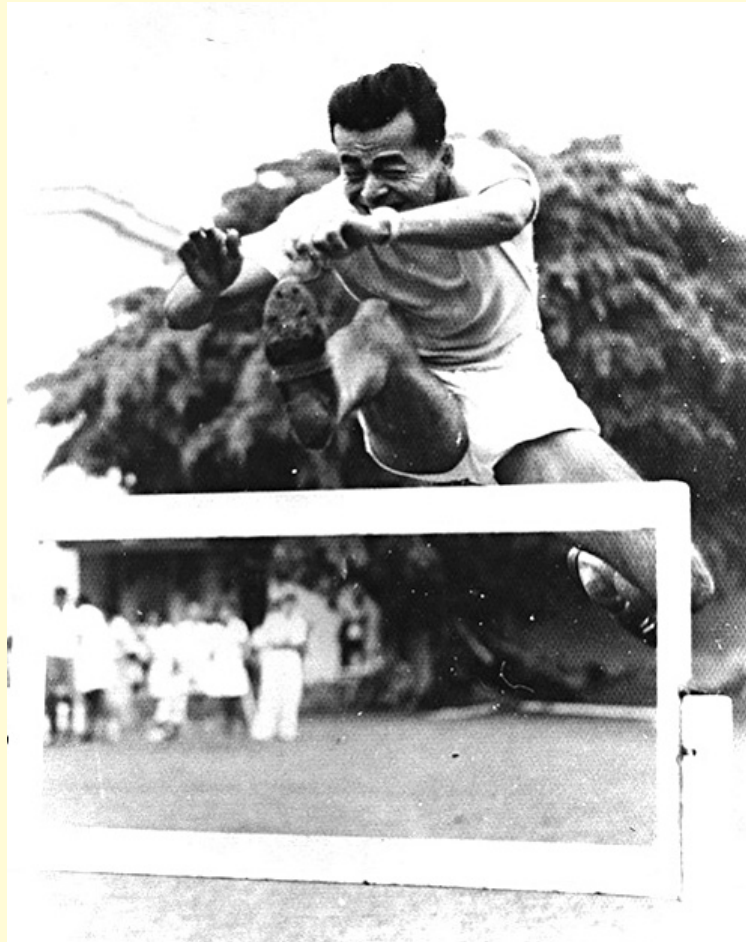
A founder member of the Swift Athletics Club, he formed the Swift Athletes Association in June 1947 alongside other pioneers such as Yeo Choon Bee, E. A. Sears, Goh Teck Phuan and Chin Lye Heng. Significantly, this marked the beginning of a new era in athletics in Malaya and Singapore.

Beyond sports, Tay made his mark as founder of Sincere Watch & Fountain Pen Dealer. More than 50 years ago, he set up his business behind a modest six-foot counter at 22 North Bridge Road to serve mainly Boat Quay seamen. Since that modest start in 1954, the company has become a listed retailer operating not only in Singapore but overseas as well.

Tay's success can be attributed in part to his single-minded focus which enabled him to keep going whatever the circumstances. And this ability to stay focused, he is quick to stress, has its roots in his days as an athlete. "I may not have achieved that much in terms of times, medals and records. But the values I've learnt from athletics are enduring. This is perhaps why I still have the fondest memories of my track & field days as well as the athletes I grew up with," he says.

His gentlemanly style also contributed to the growth of his business as customers came to him knowing he was honest and would offer them fair prices and genuine products. Though his thriving business eventually earned him customers from high society, he was always a simple man. This, he says, can be explained in part by the fact that he, through athletics, grew up humbly, mixing comfortably with athletes from all walks of life. "In the track, on the field, what matters is how you perform and how you carry yourself - not your background," he explains.

Apart from being an avid athlete, Tay later developed interest in tennis and golf even as he took his business from strength to strength. Whatever he has done - in sports or in business - he remains to those who know him a remarkably humble gentleman.



His proudest achievement was winning Singapore's first Asian Games gold medal. He did this at the inaugural Games in New Delhi in 1951, breasting the tape at 15.2 secs in the 110m hurdles.

QUIET ACHIEVER

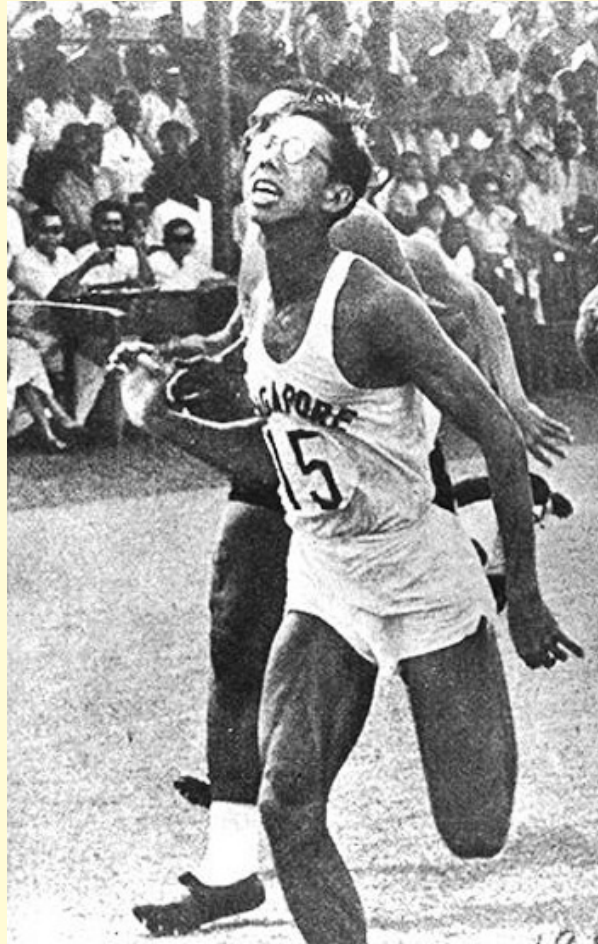
Ng Liang Chiang

Ng Liang Chiang is the quiet achiever of Singapore athletics. He would smile and say very little throughout his years as an athlete and coach - even though the champion hurdler had plenty to boast about. His proudest achievement was winning Singapore's first Asian Games gold medal. He did this at the inaugural Games in New Delhi in 1951, breasting the tape at 15.2 secs in the 110m hurdles. In the same meet, he also clinched a bronze medal in the 440-yard hurdles.

Looking back, the feats are all the more incredible when one considers that they came from a self-taught man. Ng had no coach and learnt hurdling techniques through reading books. As a student, he represented Serangoon English School in numerous sports, including athletics, table tennis, basketball, hockey and football. Then at 17, he started training with the Singapore Chinese Amateur Athletic Federation.

He announced his arrival in the international scene by winning gold medals for the 110m and 400m hurdles at the 7th Annual Chinese National Athletic Meet in Shanghai in 1948, breaking the All-China records. By doing that, the self-taught hurdler had fulfilled a promise he made to his dying mother at the age of 13. The eldest of 12 children in a poor Teochew family, he had told her that he would one day become a sports champion and bring glory to the family.

Ng retired from competitive hurdling at the age of 32 but started coaching - his most famous protege being hurdler Heather Merican, who won two gold medals at the 1973 SEAP Games in Singapore. The father of four continued coaching until he succumbed to lung cancer in 1992, at the age of 71.



It was 1959 when Singapore got its first track gold in the South-east Asian Peninsular Games in Bangkok. And for that, we have to thank Tan Eng Yoon, who blitzed the 400m hurdles en route to that win.

FIRST GOLD

Tan Eng Yoon

It was 1959 when Singapore won its first track gold in the South-east Asian Peninsular Games in Bangkok. And for that, we have to thank Tan Eng Yoon, who blitzed the 400m hurdles en route to that win. In the same Games, he won gold in his other pet event - the triple jump. That effort could not eclipse his personal best, which he set at the Jalan Besar Stadium in 1955. His effort of 49 feet and 7.5 inches (14.51 metres) stood for an amazing 32 years.

Yet it wasn't just on the field that he excelled. Tan was an honorary national athletics coach from 1958 to 1970 and showed a keen eye for talent. Among his proteges were Glory Barnabas, Osman Merican and - most notably - C. Kunalan, whom he picked out in 1962 after watching the latter play football at the Teachers' Training College.

A former St Joseph's Institution boy, he had also won a scholarship in 1955 to study physical education at Loughborough College in England. He became the first international student to top his graduating class at Loughborough University in 1958 and the first non-local to captain the Loughborough College Athletics Club. But his education didn't stop there. In 1986, he received his Masters degree in sports management from the United States Sports Academy. Loughborough also presented him with an honorary doctorate in 2005.

Tan, 79, had previously served as director of the National Stadium Corporation, which oversaw the building of the Singapore National Stadium in 1973, and was deputy executive director of the Singapore Sports Council until his retirement in 1988. He later served as the general secretary of the Football Association of Singapore from 1993 to 1999.



The highlight of her career came when she was chosen to represent Singapore at the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952.

BREAKING THROUGH

Tang Pui Wah

A former Fairfield Girls' and Nanyang Girls' High student, Tang Pui Wah started doing the hurdles when her coach Tay Kai Teck spotted that she could take three steps instead of five in between the hurdles. She was older than the other kids because the war had delayed her studies. But soon, she didn't need size or age advantage to beat others as her natural ability came through.

In the 1951 Malayan Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA) sports meet in Kuala Lumpur, she was the "triple crown" winner, getting gold in the 100-yard and 220-yard races as well as the 80m hurdles. In the 1953 MAAA Championships, she shone with two new records.

On the bigger stage, she also showed her promise. For example, at the 1951 Asian Games in New Delhi, she was placed fourth in the 80m hurdles. She then topped this performance at the next Asian Games in Manila in 1954. On the opening day of the Games, she broke the Games' 80m hurdles record with a time of 12.1 secs in her heats. In the finals, she kept up with the frontrunners throughout and finished a creditable third behind two Japanese hurdlers.

The highlight of her career came when she was chosen to represent Singapore at the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952. Though her times in both the 100m and 80m hurdles didn't take her far in the competition, the experience was valuable. Also she had taken a big step forward for women athletes in Singapore with her breakthrough. Now 74, she keeps a low profile but still speaks with fondness about the good old days of local athletics.

VERSATILE ATHLETE

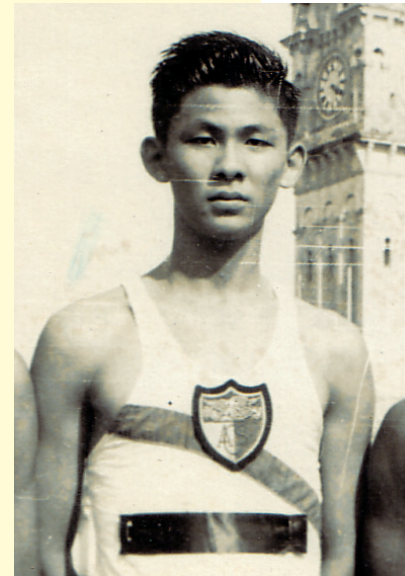
Chan Onn Leng

Much has been written about the exploits of the athletes from our “Golden Years” in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the likes of C. Kunalan and Chee Swee Lee fired our imagination with their sporting achievements. Yet, many of us draw a blank when we are asked about how athletics was like before the 1960s.

The name Chan Onn Leng might not ring a bell. Yet he was the sprint sensation of the 1950s and easily one of the more talented and versatile athletes to have graced our track scene. During his days in Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), he already showed much promise, dominating the schools’ championships of the 1950s. But athletics was not his only passion as he was involved in rugby as well.

Despite being more of a 100m and 200m sprinter, Chan’s crowning achievement in athletics came when he won the silver in the 400m hurdles for Singapore in a time of 54.8 secs at the 1954 Manila Asian Games.

Besides athletics, he also excelled in his academic pursuits and was often held up as a prime example of a scholar-athlete in those days. It did not surprise many therefore when, after his retirement, he joined the medical profession. However, that did not signal the end of his involvement with athletics. An active member of the Swift Athletes Association, he served as its Honorary Secretary from 1962 to 1963 and also displayed his creative streak by helping Swift design its logo. His light-hearted nature won him many friends and he was also known for being a practical joker before he passed away in a car accident. And he will go down in local athletics folklore as one of the earliest medallists in athletics at the prestigious Asian Games.



The name Chan Onn Leng might not ring a bell. Yet he was the sprint sensation of the 1950s and easily one of the more talented and versatile athletes to have graced our track scene.



His greatest success was becoming Coach Of The Year in 1972 - the same year that two of his athletes P. C. Suppiah and K. Jayamani were named Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year respectively.

TOP COACH, TOP OFFICIAL

Maurice Nicholas

In school, Maurice Nicholas did well enough to represent his school in both athletics and hockey. When the time came to make a choice between the two sports, he picked athletics - but didn't reach the level he wanted. He did, however, go on to become arguably Singapore athletics' most famous coach and official.

Nicholas started coaching in 1959, when he was appointed national coach for middle distance and long distance events by sprint legend Tan Eng Yoon. His greatest success was becoming Coach Of The Year in 1972 - the same year that two of his athletes P. C. Suppiah and K. Jayamani were named Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year respectively.

The following year, he became the vice-president of the Singapore Amateur Athletic Association and secretary of the Asian Amateur Athletics Association. Nicholas has scored a few firsts for Singapore, including being elected as a member of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) in 1981 and serving as technical delegate to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and the Commonwealth Games in Auckland, New Zealand, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1990 and 1998 respectively.

In 1982, he was awarded the Veterans Pin by the IAAF - the highest award given by the federation to individuals for their contribution to track and field. In the same year, he received a public service medal from then President Devan Nair. In 2004, he was awarded the IAAF's silver order of merit for his service and contributions to the development and promotion of athletics in Asia.

GREAT COACH

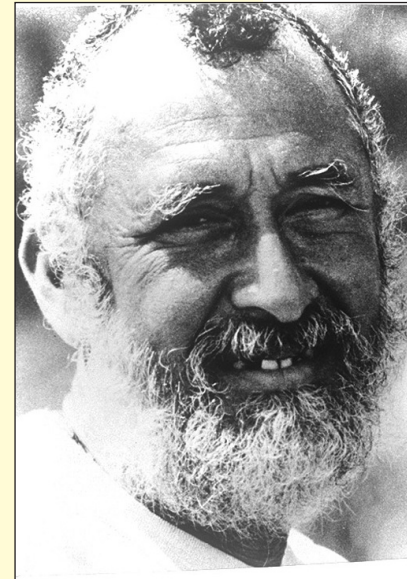
Patrick Zehnder

Behind every great sportsman is a great coach. For Singapore's track and field, there weren't many better than Patrick Zehnder. He is the only Singaporean coach to produce an Asian track champion. That happened in 1974 when Chee Swee Lee won the 400m Asian Games gold in Tehran.

The man - known affectionately as "The Beard" for the straggly facial hair - had joined the Physical Training College in 1955, shortly after leaving school. The next year, he joined the staff of Haig Boys' School, before being transferred to Telok Kurau West Primary five years later. That led to his discovery of Chee and the beginning of one of Singapore's most successful sports partnerships.

He first watched her streak to victory in school competitions as a 10-year-old and brought her under his wings. A decade later, she became Asia's fastest woman over 400m, winning the gold medal at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran.

He was Singapore's Coach of the Year in 1973, but after more than 20 years of training athletes like Chee, Gan Bee Wah, Godfrey Jalleh and Cheah Kim Teck, he quit the national team in 1985. It was clearly a big loss for Singapore track & field. But at least, he has continued to coach at club level. Even today, he occasionally coaches youngsters in his free time.



Behind every great sportsman is a great coach. For Singapore's track and field, there weren't many better than Patrick Zehnder.



Many remember top athletes due to their achievements but few acknowledge the ones who pushed them to run faster, further and better. For star athlete Tan Eng Yoon, Lim Jit Imm played this crucial role in the 1950s.

THE MOTIVATOR

Lim Jit Imm

Many remember top athletes due to their achievements but few acknowledge the ones who pushed them to run faster, further and better. For star athlete Tan Eng Yoon, Lim Jit Imm played this crucial role in the 1950s. Then a teenager, the sprinter and long jumper tried his best to beat Eng Yoon at his game, even winning the support of the local media.

The competitive relationship worked both ways, as Jit Imm – then Singapore’s second fastest sprinter – went on to establish the combined schools 100-yard record. But he was unable to make it to the international scene, often missing the mark narrowly.

Undeterred, he went on to contribute in other ways, becoming a sports administrator at the Swift Athlete Association. Then as vice president of training and selection at Singapore Amateur Athletic Association, he was responsible for organising training programmes, overseeing preparations for the SEA Games, and talent spotting athletes with potential.

Dipping into his experience as an athlete and police officer, he used his persuasive style and belief in making each training session meaningful to build rapport with young athletes like Hamkah Afik, Mohd Hosni and James Wong.

Now 72, Jit Imm lives in Canada with his wife. He may have given up his running spikes, but he keeps active by walking and visiting the local gym.

CURVE SPECIALIST

Low Sin Chock

It's a challenge that all competitive runners face on the track: running the curve effectively. Sprinter Low Sin Chock, however, had no such reservations. In fact, he was dubbed the "fastest curve man in Asia".

Talent spotted by his teacher and coach, Charles Hanam, while he was a student at Beatty Secondary School, Sin Chock's curve technique was honed on the school's field – a field so small that it couldn't fit even a 200m track. Following success at school meets, his first regional success came shortly in 1958 when he won a relay gold medal at the Malayan Games in Kuala Lumpur.

At the first SEAP Games in Bangkok in 1959, he was part of the contingent that created history for Singapore, winning the silver and bronze respectively in the 400m relay and 1,600m relay. This success was repeated at the next SEAP Games in 1971 in Rangoon when the relay team defended its silver in the 4x100m relay. But the biggest achievement for him had to be winning the bronze in the 100m – his first individual SEAP Games medal.

Later, Sin Chock, who also represented Singapore at the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta, retired from athletics in 1964 to read law at the University of Malaya and Singapore. Then he was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship to study in Australia. Following that, he built his career with Singapore Airlines as an airline captain before his retirement in 1999. From 1962 to 1963, he continued to contribute to athletics, serving on the Singapore Amateur Athletic Association's selection committee. These days, the 68-year-old indulges in his newfound sport, golf. But he also keeps in touch with the athletics scene whenever he can.



Talent spotted by his teacher and coach, Charles Hanam, while he was a student at Beatty Secondary School, Sin Chock's curve technique was honed on the school's field – a field so small that it couldn't fit even a 200m track.



Following his retirement from athletics, he made his mark as a doctor and researcher. He also contributed much to sports administration.

FLYING DOC

M. Jegathesan

What is a Malaysian athlete doing in a book on Singapore athletics? Those who know Dr M. Jegathesan and how he was so much an intimate part of the Singapore scene would know the answer. Yes, he was an inspiration to many top local athletes, including our own legend C. Kunalan - what with his remarkable feats, both on the track and off it.

As Kunalan himself puts it, “There should be a special page on him in any book on local athletics because of what he did in Singapore where he was based. For example, he was top scholar and athlete at Anglo Chinese School and later went on to get his medical degree despite competing at the highest level. And his success, including his fine run in the 200m at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, could be attributed in part to the efforts of his coach, our very own Tan Eng Yoon.”

Indeed, Dr Jega, often called “the Flying Doc”, had his fair share of success. In the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok, he earned the accolade of being the fastest man in Asia by winning three gold medals - in the 100m, 200m and 400m. At the Kingston Commonwealth Games in 1966, he became the first Malaysian to qualify for the final of the 220-yard (now the 200m). In all, he competed commendably in three consecutive Olympics, namely Rome (1960), Tokyo (1964) and Mexico (1968).

Following his retirement from athletics, he made his mark as a doctor and researcher. He also contributed much to sports administration through his appointments in various national and international organisations. He has also made an impact as a medical adviser and lecturer and, not surprisingly, he lends special support to work related to track & field using his training in medicine.

SPRINTING EXPLOITS

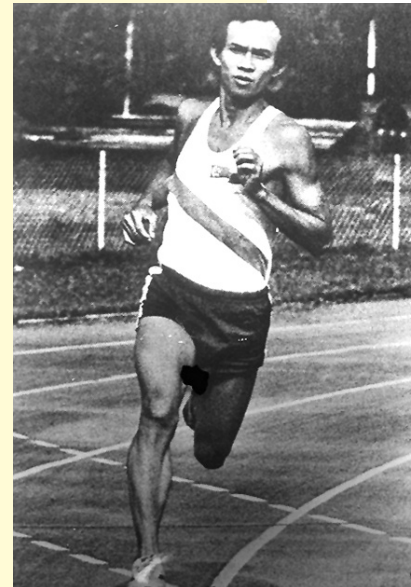
Yeo Kian Chai

This was one policeman that the thieves could never hope to outrun. Yeo Kian Chai was not just a cop but also a national sprinter. The Sportsman of the Year in 1972, he actually began his athletics reign as a long jumper. That was in 1963. He was 19 years old and showing much promise. Three years later, he set the national record of 7.01m and went on to dominate the local scene.

Still, the former Chung Cheng High student is probably better known for his sprinting exploits. He started running in 1967, when he was selected for the national 4x100m relay team for the SEAP Games in Bangkok by athletics coach Tan Eng Yoon. Over the next five Games, he took home three silvers and two bronzes for the event.

His best individual achievement was finishing second in the 100m sprint at the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur. Then in 1974, he became famous as part of the 4x100m relay team that clinched bronze at the Asian Games in Tehran.

There were other highlights in his career. For example, he was one of 32 Asian athletes offered a chance by the West German Track and Field Association to train in Cologne during the build-up to the 1972 Munich Olympics. It proved beneficial. During this period, he set an Asian mark of 9.5 secs for the 100-yard race. At the Olympics itself, however, he could not build on this momentum. He finished sixth in both his 100m and 200m heats. In 1975, he retired but has remained active in the track & field scene as a coach.



This was one policeman that the thieves could never hope to outrun. Yeo Kian Chai was not just a cop but also a national sprinter.



Kuna, as he was popularly known, enjoyed success at the Asian Games level, winning a silver and a bronze in 1966 in Bangkok, and a bronze in 1974 in Tehran.

POPULAR ICON

C. Kunalan

Singapore has had some fine runners past and present but in C. Kunalan, it has its icon. Perhaps it's because he competed in that most prestigious of events - the century sprint. Or the fact it took more than 30 years before U. K. Shyam broke his record of 10.38 secs - a time Kunalan, now 64, had set in the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Or maybe it's simply his success.

Kuna, as he was popularly known, enjoyed success at the Asian Games level, winning a silver and a bronze in 1966 in Bangkok, and a bronze in 1974 in Tehran. That 1966 event brought considerable heartache, as he was edged out into second place by Malaysian Mani Jegathesan by a mere 0.01 sec. South-east Asia brought him more success. It was capped by a stunning performance in Rangoon in 1969, when he captured three gold medals in the South East Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games.

Kunalan retired from the scene in 1979. He was a teacher and lecturer at the College of Physical Education, and is now an assistant professor in Physical Education and Sports Science at the National Institute of Education. Over time, he has been considered one of Singapore's 10 greatest sportsmen.

Yet the country almost lost its most famous sprinter to football. In 1962, sprint legend Tan Eng Yoon, who was a physical education lecturer at the then Teachers' Training College, had already spotted Kunalan flying down the right wing of the football pitch. When Tan approached him to join the athletics team, the football-crazy trainee at first agreed, but never showed up. Six months later, however, their paths crossed again in the college corridor. There was no escape this time - and the rest, as we say, is history.



She joined the national team, training regularly against the wishes of her strict mother, who wanted her to stay home like “a good Indian girl”.

GLORY & GOLD

Glory Barnabas

Mention memorable races in Singapore's track history and Glory Barnabas' stunning 200m victory in the 1973 SEAP Games on home ground easily comes to mind. She was making her comeback after a two-year layoff and was up against the much-feared Burmese runner Than Than. Running in Lane 3 on the brick-red tarmac of the new National Stadium at Kallang, she could barely see Than in Lane 1 after they flew off the blocks. But she knew she was running neck-and-neck throughout the race.

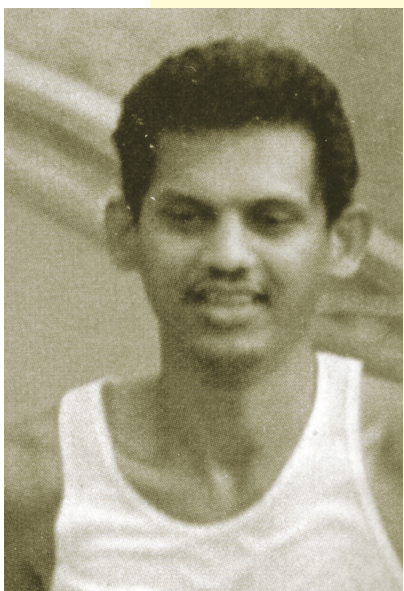
The more than 6,000 spectators did their part, screaming their lungs out to propel her to a photo-finish ahead of her rival. That year, she was also part of the winning 4x100m relay team. Singapore's sprint queen went on to help her country win more medals at the 1974 Asian Games in Teheran: a 4x100m relay bronze and a 4x400m relay silver, where the team missed out on the gold by half a stride.

As a student, Glory had run for Paya Lebar Methodist Girls' School in various inter-school meets but it was at the Teachers Training College that she became a national runner. The year was 1962 and she was training to be a teacher at the college when the women's 4x100m relay team found that they were one person short for the university meet. Glory stepped forward. She was astonished to be placed in the last leg. But that decision was a wise one - when the baton was handed to her, she turned second place to first. She joined the national team, training regularly against the wishes of her strict mother, who wanted her to stay home like "a good Indian girl".

She would go on to compete for her country in the 1965, 1967 and 1969 SEAP Games, bringing home bronze and silver medals before she struck gold in that famous 1973 victory. She retired in 1977 and took a four-year break before starting to compete in the Masters category, where she continued to find success.

ACCIDENTAL ATHLETE

Osman Merican



The hurdler dominated the 110m hurdles event at the SEAP Games before retiring at 34. He became a national coach alongside the likes of Maurice Nicholas and Patrick Zehnder.

As a rebellious 15-year-old, Penang-born Osman Merican ran away from home to stay with his sisters in Singapore. To earn money, he took up odd jobs scrubbing floors, painting and plucking coconuts before taking up his neighbour's suggestion to join the police force in 1959. There the 19-year-old made his accidental debut in athletics. That year, there were only two entries for the high hurdles event at the annual Police sports meet. He decided to join just for fun. He came in last.

Still, the cheeky young man noticed that athletes in the force could take time off to train. So, with that initial thought, he started training regularly for the hurdles. A year later, he was clocking 16 secs for the 110m hurdles though his technique was still raw. It took then champion hurdler Wong Fey Wan to train him before he made the next quantum leap. Renowned coach Tan Eng Yoon had also taken him under his wing, pushing him hard for his international debut at the Kuala Lumpur SEAP Games in 1965.

And what a debut it was. Although Osman had never beaten Fey Wan before, he did so on his biggest occasion, edging the former champion to the tape by one-fifth of a second and winning SEAP Games gold. His time of 14.5 secs was then the second fastest in Asia. It still stands as Singapore's national record after more than 40 years.

The hurdler continued to dominate this event at the SEAP Games before retiring at 34. He became a national coach alongside the likes of Maurice Nicholas and Patrick Zehnder. Now 67, the former police inspector is still involved in athletics at club level. Besides track and field, his two main loves are cooking and painting.

AT THE HELM

Loh Lin Kok

One cannot talk about Singapore's athletics scene in the last two decades without mentioning Loh Lin Kok. After all, the lawyer has been at the helm of the Singapore Athletic Association for the entire period - save for a two-year break - since the early 1980s.

He was first elected to the post in 1982, when he edged out incumbent A. W. Kirby - who had been president for seven years - by 31 votes to 30. Before that, Loh had already been inducted as a committee member in 1966, rising through the ranks to become vice-president for competitions. He was voted out of office but came back to win the right to lead the organisation.

The father of two is known for his outspoken personality that has sometimes put him at odds with officials and athletes. But he still enjoys strong support within the fraternity. Case in point: Although he finally stepped down in 2004 for businessman Tang Feng Wei, he came back two years later and still romped to a comfortable victory.

As for his own athletic ability, Loh was involved in middle distance and long distance running in his youth.



The father of two is known for his outspoken personality that has sometimes put him at odds with officials and athletes. But he still enjoys strong support within the fraternity.



Young Heather had to be egged on by her father before she competed for the first time in athletics.

SPEED IS BEAUTIFUL

Heather Siddons

When Heather Siddons stepped onto the track, she turned heads for more than one reason. Sure, she, as a multiple SEA Games gold medallist, was arguably Singapore's finest female hurdler. But, with her flowing auburn locks and electric green eyes, she was also the embodiment of beauty and grace.

Young Heather had to be egged on by her father before she competed for the first time in athletics. As a petite 10-year-old, she was afraid of taking on bigger girls in the long jump competition at the Singapore Recreation Club. Little did she expect to outleap the entire field. Her ecstatic father - whom she often credits for her rise to athletic stardom - rewarded her with a pair of spikes and persuaded her to train with renowned coach and former national athlete Tan Eng Yoon.

But fate, too, played a major role - it brought her to hurdling. In 1963, she was supposed to represent her school CHIJ only in the long jump. She was a reserve for the hurdles but was roped in when her teammate fell sick. The next thing she knew, she had won in record time. Dad got his only child a track suit for her efforts this time. Eventually, her progress in hurdling persuaded her to specialise in it in 1966, at the age of 16. A year later, she went on to win SEAP Games gold in Bangkok, finishing first in the women's 80m hurdles. As quickly as her star rose, however, she dropped the bomb by announcing her retirement.

Everyone knows you can't keep a good sportswoman down though. True enough, she made a triumphant comeback in the 1973 SEAP Games in Singapore with two gold medals. Over the years, she would accumulate a few more SEA Games medals. Her last appearance was in 1983. Now 57, Heather is a grandmother and lives in the United States with her children.

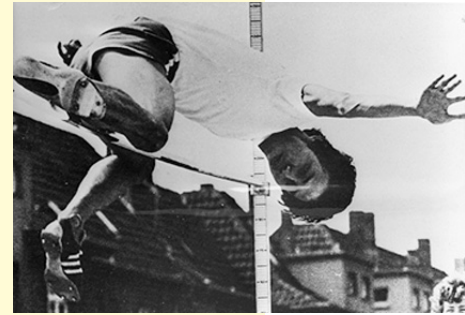
RECORD AFTER RECORD

Noor Azhar Hamid

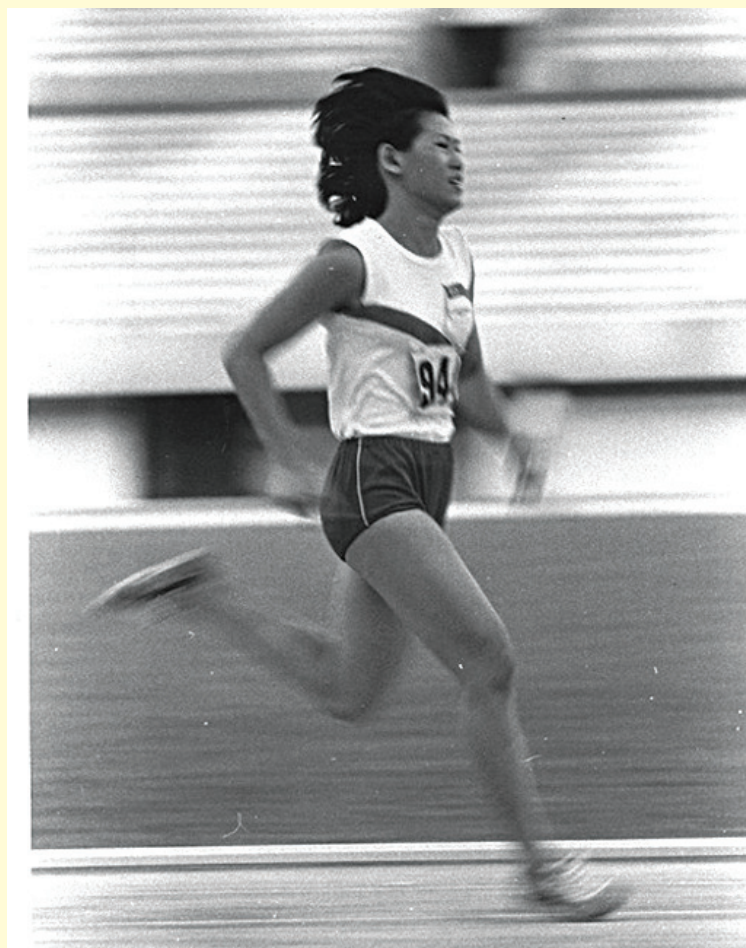
In a sporting career that spanned two decades - 1966 to 1986 - Noor Azhar Hamid made the high jump look easy, repeatedly smashing his own national record. During this period, he raised Singapore's high jump record from 1.92m to 2.12m. That latest record, which he set in the 1973 SEAP Games on home soil, was also an Asian record and a tantalising 1cm short of the magical seven-foot mark. It was a mark that stood for 22 years – until 1995.

The former Whitley School student first joined the national team at the age of 18, making his SEAP Games debut in Bangkok in 1967. That year, he clinched a bronze medal with a jump of 1.91m. Two years later, he eclipsed Lloyd Valberg's 20-year-old national high jump record and won his first SEAP Games gold medal with a jump of 1.94m.

Noor continued dominating the event in South-east Asia, amassing a total of three golds, a silver and two bronzes, with his last medal coming in 1981 - after a six-year hiatus from the sport. The 1973 Sportsman of the Year steadfastly stuck to a straddle technique when jumping - eschewing the Fosbury Flop, which had become the style du jour of high jump since the 1968 Olympics.



He continued dominating the event in South-east Asia, amassing a total of three golds, a silver and two bronzes, with his last medal coming in 1981.



At the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, she ran the race of her life to win the 400m in a new record time of 55.08 secs.

BEST IN ASIA

Chee Swee Lee

It's imperative to be quick off the blocks in sprint events - and Chee Swee Lee was quick, in every sense of the word. At the tender age of 10, she had already started running for Telok Kurau West Primary School. One year later, she became the national primary school champion in both the 100m and 200m sprints, under the tutelage of renowned track coach Patrick Zehnder.

Then came national recognition, when she was selected for the SEAP Games held in Rangoon, Burma, in 1969. The 14-year-old burst onto the scene, winning a silver medal in the 400m. She would repeat the feat in the 1971 and 1973 Games, adding another two silver medals to her trophy cabinet.

But the most important accolade of them all was yet to come. It took place at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. There, Swee Lee ran the race of her life to win the 400m in a new record time of 55.08 secs. She was 19, the first Singaporean woman to win gold in the Asian Games, and the last time a Singapore track star would be crowned best in Asia. For her achievements, she was crowned Sportswoman of the Year. In 1975, she finally clinched 400m gold in the SEAP Games, stamping her class over rivals in Bangkok.

Unfortunately her meteoric rise was cut short by injury to the Achilles tendon of her right leg, sustained just weeks before the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. The injury was to plague her for the rest of her career. However, she continued to compete successfully in college and club events in the United States, winning athletics scholarships that saw her through university. She graduated with a business administration degree from California State University in 1989.

Today, despite living in the US for almost 20 years, the 52-year-old is still holding on to her Singapore citizenship - just as Singapore holds on to the wonderful memories of their golden girl on the track.



The 22-year-old made a glorious debut for his adopted home country by winning the 10,000m in dramatic fashion.

GLORIOUS DEBUT

P. C. Suppiah

Up till the eleventh hour, middle-distance runner P. C. Suppiah still didn't know if he would be competing for Singapore in the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur. Born in Malacca but living in Singapore, the former Thomson Secondary student was in the process of becoming a citizen then. They left it late, but thankfully Suppiah got his citizenship papers rushed to him the night before the race.

Make Singapore proud, Mr E. W. Barker, the then SNOG President told him. He did exactly that. The 22-year-old made a glorious debut for his adopted home country by winning the 10,000m in dramatic fashion. His Burmese opponent had started strongly and led by 70m going into the final lap. But Suppiah sensed the leader's energy waning. Seizing the opportunity, he gave everything he had though he was also tired. The lead dissolved with Suppiah's sizzling pace as he completed the last lap in 55.4 secs to overtake his opponent and win the gold for Singapore.

At the 1972 Olympics in Munich, he became the first Singaporean to go below 32 minutes in the 10,000m. His record of 31 mins 19 secs still stands today. A father of two, the 57-year-old now works as a facilities officer.

ON THE TRACK, OFF THE TRACK

Ong Yeok Phee

Ong Yeok Phee is among the few who excelled both as a sportsman and a sports administrator. He made his track debut for the Combined Schools in 1968 and went on to become one of the Republic's top sprinters for a decade.

Among other regional accolades, he was part of the famous 4x100m relay team (alongside C. Kunalan, Yeo Kian Chai and Tan Say Leong) that set a national record of 40.34 secs at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. Significantly, in the process, the team clinched a much-coveted bronze behind China and Thailand and set a mark which stood for 20 years.

At the age of 33 in 1986, Ong called it a day while he was still one of the country's top sprinters. But that was also the start of the next chapter of his track and field career. In 1989, he was elected as the honorary secretary of the SAAA and went on to become its general manager in 1994. It was a role he excelled in, with friends and fellow sportsmen describing him as an accommodating person with excellent rapport with those around him. When he stepped down in 1997, many had described his decision as a blow to the community.

Now 54, Ong hangs around grass more often than he does tarmac, contributing to the local football scene.

He made his track debut for the Combined Schools in 1968 and went on to become one of the Republic's top sprinters for a decade.



His stint may have been brief but his leadership took SAAA to new grounds, literally, as the Centre of Excellence was established in Bukit Gombak Stadium during his tenure.

FROM ATHLETE TO ADMINISTRATOR

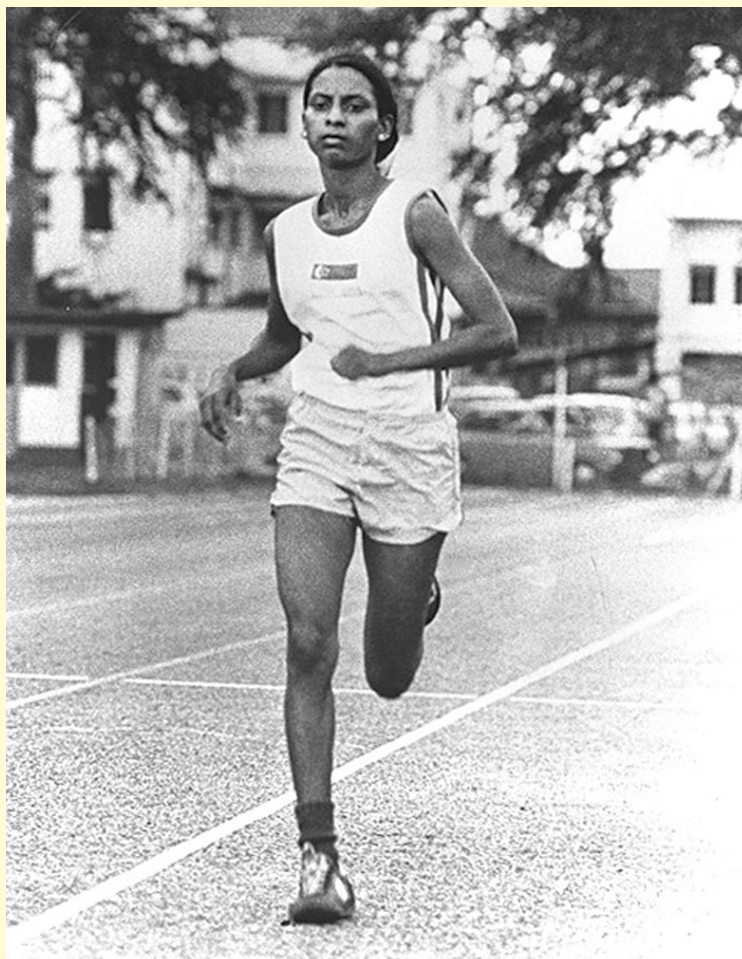
Tang Weng Fei

For Tang Weng Fei, his first race in Secondary Two started his love affair with athletics. In a hurdles event at the Bukit Timah inter-district meet, the newbie finished in third spot. For the next four years, he was unbeatable in the hurdles, earning a call to join the national squad in 1972. He also made waves on the school athletics scene as a part of the “ACS Flying Squad”, the unbeatable 4x100m quartet comprising himself, Tang Ngai Kin, Cheong Thiam Bee and Chan Kheng Kai.

Drafted into the army in 1972, Weng Fei was unable to fulfill his potential, narrowly missing a place in the 1973 SEAP Games squad. But that regret may have spurred him on to excel outside of track & field. The mechanical engineering graduate spent the next 28 years building his career, first in ESSO and then in oil trading companies in the United States, Europe and Japan. Today, the businessman is director of oil trading firm, Ramtron Oil International Ltd, a company he started in 2000.

His foray into sports administration was purely coincidental. He was approached with a proposition: take up the position of Chairman of Woodlands Wellington FC, an S-League club that was lagging in the league table. A lack of interest in football did not stop him from transforming the club. From running alongside his players to scouting for a coach in Ipoh, leading by example was top on his agenda. His efforts paid off over the next few years as the club achieved success.

Weng Fei’s experience with Woodlands Wellington led to an offer to join the Singapore Amateur Athletic Association. After a two-year understudy period as Vice President of Training & Selection, he was appointed president in 2004, a position he held till 2006. His stint may have been brief but his leadership took SAAA to new grounds, literally, as the Centre of Excellence was established in Bukit Gombak Stadium during his tenure. His motto of “leading by example” also meant a close relationship with athletes that has endured to this day.



All of 1.47m and 37kg, the little girl with the big heart and flowing pigtails dominated the 1,500m and the 3,000m events in the 1977 and 1979 SEA Games, winning four gold medals in the process.

DISTANCE QUEEN

K. Jayamani

In a country which has not produced many female distance runners - much less champions - K. Jayamani stands out as an exception. All of 1.47m and 37kg, the little girl with the big heart and flowing pigtails dominated the 1,500m and the 3,000m events in the 1977 and 1979 SEA Games, winning four gold medals in the process. Her achievements were rewarded with two Sportswoman of the Year accolades, in 1976 and 1980.

She had started running because of her family. As a 10-year-old, she took part regularly in Big Walk races around the island with her sister and cousins. Then she, representing Dunearn Secondary, got her big break when she finished first in the schools' section of a major walking competition.

That victory earned her recognition from renowned athletics coach Maurice Nicholas, who started training her in 1973 and developed her into South-east Asia's top middle distance and long distance runner.

Her last major achievement was winning the SEA Games gold medal in 1983 for the marathon. It was a significant victory. The last time Singapore won gold was way back in 1973 and it had to take Jayamani competing in an event which wasn't even her specialty to break the dry spell.



Sng credits his athletics background for helping him turn his company around even though it was badly hit by the 1997 financial crisis.

GIVING BACK

Sng Sze Hiang

As an athlete, Sng Sze Hiang's career did not last long. The former national 400m runner competed in just one SEA Games in 1983 and then retired to concentrate on his business, at the tender age of 20. But as a businessman, he continued contributing to sports through his company T.T. Importers and Exporters.

In 1994, he offered cash rewards for Singapore's track and field athletes if they managed to secure silver or bronze medals at the Hiroshima Asian Games that year. A year later, in 1995, he sponsored former national junior high jump record holder Hoe Aik Teng to the tune of \$1,000 a month for the then 20-year-old to meet her study and training expenses.

At that time, he explained that when he was a struggling student at Singapore Polytechnic, the Singapore Amateur Athletics Association stepped in to lend him a hand when he didn't have money for training. They paid for his equipment and canvassed funds for him to go overseas for events.

So with his success in business, he always wanted to give back something. Over the years, he has contributed to sports through his company, which deals in consumer electronics and produces the local brand Akira. For some time now, Akira has been sponsoring various athletics meets and programmes run by clubs and the SAA. It has also sponsored S-League football club Geylang United.

Sng credits his athletics background for helping him turn his company around even though it was badly hit by the 1997 financial crisis. During that time, the firm had a large percentage of its business in Indo-China, which was among the region's most severely affected by the crisis. That was when the athlete in him took over. Drawing on values cultivated as an athlete such as resilience, patience and self-belief, he overcame the odds. No wonder this father of five boys hopes his children will take up sports too.



Looking back, the talented Haron will be appreciated as a whiff of fresh air in local athletics.

COLOURFUL CAREER

Haron Mudir

Sprinter Haron Mudir's track career has been nothing if not colourful. In 1980, he burst into prominence with his time of 10.9 secs in the 100m. Then just 17 years old, he was a student with Pasir Panjang Vocational Institute.

Two years later, he turned more heads when he returned times of 10.5 secs for the 100m and 21.3 secs for the 200m during a training stint in Cologne, Germany. His status as Singapore's premier sprinter was sealed when he finished fifth in the 200m at the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi. The next year, at the SEA Games on home ground, he won silver in the 200m, finished fourth in the 100m and helped the 4x100m relay team to clinch a bronze.

His next career high came in 1987 when he smashed C. Kunalan's national 200m record with a time of 21.14 secs at an Asian meet. A few months later, he won bronze medals in 100m, 200m and the 4x100m relay at the 1987 SEA Games in Jakarta despite being down with the flu bug. In 1989, despite many obstacles, he kept his focus and equalled Godfrey Jalleh's time of 47.4 secs for the 400m. He also performed admirably at the SEA Games that year, winning the silver in the 100m and bronze in the 200m.

In 1991, he took part in the Manila SEA Games. But he pulled out because he felt he was not competition ready. A few comeback attempts were made but he eventually retired. Looking back, the talented Haron, who now works as a legal secretary, will be appreciated as a whiff of fresh air in local athletics - someone who offered a glimpse of hope to the sport at a time when it was perceived to be in the doldrums after the highs of the 1970s.

JAMES VS JAMES

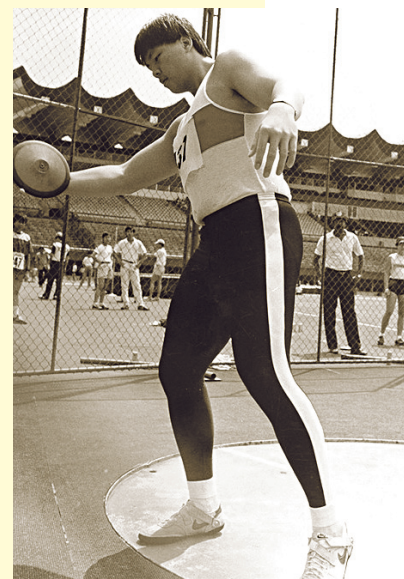
James Wong

James Wong once said he wanted to be remembered as “the most bemedalled field athlete in SEA Games history and the greatest discus thrower in this region”. Few would begrudge him this title.

After all, the 1.9m giant of Singapore throwing has won the SEA Games discus gold for seven times running. He is also the current national record holder for the discus (59.87m) and the hammer throw (58.20m), both of which were set in 1999.

At the local and Southeast Asian level at least, the only person who could compete with James Wong for the last 20 years is, well, James Wong. At the age of 15, he was already 1.86m tall and breaking discus records for older age groups. Two years later in 1986, he shattered Fok Keng Choy’s record of 40.08m with a hurl of 41.56m, making him the youngest male to set a national mark at the age of 17. He hasn’t looked back since, repeatedly breaking his own records as he pursued his sporting dream.

However, despite his dominance in South-east Asia, Wong, 37, has found the going tough at the Asian Games level. Now retired, he contributes to sports by helping today’s athletes improve their performance through his expertise in the field of Strength and Conditioning.



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A former student at St Joseph's Institution, he was first discovered by his teacher John Tan when he was 14. His progress was rapid and he soon started to make his mark.

NEW HEIGHTS

Wong Yew Tong

In the 1995 SEA Games in Chiangmai, Thailand, Singapore's high jumper Wong Yew Tong managed "just" a silver medal. But the height he cleared in a highly competitive contest between him and the gold medallist from Malaysia led to one of the best performances in our track and field history. Indeed, Wong's 2.22m, a new national record, was of Asian standard. Riding on such good form, he later earned a place for himself in the Singapore team for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

It is thus understandable that the 36-year-old looks back at the 1995 SEA Games with much fondness. "For me, it was special. I was particularly pleased with how I could bring myself to new heights each time I was pushed to outdo myself by the intense competition," he says.

Apart from his SEA Games feat in Chiangmai and the "wonderful experience of taking part in the Olympics" in Atlanta, he also counts his gold medal at the 1988 Asean Schools in Singapore as a highlight in his career. The gold, achieved with a height of 2.04m, was not surprising, given the potential he showed as a school boy.

A former student at St Joseph's Institution, he was first discovered by his teacher John Tan when he was 14. His progress was rapid and he soon started to make his mark at the national and regional levels. Given the promise he showed, he was even selected for training stints in Germany and Australia.

Today, Wong, who retired in 2000, works with Outward Bound Singapore and is in corporate training covering areas like leadership, personality profiling and team building. He also recently became a father and now spends his free time mainly with his family. While he is no longer into high jumping, he still swims and runs "just to stay fit".

WHAT A RECORD!

U. K. Shyam

For more than three decades, C. Kunalan's legendary 100m national record stood firm, brushing aside all pretenders to the throne. But in 10.37 breathtaking seconds in 2001, U. K. Shyam changed all that. He could barely believe it when he made the mark, breasting the tape ahead of everyone else in his 100m heats of the 2001 World University Games held in Beijing. After realising that he had bettered the mark by 0.01 sec, he burst into tears.

The new 100m star had first come to prominence as a 17-year-old student, clocking 10.7 secs, just one year after he started training seriously. The St Andrew's School student had secretly admired his school's sprinters but never imagined that he himself could be a top runner. Victory at his maiden competitive outing in the 1993 National Schools 'B' division 100m event - where he clocked 11.2 secs - boosted his confidence. Eight months later, he did his first sub-11sec timing, at the 1994 National Junior Championships. Finally, he believed he had the talent.

After breaking a couple of age-group records, he joined the national team and ran the anchor leg of the 4x100m relay in the 1997 SEA Games in Jakarta. The relay team won a bronze medal that year. Then in 2001, Shyam - who had just broken Kunalan's record - equalled that time again in the 100m final of the SEA Games in Vietnam. In the process, he finished a close second in the blue riband event, marking the first time a local sprinter had won a silver medal in the century sprint since Haron Mundir in 1989.

But he returned home empty-handed in the 2003 SEA Games in Vietnam. Subsequently, he quit running. Now 30, Shyam, who is pursuing a post-graduate diploma in education at the National Institute of Education, still hopes to make a successful comeback.



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