

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 He 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 pivotal 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.

DIGITAL EXHIBITION | Launch 15 Feb 2022

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)

1

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'.

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)

2

Change of Sporting Identity



Raffles College freshmen's football team. The team captain, Edmund William Barker (front row, third from right) was an avid sportsman and champion student athlete. Barker (1920-2001) played various sports including hockey, cricket, rugby, athletics, and badminton. After the war, he became Minister for Law and Minister for National Development, and contributed significantly to the development of sport. 1939. Source: Raffles College Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005802 – 0112)

Centralised Control and Racial Integration

The Japanese Occupation created a change of sporting identity. The sportsmen and sportswomen of Syonan were now confronted with an approach of centralised control and a loss of autonomy. This was unlike the British club system, which advocated for a policy of segregation and promoted a laissez faire approach.

The new regime aimed to bring the different racial groups together through sport. Sport represented a common interest, and an attempt by the invaders to win over a population that had seen its world turned upside down. The vulnerable society was softened by the introduction of sporting opportunities, particularly for the youth.

The administration of sport bordered on dictatorial with the creation of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA) by the Japanese to regulate sport for its political purposes.

Colonial Legacy - British Sport and Pastimes

Spread by the military across the vast British Empire, British sport and games were adopted by local clubs and institutions and were played by both men and women in the colonies.

Page | 4

The new rulers ironically promoted British sport. Games and activities remained much the same as before the occupation, with the addition of baseball which was a popular sport for the Japanese.

Photographs dated between 1930 to 1940 depict sporting teams in the decade before the shocking Fall of Singapore in 1942:



First Committee of Singapore Girls' Sports Club. Standing, from left: M Lewis, G da Silva, R Woodford and Tennis Convener M de Souza. Sitting: Honorary Secretary Zena Clarke, President D Oehlers and Honorary Treasurer M Clarke. Front row: Hockey Convener T Oehlers and Netball Convener B Oehlers. 1930. Source: Singapore Girls' Sports Club, courtesy of National Archives Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005133 – 0099)



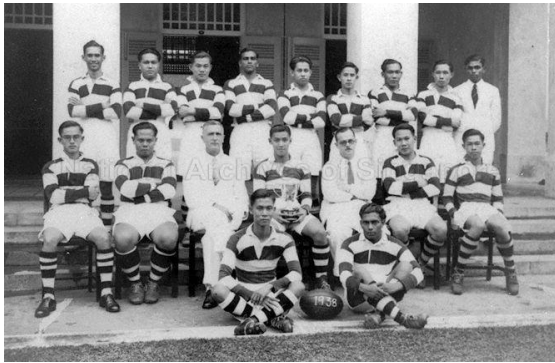
Singapore Chinese Swimming Club water polo team. 01/08/1939. Source: Singapore Sports Council (Media – Image No: 19980005602 – 0037)



Sports team of the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment, Gillman Barracks in Singapore. 1936/1937. Source: Glyn Wright Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20160000040 - 0016)



Raffles College athletics team. 1938. Source: Margaret Clarke collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005816 - 0009)



Raffles College rugby team. 1938. Source: Margaret Clarke Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005816 - 0010)



Singapore Girls' Sports Club netball team with Mr Conrad Clarke, a sports patron in pre-war Singapore who donated the Clarke Shield in 1930 to encourage netball teams to hold competitions. His daughter, Mrs Zena Tessensohn, was also one of the founders of the Girls' Sports Club in 1930. c.1936. Source: Singapore Girls' Sports Club Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005133 - 0097)

3

Sport as Political Tool

Pre-war: Japanese women athletes of the 1936 Berlin Olympics gather on the grounds of the Japanese Club in Singapore. c.1930s. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19990002629 – 0076)

Cultural Tool for ‘Nipponisation’ and Harmony

Sport was perceived as a means of re-establishing social equilibrium after the invasion in February 1942. It was also a significant political tool which used any public opportunities to impose elements of Japanese culture. Coercion and indoctrination were the watchwords that touched on sport, as they did with the rest of the community.

To coincide with broader policies associated with occupation, it was necessary to form a centralised sports body. Plans were actuated by a desire to make the lives of the people of Syonan as ‘happy and bright’ as possible, once the early months of ‘Sook Ching’ (a purge of anti-Japanese elements and massacre of male civilians) that ravaged the Chinese and Eurasian communities had ended.

There was an additional agenda - to create a platform for propaganda.

The tone of official pronouncements was one of working towards harmony, peace, and eventual prosperity under the Greater Far East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Within sport itself there were distinct parallels in some of the guiding principles - fair play, perseverance and courage were shared values.

Singapore Japanese Club

The pre-war Japanese community played games like tennis and golf, and held sports meets. Upon occupation, the Singapore Japanese Club became a member of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA), which all sporting clubs and associations had to join.



Pre-war: Sumo wrestling match sponsored by the Japanese Club. 01/09/1931. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19990002629 – 0106)



Pre-war: Slow speed pedal race at Sports Meet sponsored by the Japanese Club. 1934. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20100000395 – 0011)



Pre-war: Reaching the finishing line at Sports Meet sponsored by the Japanese Club. 1934. The venue was likely the Jalan Besar Stadium, which later became the headquarters of the Syonan Sports Association during the Japanese Occupation. Source: The Japanese Association Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 20100000395 – 0010)

4

Syonan Sports Association (SSA)



The Syonan Sports Association - players from different soccer league teams to form the Singapore team. 1942-1945. Source: National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005027 – 0080)

Power and Play

The formation of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA) brought about a series of interactions between Japanese and Singaporeans that would combine power and play.

The key Japanese official was Mamoru Shinozaki, a bespectacled former journalist who had been convicted of spying on Singapore in 1940 before the invasion. He was Chief of the Welfare Department (*Koseika-cho*) and responsible for delivering the political messages of the senior administrators.

The key Singaporean official was Goh Hood Kiat, known as G H Kiat, a well-respected businessman and sports devotee, who became the Chairman of SSA.

Syonan Shimbun and Sports News

The daily Syonan Shimbun published its first edition five days after the British surrender. Focusing on sporting activity at the end of April 1942, sport was to signal that some form of normalcy was returning to the island.

Members of the pre-war sporting fraternity were instructed by the Sports Editor of the Syonan Shimbun to attend a meeting on the formation of the SSA. Former Committee members of the Football Association, Tennis Association, Hockey Association, and representatives from other sports such as Baseball and Boxing, were the first delegates.

Page | 8

Formation of SSA – Clubs and Associations

The SSA was registered in early September 1942, with Mayor Sigeo Odate as patron and Honorary President. The following clubs were invited to attend the committee meetings:

- Singapore Japanese Club
- Chinese Swimming Club
- Straits Chinese Recreation Club
- Ceylon Sports Club (at Balestier Plain)
- Indian Association (at Balestier Plain)
- Singapore Recreation Club
- Clerical Union (at Balestier Plain)
- Municipal Services Club (at Farrer Park)
- Island Club
- Singapore Badminton Association
- Singapore Boxing Association
- Malay Sienen Club

Sport may be regarded as the true barometer of the mindset of the community. However, there was resistance to the new philosophy amongst Chinese sporting clubs who wanted that sense of independence that had developed with the British.

Singapore Recreation Club, Singapore



The Singapore Recreation Club was founded in 1883 with 30 Eurasian members. In 1884, a Pavilion was erected on the site of the Padang allocated to the Club. Eurasian athletes became dominant in many sports and team games such as athletics, cricket and hockey. 1920-1928. Source: Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore. (Media - Image No: 19980005093 – 0026)

Syonan Sports Association 'Nucleus Of Power For Good' Of All Races

THE nucleus of a great sports club, open to all communities, was formed on Friday when the Syonan Sports Association had its first annual meeting. Held in the hall of the Bras Basah Road Boys' School the meeting which was well attended, was presided over by Mr. G. H. Kiat. The meeting was honoured by the presence of Mr. M. Shinozaki who gave an inspiring address after he had been formally introduced at the outset of the meeting. He stressed the importance of the Association and gave the meeting a pleasant surprise when he disclosed that the Authorities were giving full support and had promised a monthly donation of \$300 to the Association. He also hinted that if the Association needed more financial help it would be forthcoming.

The daily reported that the first AGM of the SSA, open to all communities, was held at Bras Basah Road Boys' School (St Joseph's Institution). Source: Syonan Shimbun, 18 October 1942, Page 4. Retrieved from NewspaperSG.

Universal Brotherhood – 'Hakko Itiuo'

No sporting club could be formed without the sanction of the SSA. The stated objective was to do away with racial and sectional differences - *"emphasising that the people of Syonan are now members of one community as an all-Malayan community and doing away with all the former prejudices and jealousies..."*.

"Any friendly rivalry that may exist will be only that to be found between two teams – both belonging to the same parent body – the Syonan Sports Association. This will do more than anything else to build up that close harmony and kindly feeling for each other which is essential to the creation of the spirit of Universal Brotherhood."

- Syonan Shimbun, 10 October 1942, p.2

The term *Hakko Itiuo* or Universal Brotherhood was significant for the Japanese. It implied a spirit of good-fellowship and harmony, such as was displayed during inter-state games in the pre-war period. Communal sport, a British legacy, was viewed as the curse of sports.

SSA Headquarters at Jalan Besar Stadium

The first objectives of the SSA were to repair the Jalan Besar Stadium and to convert Farrer Park into a venue for athletic events. The Esplanade was to be retained as an open space and playground.

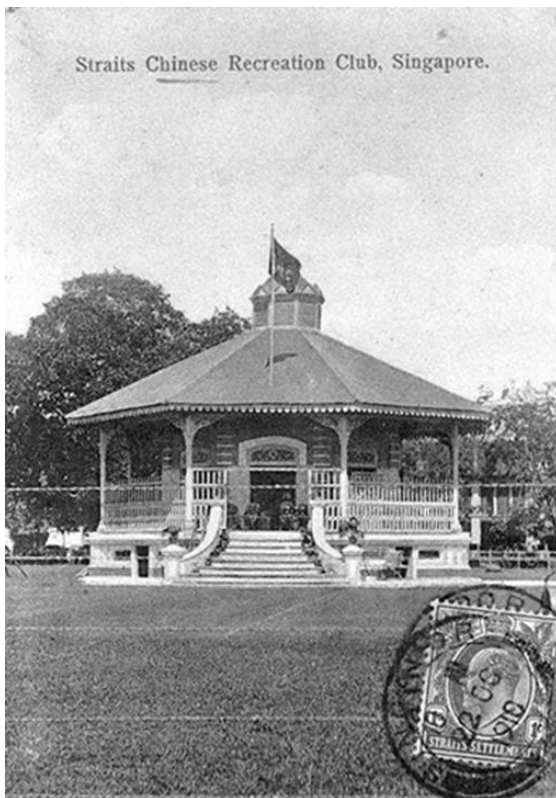
The SSA consolidated its own position by constructing a pavilion adjacent to the stadium. It was completed in April 1943, with extensions to follow. The increase in membership by the end of 1943 and the subscriptions collected provided financial support for the venture.



During the Japanese Occupation, Jalan Besar Stadium became the Headquarters of the Syonan Sports Association. Both photographs depict the stadium just after WWII. A young footballer and future Olympian, Chia Boon Leong, is captured in action. Top Photo: Chia going full length to head past Derbyshire, the goalkeeper of Johore. Bottom Photo: Chia in action at a charity football match where the Rovers beat R.E.M.E. 6 goals to 1 at Jalan Besar Stadium. 1947. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0066 and 20140000148 – 0035)



The Indian Association was registered in 1923. Cricket, Hockey and Football figured highly in the activities that emerged as competitive sports for the association. Photograph above depicts the prize-winners of various tournaments held in 1927 at the Indian Association. 1927. Source: Singapore Sports Council. (Media - Image No: 19980005604 – 0008)



Straits Chinese Recreation Club (renamed Singapore Chinese Recreation Club in 1946). This iconic octagonal pavilion stood in the middle of Hong Lim Green for many years. The pioneer club was established in 1885 and was the first club adopting English sports for Straits-born Chinese. The club offered facilities for cricket, hockey, lawn tennis, football and indoor games such as chess and billiards. The lovely green lawn was damaged during the Japanese Occupation years and could not regain its former glory. 1910. Source: Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005901 – 0101)

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).

Page | 11

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.

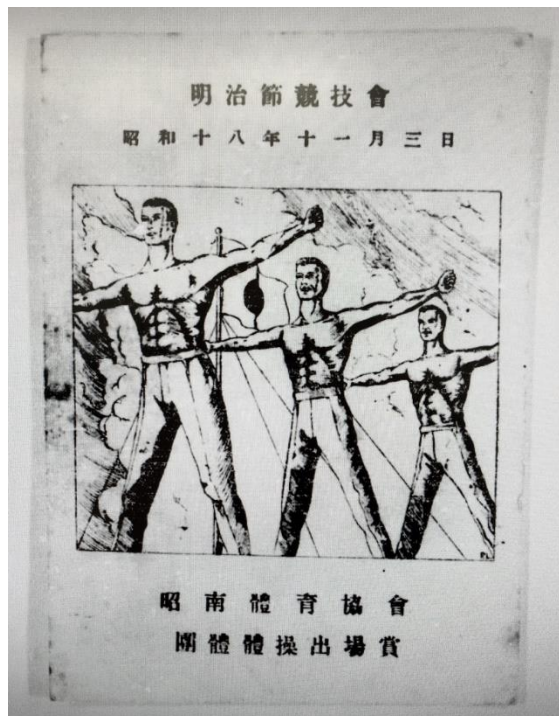
The Syonan Marathon Race due in December for the Mayor's Cup received 76 entries. It was a 10 ½ mile race from the Padang to Bukit Batok hill, where the Chureito Memorial to honour fallen Japanese soldiers was constructed.

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'.

"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 10minutes 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)

6

1943 - First Anniversary of Occupation and Hockey Cup



Group photograph of the winning Harlequins Hockey Team. 1943. Source: Margaret Clarke Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005816 – 0022)

Harlequins Hockey Team and Lazy Lads

At the beginning of the second year of occupation, there was a flurry of activity as proposals were put forward for competitions, including track and field, tennis and football.

The cricket fraternity proposed the creation of a competitive league and the hockey players prepared for their own competition. The condition was that the playing fields and pitches were to be repaired and reconditioned.

A Knock-Out Hockey Cup competition was initiated with a strong Eurasian representation. The Harlequins Hockey Team beat the Lazy Lads to receive the Alkaff Challenge Cup. The first hockey league was intended to showcase teams, rather than communities. Entries closed in November 1942 and the games extended until February 1943.

There were seven participating teams that still retained some racial identity.

- Harlequins (Eurasian) – ultimate winners
- Lazy Lads (Jewish, Ceylonese and Indian)
- Hornets (Eurasian)
- Wanderers

- Rangers (Eurasian)
- Taha's XI
- International XI

Programme and Propaganda

All of these events were in response to the central administration's desire to celebrate the Fall of Singapore.

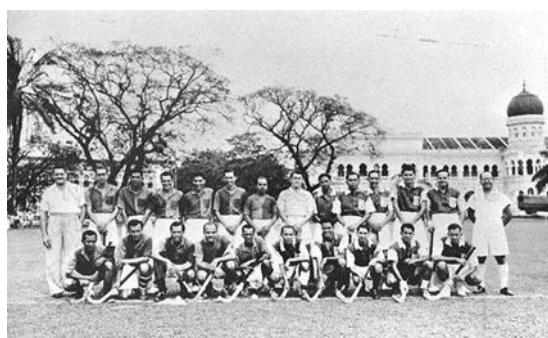
The propaganda message was forcefully reiterated:

"The SSA formed with official blessing, has received generous assistance, and the sports meets held on the occasion of important festivals and anniversaries point undeniably to the desire of the authorities to encourage healthy sport in all its branches, so that the youth of the country may develop healthy bodies in which healthy minds can flourish."

The anniversary programme included an international-style game in hockey. Visitors from Selangor were entertained on the Padang. The newest addition to the sporting calendar included a rugby match.

In March 1943, the cricket season opened with games being played at the Jalan Besar Stadium, the Padang and the Straits Chinese Recreation Club ground at Hong Lim Green.

With a wide variety of sports on display, demand for SSA membership grew rapidly. By 18 April 1943 there were 1,434 members of the SSA.



Pre-war: Group Photograph of Singapore Hockey Team with Selangor State Team at Kuala Lumpur Padang. 1940. Source: Singapore Sports Council (Media – Image No: 19980005602 – 0058)

Visit of the India National Army Hockey Team and Selangor Soccer Team

A boost to the hockey scene was the visit of the India National Army (INA) team. The INA were fighting for independence against British imperial rule.

The official opening of the SSA Clubhouse by the Mayor coincided with the visit of the INA hockey team and a soccer team from Selangor.

The end of 1943 marked the high point of sporting engagement for sportsmen of Syonan with a tour to Malaya.



Post-war: Group photograph of players and officials of the Singapore Recreation Club Reds Hockey Team. 01/02/1951. Source: Margaret Clarke Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media – Image No: 19980005815 – 0032)



Post-war: Oehlers Challenge Cup, Singapore Recreation Club. Seated (left to right): Andrew Clarke, G E N Oehlers, Burdett Coutts, Norman Hogan, Harold Hoeden. Standing (left to right): John Marks, W Hay?, Noronha (Goalkeeper), Fernando, Wright, John Martens. Date: Unknown (circa 1955). Source: Singapore Sports Council

7

Syonan Goodwill Tour to Malaya



Pasir Panjang Rovers football team after winning the Alsagoff Shield in the Syonan Sports Association Soccer League, 1943 (2603 Japanese Occupation date). Front row (left to right): Shariff Madon, Tan Wee Eng, Ong Swee Hock, Chia Boon Leong, Gan Kee Siang. Middle row (left to right): Kally Din (official), Ong Leng Hoo, V Sabapathy, Zain (?), Francis Loh (official). Back row (left to right): John Hon, Abdul Rahman, Ong Eng Hoe, Tan Chin Lye, Wong Tong Seng, Choo Kwan Leong. 1943. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No:20140000148 – 0196)

SSA Soccer League and Army Day

To signal that some form of normalcy was returning soon after the occupation, a report by the Japanese media stated that two soccer games had been played on a pitch at Cantonment Road. Although there were many informal football matches thereafter, there was no league programme in 1942.

In 1943, a communally-based soccer tournament was arranged to coincide with Army Day, which involved the four main racial groups and a sponsor – Syonan Nippo, the Japanese language daily newspaper.

Alsagoff Shield - May to September 1943

In March 1943, a new innovative, open soccer league was heralded by the Syonan Sports

Association (SSA). Government departments and business houses were eligible to enter a single team each. Members of SSA were allowed free entry whilst non-members paid 20 cents. Ultimately, the Alsagoff Shield was won by the Pasir Panjang Rovers and Potong Pasir won the second division title.

Page | 16

Champions of Syonan

The end of 1943 marked the high point of sporting engagements. Jalan Besar Stadium became the venue of the first Inter-State soccer match between Syonan and Johore.

The charity match was a test before a 'goodwill tour' of soccer and hockey teams to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and Seremban from 2 November to 5 December 1943.

Japanese official Shinozaki from SSA was quick to exhort the players to seek success in the games.

"Go and fight and come back with victory. You are champions of Syonan and you must show your spirit. In Selangor, they are preparing the Sultan's Cup. You must bring the Cup down."

- Syonan Shimbun, 23 November 1943

His desire was fulfilled when the soccer players were undefeated in all six games. Two soccer members - Chia Boon Leong and Chu Chee Seng, would later represent China in the 1948 Olympic Games in London.



Post-war: Action on the field during the match between Rovers Sports Club football team against the T.P.C.A. Team taken in Kuala Lumpur. 21/04/1946. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore. (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0215)



Olympic soccer stars: Chua Boon Lay (right) (1936 Berlin Olympics) and Chia Boon Leong (left) (1948 London Olympics) at Tivoli Restaurant. Both were members of the Rovers Sports Club. 1940s. Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 - 0238)



Post-war: The Malayan Chinese Football Association's Inter-State Challenge Cup competition held at Jalan Besar Stadium. The Singapore Chinese beat the Johore Chinese by two goals. On the right is goalkeeper for the Singapore Chinese team, Chu Chee Seng, who also played for the China Olympic team in 1948. 01/10/1948. Source: David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005699 - 0103)

8

War Heroes and Rise of a Sporting Hero: Chia Boon Leong



The young Chia Boon Leong (b.1925) in the Rovers team uniform. 1940s. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0051)

Young Olympian - Chia Boon Leong (b.1925)

From the depths of war and the seaside at the west coast, a young Olympian arose. Born on New Year's Day in 1925, and growing up at five and a half milestone Pasir Panjang Road, Chia Boon Leong went on to become a sporting hero for Singapore and Malaya during and after WWII.

Boon Leong lost both his parents in childhood and was in the care of his older brothers and relatives. He played with marbles and kicked about tennis balls in the yard with the

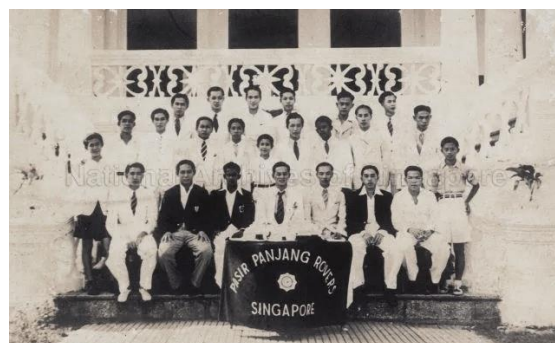
kampong boys. He trained football at Pasir Panjang English School, which was located at Yew Siang Road, a street named after his father.

"In primary school, all the students played football matches barefooted."

– Chia Boon Leong, oral archives, National Archives of Singapore



Pasir Panjang Rovers football team in a casual pose. Chia Boon Leong is standing third from the right. 1940s. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0206)



Pasir Panjang Rovers 3rd Anniversary celebrations at Chia Keng Thye's bungalow at 610 Bedok on 17 May 1941. Chia Boon Leong is standing in the front row extreme right. 17/05/1941. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0195)

Formation of Kampong Team - Pasir Panjang Rovers

Sometime before the war broke out, the Pasir Panjang Rovers was formed. Boon Leong's friend, Chua Boon Lay, encouraged him to play.

"I remember some soccer enthusiasts from Pasir Panjang who decided to form the Pasir Panjang Rovers team, and they are Chinese, as well as Malay and Indians. So they got together and formed Pasir Panjang Rovers just for the sake of playing friendly matches because the team being a cosmopolitan team, they are not eligible to play in any of the league organised by the Singapore Amateur Football Association (SAFA). At that time it was confined only to the communal teams (Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasians) and teams from the services side (RAF, Army and Navy)."

- Chia Boon Leong, oral archives, National Archives of Singapore



Raffles Institution First XI Football Team. Chia Boon Leong is in the front row, second from the right. 1941. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Sook Ching – A Narrow Escape

Boon Leong studied at Raffles Institution. When war broke out in December 1941, Boon Leong had just completed his Senior Cambridge exams. The bombings went on day and night. His family thought it would be safer to move to Tiong Bahru for a time.

When the British surrendered on 15 February 1942, Boon Leong had just turned 17. He was called in for 'Operation Sook Ching', a mass screening by the Kempeitai at an open ground at the corner of Tanjong Pagar and Cantonment Road. Being small-sized, he passed the screening and escaped the purge of

anti-Japanese elements. Many others were taken away and killed, including a coach-player of the Pasir Panjang Rovers.

War Hero – Lieutenant Adnan Saidi and The Malay Regiment at Bukit Chandhu

Page | 19

Two lanes away from Yew Siang Road was Pepy's Road, where an open ground and an opium packing plant stood at the foothill of Bukit Chandhu. Boon Leong watched keenly as older boys played friendly matches against other kampong teams at Pepy's Road field and at Farrer Park.

When war came, the youngster Boon Leong witnessed soldiers on vehicles plying Pasir Panjang Road. Little did he imagine that on eve of the Lunar New Year, on 14 February 1942, the historic final Battle for Singapore, fought by brave soldiers of the Malay Regiment and war hero Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, would take place at Bukit Chandhu.



National war hero, Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, Platoon Commander of the Malay Regiment, who sacrificed his life at the Battle for Singapore at Bukit Chandhu, Pasir Panjang. c.1937-1942. Source: Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

The Malay Regiment fought bitterly and held their stand to the last against a foe that vastly outnumbered them. Their heroic sacrifice is commemorated at Reflections at Bukit Chandu near the battle site.

Playing During the Occupation – 1942 to 1945

Fortunately, Boon Leong was able to continue playing during the occupation. He was a member of the Rovers team that went through an eight-game league tournament for the Alsagoff Shield. There were charity matches, with the Rovers defeating the fancied Cosmopolitans, while raising funds for the various farming schemes by the Japanese.

In 1943, together with his friends, Chua Boon Lay and Chu Chee Seng, Boon Leong joined the Syonan Goodwill Tour that travelled by rail up to Malaya. The Syonan soccer team won all their games.

“The Rovers won all the major trophies offered by the Syonan Sports Association from 1943 to 1945.” – Ken Jalleh, The Singapore Free Press, 20 April 1949



1943 (2603 Japanese Occupation date). The Pasir Panjang Rovers football team posing with many Cups they had won during the Occupation. 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. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: Media - Image No:20140000148 - 0228)



Force 136 member, Lim Bo Seng (Major-General) (1909-1944), a national hero of Singapore for his resistance to Japanese forces during World War II. Following in his footsteps, his grandson Lim Teck Yin served the nation as Brigadier-General in the Singapore Armed Forces, as well as a national water polo athlete and champion between 1985 and 1995. Lim Teck Yin now serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Sport Singapore. c.1940s. Source: Lim Leong Geok Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

War Hero - Lim Bo Seng (1909-1944)

In 1925, the same year that tiny Boon Leong was born, a young man of 16 years had arrived in Singapore to study at Raffles Institution, where Boon Leong later attended school. His name was Lim Bo Seng (Major-General) (1909-1944).

Bo Seng was destined to become a national war hero, after enduring tortures and sacrificing his life as a guerilla freedom fighter and resistance leader of Force 136, a special operations unit. Buried with full military honours at MacRitchie, the Lim Bo Seng Memorial at Esplanade was gazetted as a national monument in 2010.



War-heroine Elizabeth Choy Su Moi, OBE (nee Elizabeth Yong Su Moi) (b. 1910 – 2006). During the Japanese Occupation, Elizabeth worked as a canteen operator with her husband at Woodbridge Hospital. The couple secretly supplied food, medicine, messages, money and radios to British internees. The couple were caught, arrested and interrogated by the Kempeitai. Elizabeth was subjected to 193 days of starvation and repeated torture. She refused to break and never revealed the names of anyone she had assisted. Post-war, Elizabeth was awarded the Order of the British Empire, and became the only woman member in the Legislative Council in 1951. A dedicated educator for many decades, she was the first principal of the Singapore School for the Blind in 1956. 14/03/1955. Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No:19980001106 – 0019)



Lien Hwa (United Chinese) football team in full suit. Chia Boon Leong is in the back row, second from the right. Chia joined Lien Hwa in a 42-day tour of Asia sponsored by N.S. Chinese Recreation Club, Seremban in December 1947, playing in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Manila. 1947-1948. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0073)



Chia Boon Leong in Lien Hwa (United Chinese) team uniform taken in Bangkok. 1947. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0088)

Post-war Memories – 1947 Shanghai

Immediately after the war, Boon Leong played in a series of tour matches in Asia – Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Manila.

His most memorable game occurred in Shanghai in 1947 playing for the Lien Hwa (United Chinese) team in front of an ecstatic 12,000 capacity crowd. His endurance, speed, and skill in creating chances for his teammates won the hearts and total respect of the home audience.

He was feted by joyful fans after the game, who forgot in a moment of euphoria that China was enmeshed in a civil war.

“What I remembered most about the match in Shanghai against the defending champions, Tung Hwa, is not so much the game itself, but the post-game reception given by the crowds.

It was a once in a lifetime feeling. I can’t really recall how I played. I did not even score a goal. But it was the crowds mobbing me as I walked out of the stadium to the bus after the match that gave me a flutter.”

- Chia Boon Leong, 5 November 2011, in an interview with Dr Nick Aplin



Mass of spectators in long queues waiting to enter the stadium. 1947-1948. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 008)



Lien Hwa (United Chinese) team taken against a packed spectators' stand in Shanghai. Chia Boon Leong is in the front row, second from the right. 1947-1948. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0135)

Playing at the 1948 London Olympics

The 1948 London Olympics was the first summer games to be held after WWII and Boon Leong was selected to represent China.

This caused consternation amongst officials of the Malayan Chinese Amateur Football Association and the Singapore Chinese Football Association. He had apparently contravened a rule that required players to seek approval to play abroad. No action was taken as it was recognised that the selection itself was an immense honour.

Fellow Singaporeans Chua Boon Lay (b.1902-d.1976, one of the first Olympians from Singapore, reserve player at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, representing China) and Chu Chee Seng (b.1923, reserve goalkeeper at the 1948 London Olympics, representing China), both went to the Olympics as well, but never played.

Till today, Chia Boon Leong remains the only Singaporean to have played soccer at the Olympics.

“Swift as a hare, with brilliant ball control and unlimited stamina as his chief assets, he is a schemer of immense value to any forward line.”- Sonny Yap, New Nation, 1975



Chia Boon Leong at Uxbridge, England, when he played for the China Olympic Football Team at the London Olympics. 1948. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000149 – 0006)



Chia Boon Leong (right) and Edwin Dutton (left) chatting with Arsenal's inside left, Jimmy Logie, at the Highberry training ground. Fraser and Neave ran a competition to select Malaya's most popular football star. The reward for Chia who came up tops, and the runner-up Edwin Dutton of Selangor, was a two-months training stint with Arsenal in London. 1954. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000149 – 0134)

Speed Legend - "Mr Twinkletoes of Soccer"

Upon his return, Boon Leong played a pivotal role in Singapore's Malaya Cup-winning teams of the 1950s and participated in the 1954 Asian Games.

Page | 23

A crowd favourite, Boon Leong was also voted most popular player in Malaya in 1954.

After an illustrious career, he retired at the end of the season in 1955. Boon Leong continued to serve the football fraternity as manager of the Singapore national football team in 1978, and later as Council Member of the Football Association (FAS) of Singapore and Chairman of the FAS Welfare Committee.



Singapore Team that beat Penang and won the Malaya Cup 1950. Chia Boon Leong is in the front row, extreme left. 1950. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0019)



Singapore Team won the Malaya Cup 1952. Result: Singapore 3 – Penang 2. Chia Boon Leong is seated in the front row, second from the right. 1952. Source: Chia Boon Leong Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20140000148 – 0071)

A Singapore Sporting Hero for All Time

In November 2021, author Dr Nick Aplin met with the spritely nonagenarian who was home-bound due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though rather hard of hearing, Mr Twinkletoes of Soccer did not fail impress with the same bright smile and sporting spirit that helped him to triumph on and off the field.

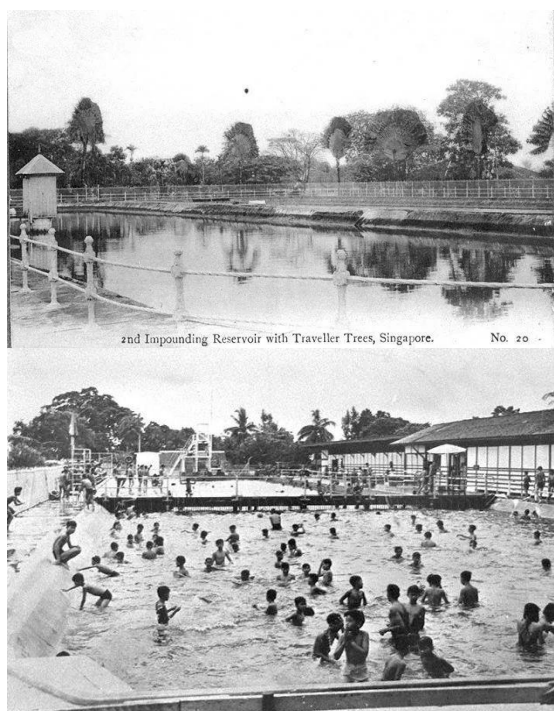
“Chia Boon Leong is widely considered to be one of the most talented and highly regarded football players ever to represent Singapore. Close to 97 years of age now, he is a store of precious information about the glory days. He has a number of favourite topics that will easily emerge. His justifiable pride in his own achievements focus on his Olympian status – he represented China against Turkey in the London Games in 1948 – and his representative prowess for the Lien Hwa touring team in 1947.”

- Dr Nick Aplin, 5 November 2021



Chia Boon Leong, aged 96yrs, in his home during an interview with author, Dr Nick Aplin. 5/11/2021. Source: Courtesy of Dr Nick Aplin

9

Boxing, Bushido and Bahau

Top photo: Mount Emily Reservoir, along Upper Wilkie Road. Part of the municipal reservoir was converted in 1931 into Singapore's first public swimming pool and the first pool to use fresh water instead of seawater. 1911. Arshak C Galstaun Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005504 – 0021)
Bottom Photo: c.1960. Source: Singapore Sports Council (Media - Image No: 19980005602 – 0095)

Swimming at Mount Emily Pool

One of the few activities open to all during the Japanese Occupation was swimming. Mount Emily Swimming Pool was open daily with allocated times for different groups. Sessions were chiefly for men and boys. Women and girls could access only 2 sessions a week. Mixed bathing took place on Sundays and holidays.

A swimming competition was scheduled and there were events for Men, Women and Boys. The swimming carnival was due to be staged on 3 October but was postponed to 7 November 1943.

Boxing for Entertainment and Fund-raising

As the occupation moved forward, boxing became a chief form of entertainment. Gate money was collected and there was betting. An innovation occurred in June 1943 – which was to donate proceeds from amateur boxing matches for charity.

Page | 25

A second major innovation in the sporting culture occurred in September 1943. Women would be allowed to join the Syonan Sports Association and participate in their chosen sports. The committee made special provisions for an extension to the clubhouse – a room for women.

Lawn Tennis opportunities brightened when the former YMCA courts on Bras Basah were restored, providing courts for tennis, badminton, basketball and volleyball.

The introduction of judo, kenjutsu and other martial arts at the 'Butokuden' in the Syonan Town Hall (Memorial Concert Hall) meant a widening of available activities.

Food Cultivation at the Padang

There were plans to create a New Syonan sports organisation with sports fields and amenities. However, as a stark reminder of wartime shortages, it was announced that any open spaces would be dedicated for food production.

The Tokubetu-si Padang in front of the Tonan Club (Singapore Cricket Club) and the Konan Club (Singapore Recreation Club) were prime targets.

With a touch of irony, members of the Free Labour Service Corps of the Syonan Sports Association were detailed to till and cultivate the fringes of the Padang with tapioca and sweet potato plants.



Happy World (opened 1937, renamed Gay World in 1964) was one of three popular amusement parks built before WWII, known for entertainment and sporting matches, especially boxing and wrestling. Ticketing booths for Victory Theatre was on the right, and for boxing on the left. During WWII, it was used as a gambling den and later converted into a Technical School for Aeroplane Works for youths. Post-war, it was a venue for the 7th Southeast Asian Peninsular Games. 1940s. Source: Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005879 – 0034)

Boxing – Revealing the Spirit of Bushido

Boxing was promoted strongly by the Japanese coach Hisao Saito. Both amateur and professional contests were envisaged. The rules were changed to account for the heat and high humidity - bouts lasted 2 minutes per round rather than three.

It was Saito's desire that boxing reveal the true spirit of Bushido. The ways of the warrior reflected samurai values, which stressed loyalty, mastery and honour. A front-page feature of the Syonan Shimbun extolled the virtues of boxing and its possible value at a time of war.

“Boxing has come into its own...the public owes its thanks to those sports minded individuals who have come forward on every occasion.”

- Syonan Shimbun, 9 March 1944

Sport in Aid of Bahau Fund

A soccer match was planned in aid of new farming settlements at Bahau (Fuji-Go, meaning Beautiful Village in Japanese) and Endau (New Syonan), set up to address problems of food scarcity and rising discontent. The land at Bahau was unsuitable for agriculture and many settlers suffered from malnutrition or died from malaria and other illnesses.

Advance tickets sold and donations received yielded \$5,000. The games featured the Pasir Panjang Rovers and the Cosmopolitans, who were coached by Olympian Chua Boon Lay.

Boxing and hockey organisers were also involved with fund raising for settlers. A prominent Chinese businessman paid \$5,000 for a ticket to the open amateur boxing championships.

A regular yet diluted programme of sports events continued between bombardments but press coverage was becoming sporadic. The only well publicised sporting event at this stage was a Boxing Tournament in August 1944. Proceeds were donated to the Bahau Fund. There were signs that the dreadful war was turning.



View of the main road leading to the Bahau Settlement. On the right was the Police Station and on the left was the Community Hut used for gatherings by the settlers from Singapore. After the Japanese Occupation ended, majority of the surviving settlers were repatriated to Singapore by Force 136. c.1945. Source F A C Oehlers Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20050000319 – 0004)

10

Sport in Changi Prisoner of War Camp



Pre-war: Aerial view of the new civilian prison at Changi, which later became the Prisoner-of-War (POW) Camp for allied POWs during the Japanese Occupation. 1936. Source: Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005075 – 0055)

A Sporting Distraction

In captivity, the Prisoners of War (POWs) managed to create a sporting distraction from the brutality of incarceration. One which reinforced their sense of toughness and resilience.

As most of the captives were brought up with a British Empire perspective on sport, it was not surprising that the major team games that might link British and Australian soldiers together were cricket and football. What was surprising was that some Japanese guards were drawn into the fascination of childlike play with footballs and cricket balls.

POW Playing Grounds

There were three main playing grounds for games. One near Selarang Barracks, which was occupied by Australians. One near the Roberts Barracks, which was occupied by the British. And one near the India Lines, which was occupied by British and Dutch POWs.

The Australians played Aussie Rules from the start of captivity and the British kicked a soccer ball around. There was a hidden message

behind these games: it remained, as in times of peace, as a way to prove oneself. Still strong and fit.

The game that most symbolized the ailing British Empire was cricket. Thus it was no surprise that a cricket Test series would be initiated. Among the POWs were a significant number of first-grade Australian cricketers and county cricketers from England. It seems that the Australians were the dominant force!

Serious Play

There was rugby (both League and Union varieties), boxing and basketball, but football was the most enduring even though it adopted a particularly aggressive form. It was the only game that's survived a ban that had been imposed as a result of over-zealous play.

If the Aussies dominated the cricket and rugby, then the Brits called the tune with soccer. Most of the games were played on their 'turf'. They played their games in the early evening after tea.

"The POWs not only had a well-organised soccer league, but they also played competitively in the more physically violent contact games of Australian Rules, rugby league and rugby union."

"The players and officials took the game and its rules very seriously. They even had rules regarding the 'transfer' of players from 'club' to 'club'."

"Green (steward of Victorian Australian Rules team) described how when he was at Selarang Barracks, 'Max Street, a friend of mine, persuaded me to go to the hospital area to play football for 'Melbourne'. I was given three bowls of rice for transferring'."

- Quote from 'The Sportsmen of Changi' by Kevin Blackburn



The infamous Death Railway constructed during the Japanese Occupation. 1942-1945. Source: National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20050000103 – 0011)

Playing with the Enemy

One apparent contradiction about the environment at Changi was the involvement in sport of some of the Japanese and Korean guards. Soccer was a popular game with the guards. They watched and learned and might play an informal game together.

It was very rare for guards and prisoners to appear in the same match. Not impossible though. There was one Japanese dispatch rider who earned the nickname 'McKenzie'. He would take all the knocks that might be expected and carried on regardless.

Casualties and Ban on Sport

Other games and sports appeared on the calendar at Changi. There was boxing, baseball and basketball. They were not accessible to the POWs throughout their internment. Gradually as food supplies were more limited, the physical condition of many of those tough blokes began to decline.

Despite their weakened condition due to the poor diet, the medical staff and the unfit men *'still felt that the benefits of playing sport more than outweighed any drain on the physical condition of the men'*.

"In Jan 1943, the casualties resulting from football and boxing were a drain on the decreasing drugs, and acting on medical advice, these two sports were banned."

– War diary of AIF Headquarters in Changi

Page | 28

The medical staff were the fittest as many of the fitter men were sent as work parties for the Burma-Thailand Railway. For many of the surviving men who escaped being sent to the infamous 'Death Railway', Changi 'seemed like heaven compared with other places where POWs were forced to work'.

By 1945 there was a ban on sport and an almost total lack of desire to compete.

Sport played a significant role during the dark days at Changi in lifting morale and up-keeping of self-esteem, as was evident in the daily diaries kept by POWs, where details of scores and best players were meticulously recorded.



Entrance to Changi Prison. 1940s. Source: Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20080000057 – 0058)

Acknowledgement to Kevin Blackburn, author of 'The Sportsmen of Changi'.

11

The Auxiliary Labour Corps and End of Occupation



Labour booklet issued during Japanese Occupation. 1942-1945. Source: Chew Chang Lang Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image no: 19980005535 – 0107)

Auxiliary Labour Corps of the SSA

Members of the Syonan Sports Association (SSA) discovered that sport was not going to be their only endeavour. At least 400 men formed the Auxiliary Labour Corps and were detailed to make 25,000 flags for the New Malai celebration.

Subsequently, requirements expanded to more trying and demoralising duties such as clearing up the debris and removing the dead after a bombing raid by the Allies.

The advance notice and reports of the various games provided one of the few sources of enjoyment and a distraction from the horrors of occupation.

Sportsmen Contributing to Defence Tasks

A diluted programme of sport events continued between bombardments. The league soccer season opened in early June with few reports, and it is only possible to identify four participating teams - The Coleman Casuals, the Medleys, the Pasir Panjang Rovers and Miyako Byoin were the rivals.

The steady decline of SSA operations came after the group was instructed to reallocate the members to passive defence tasks. The conflict was moving dramatically in the favour of the allies.

Air raids were causing considerable damage and the young men of the SSA were required to remove debris, and help with the thankless task of restoring basic amenities during emergencies and building public air raid shelters. Shinozaki, the honorary adviser to the SSA, was the Commandant of this task force.

Creating a Positive False Front

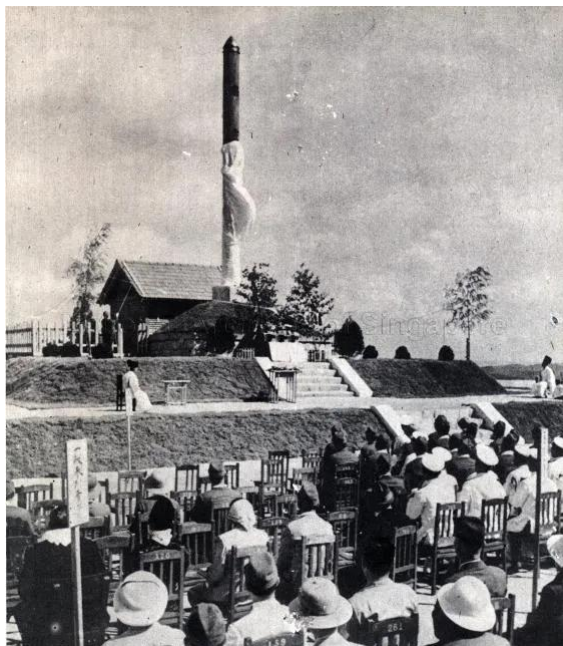
Marking important dates in the Japanese calendar remained a priority, though there were changes. Instead of a run, there was a cycle race from the Padang to the Chureito Memorial planned for October the 8th.

An extensive Syonan Sports Programme for Meiji Setu to be staged in November was announced. The claim was that these celebrations would be held on an unprecedented scale. Part of the Padang was still useable for a Mayor's Cup soccer match, and tennis could take place at the Tokubetu-si Sports Club (YMCA) grounds at Bras Basah.

For the Japanese, the main objective was to rally as many of the people as possible to create a positive, though misguided, impression that the war was proceeding well.



Labour booklet issued during Japanese Occupation. 1942-1945. Source: Chew Chang Lang Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005535 – 0104)



Syonan Chureito (Japanese Memorial Shrine) at Bukit Batok hilltop. Two memorials were built during the Japanese Occupation to honour the dead soldiers of the Japanese and British forces. Syonan Chureito was destroyed by the Japanese after the war for fear of desecration. The British Memorial Cross was removed later. 1942. Source: From Shashin Shuho, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media Image Number 20050000124 – 0002)



Junction of Prinsep Street with Bras Basah Road. On the right is the former Ladies Lawn Tennis Club premises which had been acquired by Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1932 after the club's closure. In the background is the Raffles Museum and Library. 1930s. Source: Lim Kheng Chye Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005881 – 0091)

From Tennis Courts to Trenches

The SSA membership numbers continued to grow and by early January 1945, the Syonan Shimbun reported a total of 3,287 members.

Not all were necessarily active members, for one incentive for joining was the possibility of receiving additional rice to stave off hunger.

Activities of the SSA focused largely on passive defence, and the work of the Special Forward Service Corps in dealing with air raid damage and digging shelters. The former YMCA tennis courts on Bras Basah Road were converted to trenches for defensive positions.

Page | 30

Soccer Must Go On - Okamoto Challenge Cup

Reporting soccer matches became infrequent as the programme became more fitful. There was one highlight early in 1945, but an anticipated close contest proved to be disappointing. The Okamoto Challenge Cup soccer final between Pasir Panjang Rovers and Syonan Jovials was played at the Jalan Besar Stadium, resulting in a one-sided victory for the Rovers by seven goals to nil.

Sportswomen Joining Special Forward Service Corps

At the beginning of April, SSA membership reached 3,649. Apparently 62 out of the 162 new applicants were women. They were not yet able to enjoy the Association's amenities, but were advised that they would soon become eligible to join the Special Forward Service Corps.

The insistence on ritual and obedience continued, even if the sporting programme was flagging badly. On the third anniversary of the occupation, the Special Forward Service Corps was ordered to march to Churieto Memorial on Bukit Batok Hill.

Goodwill Tour – Fostering Friendship and Sport for Entertainment in New Malai

The idea of a goodwill tour to peninsula Malaya was revived with a dual purpose. First, to further foster friendship with up-country sportsmen, and second, to provide entertainment for the 10,000 former residents

of Syonan who were farming in the agricultural settlements of New Syonan (Endau) and Fuji Village (Bahau).

A team of footballers, amateur musicians and actors from the SSA departed on 20th May for a two-week tour of southern and central Malai.

The party's itinerary included stops at Seremban, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang to play seven games. Three of the games were won. These games represented the final gesture of sporting harmony in the region during the occupation. During the tour the positive tone back in Syonan was one of denial.

"Life in Syonan is characterised by hard work on the one hand, the aim being to win the war, counter balanced, on the other hand, by no lack of entertainment and recreation."

- Syonan Shimbun, 1945

Boosting Morale – Boxing is the Chief Attraction in Malai and Syonan

It was a time for brave faces confronted by hardship and declining fortunes. Boosting morale was becoming a regular occurrence.

"Syonan's busy public – pre-occupied with overtime work, spare-time employment and Grow-More-Food schemes – still snatch time for relaxation in the field of sport, those vigorous and competent enough taking an active part, while others, although in a passive role, lend moral support by going to witness games. Undoubtedly, Boxing is the chief attraction throughout Malai and in Syonan in particular. This is amply demonstrated by the crowds that flock to the boxing arena, be it the New World or Great World parks, where Bell's Sports enterprise stage a programme invariably every Saturday."

- Syonan Shimbun, 1945

Call to Arms - Final Membership of the SSA

Increasing demands on the male membership of the SSA Special Forward Service Corps prompted a simultaneous call to arms from the female population.

In June alone the number of young women joining the Corps helped to increase total numbers from 3,749 to 3,846. There were now 100 women members in all.

There was a Forward Service Corps' Inter Chutai (inter-group) soccer competition and the ever-present boxing promotions under Bell's Sports Enterprises, which featured Battling Khoon vs Tiny Severo. However, it was soon to be curtain call for the SSA.

A Shocking End

On 6 August 1945, the first atomic bomb was released over Hiroshima and three days later a second fell on Nagasaki. The Japanese Occupation of Singapore would end. The concluding blows were shocking and horrifying in the extreme.

Syonan returned to being Singapore with the surrender.

12

Conclusion

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, British Supreme Allied Commander, Southeast Asia, delivering a speech at the steps of Municipal Building (City Hall) after the Japanese surrender on 12 September 1945, marking the official end of the Japanese Occupation. 1945. Source: RAFSA Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20170000053 – 1727)



Spectators at Victory Rally at the Padang after the Japanese Surrender and end of over 3 years of occupation in Singapore. 10/10/1945. Source: David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005701 - 0008 and No:19980005701 – 0005)

Impact of War on Sporting Culture

Singapore's current sport culture emerged battered but not disabled from the ruins of war. As a remnant of happier times, it was able to rejuvenate spirits and provide an optimistic view of the future.

Page | 32

Sport uplifted spirits in a time of despair and helped build resilience amid adversity.

Sport was also a distraction from austerity.

Over time, the colonial rulers of old were stung by the shame of defeat, and lost influence over clubs. Post-war, sport became part of national identity in the fledgling nation.

Humanising Force of Sports

In war and sport, there are always winning and losing sides. It is how we respond to defeat and adversity that defines us.

For sportsmen during the occupation, such as pioneer Olympians Chia Boon Leong, Chua Boon Lay, Chu Chee Seng, Lloyd Valberg (b.1922-d.1984), and many others, survival meant not be consumed by defeat, but to find the will to bounce back.

The sporting community of Syonan contributed to critical functions by clearing streets, helping to restore the city's basic amenities and building public air raid shelters.

Despite hardships, survivors of WWII adapted and persevered. The individual and community fighting spirit shone through in the worst of times, and the positive and humanising force of sport was none so evident as during deprived conditions of war.

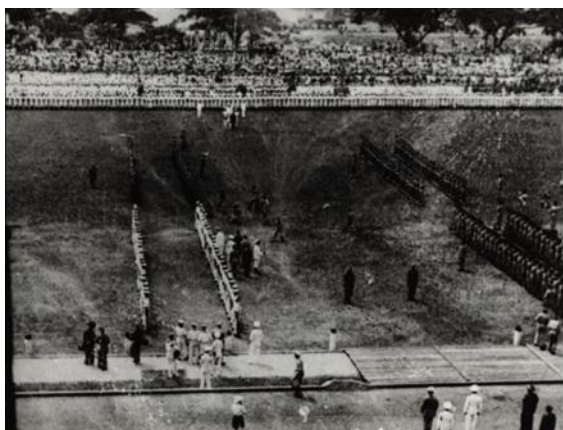
Dark Side and Brighter Side

Paradoxically, during this period of oppression the Japanese embraced the affective quality of sport in nationalising disparate social groups in Singapore. It was a way of maintaining control. There was a dark side and a brighter side. Being good at sport paved the way for opportunities.

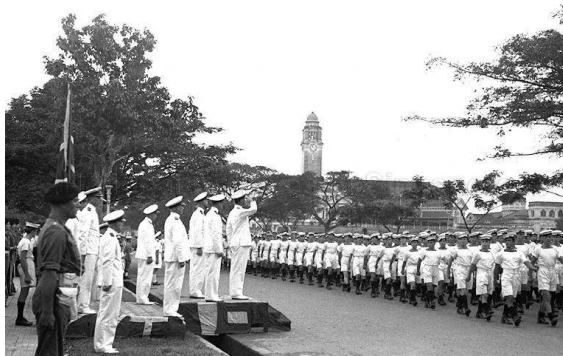
Meanwhile, Mamoru Shinozaki (1908 – 1991), who clearly related well with members of the Syonan Sport Association, remains a controversial figure till today. Detractors accuse him of distorting history to portray himself in a positive light, whilst others have lauded him for his humanity and genuine welfare, labelling him the “Schindler of Singapore”.

Fraternising with the Enemy

While competing together – and sometimes, with our foes – our shared humanity became self-evident. During the occupation, locals and POWs played games with or against the Japanese, for the love of sport transcends nationalities and gender. In the final analysis, all men and women are equals regardless of race or creed.



Victory Parade at the Padang in front of the Municipal Building (City Hall). 1945. Source: Tham Sien Yen Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 20080000015 – 0087)

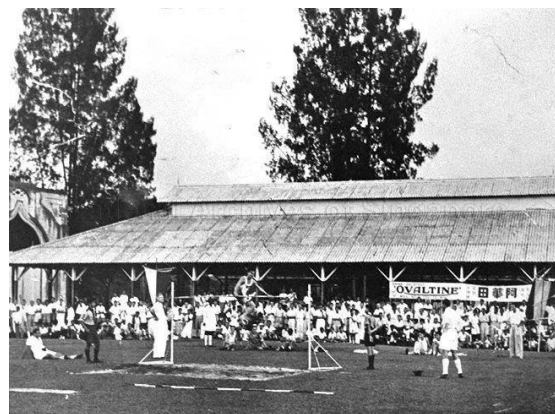


Victory Parade by the British and Australian Navy at the Padang. 07/01/1946. Source: David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005785 – 0037)

Shifting the Game

The competition for opportunities increased the seriousness of sport and physical education, while at the same time the seriousness of war also had the unintended consequence of shifting the game.

The function of sport shifted from play and socialisation, to one of personal fitness with an emphasis on the disciplining of the body into the production of a combat-ready citizenry.



Post-war: Olympian Lloyd Valberg (1948 London Olympics) in an exhibition leap in Sydney. c.1947-1950. Source: Singapore Sports Council (Media - image no: 19980005603 – 0032)

Post-war: First Olympian under Singapore Olympic and Sports Council - Lloyd Valberg

Three years after the end of WWII, Singapore sent her first official representative to the 1948 Olympiad in London under the newly minted Singapore Olympic and Sports Council (SOSC, formed on 27 May 1947).

It was a strange scenario indeed, whereby two Singaporean soccer athletes (Chia Boon Leong and Chu Chee Seng), and two basketball athletes (Wee Tian Siak and Ng Liang Chiang), represented China, whilst another Singaporean from the athletics fraternity, Lloyd Valberg, participated as a lone athlete in the Singapore contingent.

As there was no Singaporean flag then, Lloyd hoisted the Union Jack at the flag raising ceremony at the Athletes' Village before the Games. Lloyd overcame adversity in London

and on his return, became one of the most versatile athletes in Malaya and Singapore.

Lloyd was to inspire a future Olympic star, his grand-nephew Joseph Issac Schooling, Singapore's first-ever Olympic gold medallist.

Keep the Spark Burning

Whilst sporting culture will evolve as society evolves, the fundamental spark for sport through the ages, both in peacetime and in wartime, is playing to derive pleasure and challenge. This pure spark must be kept burning.

Sport has now grown in significance as a source of national pride and international identity, yet there is still room for the flames of sport to grow.

A New Battle with an Invisible Enemy

Eighty years on, our nation and the world are fighting against an invisible enemy, and exercise and sport have aided Singaporeans to upkeep their physical and mental health in these most challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The same enduring values of sport – courage, resolution and tenacity – will help to us triumph against the odds, and to sustain our Singapore Spirit.



Victory Parade along North Bridge Road near Elgin Bridge. 10/10/1945. Source: David Ng Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No: 19980005701 – 0004)

“They died so we might live.”

- *Inscription on The Cenotaph war memorial to honour the fallen from WWI & II at Esplanade Park*



Unveiling of national war hero Major General Lim Bo Seng Memorial by Commander-in-Chief, Far East Land Forces, Sir Charles Falkland Loewen, at the Esplanade Park in 1954. The unique bronze pagoda with four bronze lions was designed by architect Ng Keng Siang. Collectively with The Cenotaph, a war memorial that honours the heroes who fought and died during World Wars I and II, and the Tan Kim Seng Fountain, the Lim Bo Seng Memorial was gazetted as a National Monument in 2010. 29/06/1954. Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore (Media - Image No:19980001068 – 0013)

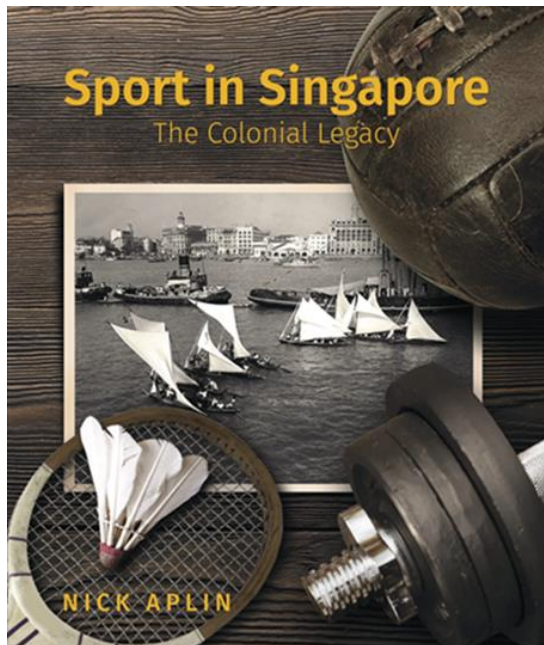
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Visit the [Singapore Sports Museum](#) to discover Singapore's sporting heritage and the Hall of Fame (HOF), which honours more than 50 sporting legends. The Hall of Fame was created in 1985 by the Singapore Sports Council (now Sport Singapore) to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

Reference

Sport in Singapore: The Colonial Legacy



AUTHOR: Nick Aplin

PUBLISHED BY: Straits Times Press

ISBN: 9789814827652

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.

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Page | 35

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