

Sport
SINGAPORE

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FALL
OF SINGAPORE (1942 – 2022)

SPORT IN — TRIUMPH OVER DESPAIR — SYONAN

DIGITAL EXHIBITION
Launch 15 Feb 2022



An island fell into shock and despair, and yet from local shores, a sporting hero arose and left a legacy for generations to come...

Source: Quah We Ho Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore



Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

How did sport sustain the sporting community in the harsh conditions of WWII?



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1943 (2603 Japanese Occupation date). Group photograph of the Pasir Panjang Rovers football team after winning the Alsagoff Shield in the Syonan Sports Association Soccer League. Chia Boon Leong, a future Olympian nicknamed 'Twinkletoes', emerged post-war to reach the 1948 London Olympics. The sporting legend played a pivoting role in the Malaya Cup-winning teams of the 1950's and represented Singapore at the 1954 Asian Games. Voted most popular player in Malaya, Chia is in the front row, second from the right.

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Sport in Syonan

Triumph Over Despair

Presented by Sport Singapore
In commemoration of the
80th Anniversary of the Fall of Singapore
(15 February 1942 - 2022)

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Introduction



Lieutenant General Percival (right) and other British officers on the way to Ford Factory at Bukit Timah to surrender, marking the start of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. The historic Former Ford Factory is now a WWII museum. 15/02/1942. Source: Quah We Ho Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005689 – 0115)

The Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 during World War II was a disaster and a tremendous turning point in our island's history, the impact of which can still be felt 80 years on.

What role did sport play for the dispirited survivors of a renamed isle – Syonan-to, meaning Light of the South Island?

In what way did sport happen for sportsmen and sportswomen in deprived conditions? How did the new masters deal with sport, and could sport triumph over despair in the darkest hours?

War and Sport

Much has been written about the ignominious defeat of the colony, pronounced by then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as 'the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history'.

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Stories of hardship endured by the populace and allied Prisoners of War (POWs) during the brutal occupation of the Imperial Japanese Army have been told and retold through a river of memoirs and memorials.

Little, however, has been inscribed about the local sporting landscape during the three and a half years of occupation from 1942 to 1945.

A Humanising Force

Within the larger sporting world theatre, the 1940 and 1944 Olympics were abandoned due to the global catastrophe. The notion of any sport and recreation taking place in such a deplorable state is hard to imagine, yet sport survived.

Contrary to common belief that fun and games had no place during the war years, not only did an astonishing amount of sport take place under tight centralised control, but sport also played a significant role in improving the morale and lives of athletes, people and POWs.

This exhibition in 12 Chapters presents the reader with fascinating insights on Sport in Syonan, extracted from the book 'Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy' by academic, Dr Nick Aplin (Straits Times Press, 2019).



Allied Prisoners of War on the way to Changi POW Camp. 1942. Source: David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005713 – 0050)



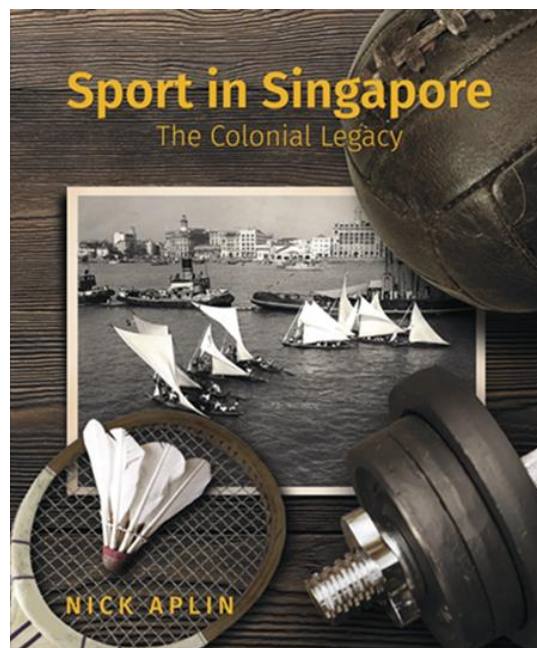
A group on a bicycle outing in Johore, Malaya, before the Japanese invasion. Whilst bicycles are now associated with recreation and races, the Japanese 'cycling army' advanced down Malaya and invaded Singapore in early February 1942. During WWII, light tanks and bicycle infantry were employed by the Japanese 25th Army in the Malayan campaign for speedy overland movement. c.1941. Source: Lee Brothers Studio Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005772 – 0094)

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Visit the **Singapore Sports Museum** to discover Singapore's sporting heritage and the Hall of Fame (HOF), which honours more than 50 sporting legends. The Hall of Fame was created in 1985 by the Singapore Sports Council (now Sport Singapore) to recognise and celebrate the achievements of Singapore's top athletes.

Reference

Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy



AUTHOR: Nick Aplin

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About the Book

A comprehensive exploration of the development of sport in Singapore in the colonial period, from the early 19th century up until self-government was established in 1959, with a detailed chapter on the Syonan years (1942 - 1945). More than 20 sports, such as football, golf, badminton, netball, polo, and swimming, are examined. The book highlights the human stories behind sport - the struggles and achievements of Singapore's early sportsmen and sportswomen.

About the Author

Written by Dr Nick Aplin, Deputy Director of Sport Heritage at Sport Singapore, and former senior lecturer at Nanyang Technological University's Department of Physical Education & Sports Science. Other publications by the author include 'Singapore Olympians: The Complete Who's Who, 1936–2004', published in 2005.