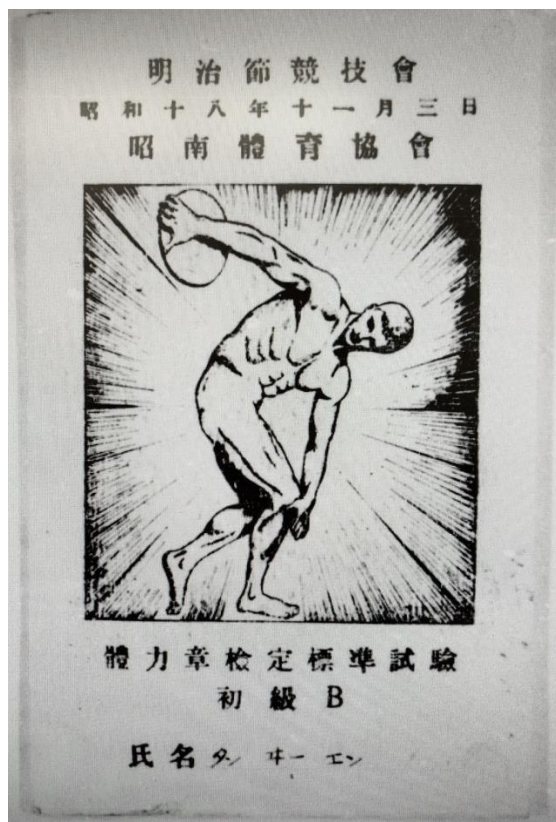


## 5

## Reintroduction of Sport and Games



Leaflet from the Syonan Sports Association. Translation: "Meiji Emperor Commemoration. Showa 18th Year, November 3, Syonan Sports Association", Physical Fitness Standard Test, Elementary B Level. Full Name: Tan Wee Eng". 1943. Source: National Archives of Singapore

### New Malaya Celebrations and Mayor's Cup

In August 1942, the New Malaya Celebrations was the first of landmark events designed to demonstrate a new hegemony. On the agenda were Football and Hockey, the two most popular team games.

In the national football competition, there was one team from each main community: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian. Under the watchful eye of referee Lieutenant Okomoto, the Malays competed against the Chinese for the football Mayor's Cup.

Clearly the re-introduction of sport was a popular initiative. Each sport could convene its own committee to organise events, on condition that members of pre-existing and new clubs become official members of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA).

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In consequence, membership numbers increased rapidly in 1943. However, women only became members in 1945.

### Far East Olympic Games, Competitive Leagues and Inter-School Games

Competitive sport under the SSA saw the execution of successful games and leagues, including football, hockey, volleyball, basketball and baseball, and even marathons.

Inter-School games were organised for football, netball and basketball. One aim for competitive sport under the SSA was participation in the Far East Olympic Games, together with Japan, China, and the Philippines.

The Syonan Marathon Race due in December for the Mayor's Cup received 76 entries. It was a 10 ½ mile race from the Padang to Bukit Batok hill, where the Chureito Memorial to honour fallen Japanese soldiers was constructed.

### Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival and Fitness Tests

Using sporting events with enforced audience participation was one way that the Japanese spread their words of dominance and proselytize their ideas.

A large-scale sports carnival was planned for the Meiji Setu Celebrations in November 1942. The Emperor's Birthday represented an opportunity to propagandize the Japanese way. Sportsmen from Penang were invited for friendly basketball, badminton and soccer games.

There were physical tests, mass drill and calisthenics that the youth were obliged to enter.



Leaflet from Syonan Sports Association. Translation: "Meiji Emperor Commemoration, Showa 18th Year, November 3, Syonan Sports Association, Mass Exercise Participation Award". 1943. Source: National Archives of Singapore

### Physical Fitness and Military Function

While the British introduced different sports for recreation, it was the Japanese who emphasised the significance of physical fitness, which was tied to military function.

Schools were not overlooked. Physical training became an element of teacher training, while physical exercise was introduced as a subject for pupils.

*"Unlike the previous administration, the Nippon-zin themselves are doing everything in their power to foster the sporting instinct in each and every individual so that he may attain health and physical perfection through games, thereby helping to build up a strong and virile nation."*

- Sporting Activities Dominate Life in Syonan. Syonan Shimbun, 7 October 1942, p.3

The social elements of sport were gradually reduced in favour of physical fitness and personal responsibility to keep fit and healthy. A new identity and a redesigned approach to community sport were the aims. The mantra was 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'.

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*"For the first time, formal testing of physical fitness was introduced into the culture of sport and physical activity of Singapore."*

- Lai Kuan Lim and Peter Horton (2011)

*"The SSA conducted a fitness test for its members during the Meiji Setsu Sports Carnival. Some 40% of the participants passed this battery of six test items:*

- A 2,000 metres run to be completed in 10 minutes and 30 seconds;

- 100 metres to be done in 16 seconds;

- Long jump with a minimum distance of 3 metres;

- Lifting a 30 kg weight over 50 metres in a time of 15 seconds;

- Throwing a hand grenade over 30 metres;

- And Four pull-ups"

- Lai Kuan Lim and Peter Horton (2011)

### Seizure of Club Facilities – Tonan and Konan

To counter the club system under the British whereby respective racial groups had their cultural bastions, the clubs at either end of the Padang were seized for the recreational use of Japanese officers and officials. The Singapore Cricket Club (SCC) was renamed 'Tonan' and the Singapore Recreation Club (SRC) was renamed 'Konan'.

Other clubs were similarly requisitioned. The Straits Chinese Recreation Club (SCRC) ground was assigned to the Police. One outcome was that playing fields that were associated with clubs became increasingly accessible to the sporting fraternity.

## Meiji Setu Festivities and Baseball at the Padang

Special dates on the Japanese social calendar represented opportunities to combine indoctrination with sporting celebration.

The Meiji Setu festivities in November 1942 were held at the Padang, a central location that could attract thousands of spectators. The Padang was neatly sectioned for five competitive sports: football, hockey, volleyball, basketball and baseball. Baseball, together with table Tennis and badminton, were competitive sports to benefit from centralised control.



Pre-war: Singapore Baseball League - a popular sport among the Japanese. 03/09/1933. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20100000394 – 0036)



Pre-war: Friendly baseball match between Japanese and Americans, Singapore. 03/09/1933. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20100000396 – 0004)



Post-war: The first game of American baseball at the Padang since WWII. It was played by officers of the visiting heavy cruiser USS St Paul against its crew, with the iconic Municipal Building (City Hall) seen in the background. 16/10/1949. Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20060001703 – 0018)



Post-war: Players and spectators at the first game of American baseball at the Padang since the Japanese Occupation, with Saint Andrew's Cathedral seen in the background. 16/10/1949. Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20060001703 – 0015)

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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.