



EVENTS - July 2019

Bench & Bar Games 2019

15 min read

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“This is the fight of our lives. We are going to win. Whatever it takes.”

Captain America

Some people move on. But not us. We remembered that night at the Grand Ballroom of the Weil Hotel in Ipoh in 2018 where Team Singapore lost pretty much everything (yes, even the Boat Race). It served as a wake-up call to all our players and supporters. In 2019, we vowed that the Judge’s Cup will come home.

To make this year’s Bench & Bar Games even more special was the fact that 2019 represented the 50th anniversary of the Games. It began with Sports Suit No. 1 of 1969 between Bench & Bar of Singapore (Guests) and Bench & Bar of Malaya (Hosts) comprising of four sports which were golf, badminton, cricket and tennis and where it was ordered that our claim to the Judge’s Cup *“be and is thereby dismissed with costs”*. The Games has now grown to include 17 sports played over three days and involve hundreds of players and supporters. A senior member of the Sports Committee reminded Team Singapore that the Games represent the friendships and close bond between the legal fraternities of Singapore and Malaysia and that all of us are beneficiaries of these Games.

And whilst Team Singapore was incredibly honoured to host the Golden Jubilee edition of the Games, we still needed the Avenge last year’s defeat. Team Singapore! Assemble!

Day 1 – Part of the Journey is the End



Throwing of Darts by Justice Andrew Phang

In keeping with tradition, there were some sports which were played before the Games was officially launched at the Welcome Reception. This year, hockey kicked off the Games on a Thursday afternoon with Malaysia drawing first blood by beating Singapore 2–1 in Hockey. Although Malaysia has traditionally been the powerhouse in this sport, Team Singapore kept the Malaysians at bay for most of the game. We even managed to equalise after going a goal down but eventually went down to a glorious goal by the Malaysians late in the match. Darts was next and the team, still reeling from the thumping last year, played superbly but lost against an experienced Malaysian team with a final score of 2–5. The fact that we were already down 2–0 down in the overall score at the end of the first day of competition did not dampen our spirits and the revelry at the Welcome Reception at the Singapore Cricket Club. Old acquaintances were renewed and new friends were made over a sumptuous buffet spread. Whilst the Malaysians were quietly celebrating their early lead, our Wonder Woman Chairperson of the Sports Committee, Lai Foong urged the Singapore contingent to suit up and get ready for battle on Day 2.

This time, we listened.

Day 2 – Endgame, Really?

Day 2 began with some form of Supreme Being answering Adrian's prayers because it began to rain. With that came

Team Singapore's first half point in golf (I was told for over 20) as the course at the Keppel Club became unplayable in the rain. It has been said that this half point sparked off celebrations typically seen at the National Day parades. But the rain did dampen the mood of our cricketeers as their game was similarly called off. The cricket team was expecting to emerge victorious but had to settle for a half point because of the draw. The team immediately drowned their sorrows with copious amounts of half pints instead.

Balance was restored when tennis emerged victorious with a score of 6–1. Although the score appeared lopsided, XT reported that each individual match was much closer than the Wimbledon's Finals between Djokovic and Federer. Squash was next. It may be that the Malaysian squash team was mourning the retirement of, arguably, the best female squash player in the world ever, Nicole David, from the Malaysian national team and was squashed 5–2 by Team Singapore at the Singapore Cricket Club. Whilst on the other hand, a titanic battle was ensuing at the Singapore Swimming Club for badminton. In recent years, badminton had provided some of the more dramatic moments during the Games (a snapped Achilles tendon here, an almost blind left eye there) and true to form, it occurred again this year when Team Singapore was literally a point away from clinching overall victory in badminton. But alas, the Malaysians mounted a fightback rivalled only by Liverpool's comeback against Barcelona and emerged victorious with an overall score of 3–2.

Still to go for Day 2 were pool, basketball and premier soccer. Pool produced some more dramatic moments at the ON1 Sports Bistro and our cue wizards turned the tables on the Malaysians by winning 5–3 (which was, coincidentally, the same score by which the Malaysians beat us last year). Our basketballers, on the other hand, came up against a younger and speedier Malaysian team this year and was defeated in a close match with a score of 55-66. It looks like we need an Anthony Davis-esque trade next year to draft in some youngsters to bolster the team next year. Our footballers ensured that Day 2 ended on a high for Team Singapore by clinching victory at Tampines SAFRA with a final score of 2–1.

At the end of Day 2, Team Singapore was in a position which we were not accustomed to. We were ahead 6–5 in the overall standings!

Day 3 – So Close to Home

The final day of competition began like it did on Day 2, with the heavens opening up. The cross-country runners gathered at the Gardens by the Bay. Desiree and Norman, having seen their team suffered its first ever defeat at Kledang Hill last year, assembled a running team which was geared to do one thing – win. And win the team did with a score of 212–232 in Team Singapore's favour. The feat was made more admirable as one of the team's top female runners woke up late and did not even make it to the start line. The ladies soccer was played next at St Wilfred's Field. The team was not able to play their samba soccer due to an exceedingly soggy pitch. This played into the Malaysian team's hands as they were able to keep our ladies at bay for long periods in the game. However, we managed to carve out a hard earned 1–0 victory which kept the winning streak alive. By this time, a number of sports were being played simultaneously all over Singapore.

News of Team Singapore's victory in chess trickled in when we blitzed the Malaysians with a score of 7–3. Unfortunately, chess is still considered a "friendly" sport and not on the official list of competitive games played at the

Games. So while it brought us good cheer, it did not bring us closer to the Judge's Cup. Team Singapore was then brought down to earth with news that our paddlers from table-tennis had gone down in a blaze of glory with a score of

5–0. The Malaysians, yet again, fielded a team which was strong across all the pairings and though most of the matches were close, our team did not manage to dent the Malaysian team's armour. Next up was netball played at MGS. Team Singapore jumped out to an early lead in the first quarter and did not allow the Malaysians to come close in the subsequent two quarters. Our ladies then turned on the afterburners in the fourth quarter and pulled away to record a 40–28 victory.

By this time, Team Malaysian realised that that Team Singapore is pulling away in the overall standings. A rallying call was issued and their volleyball team answered the call first. In spite of being a set down after 3 sets, they evened the score in the fourth set before clinching victory in the fifth set to post a 3–2 win over Team Singapore.

The overall score is now 8–7 with Team Singapore ahead.

Spurred by victory in Volleyball, the Malaysian keglers bowled tooth and nail and achieved a narrow victory over the bowlers from Team Singapore with a score of 6–7. For the first time in recent memory, the fate of the Games comes down to the final sport, veteran's soccer. It is most apt that Team Singapore looked to the Merdeka Generation to secure victory at the Games. We have relied on them to steer the labour force in turbulent times, building a sturdy foundation for Singapore. And now, we call on them to bring the Judge's Cup home – which they did in style by winning the final sport of the Games with a 4–0 score line.

Victory is inevitable. Snaps fingers.

Spirits from both camps were high when the participants made their way to Grand Ballroom at the Pan Pacific Hotel to celebrate the golden qualities of diligence, determination, courage, resilience, fighting spirit, team work and perseverance which had been on display during the Games by both teams. Team Singapore's thirst for victory was on display for one final time when we emerged victorious for the boat race.



Presentation of Judge's Cup and Lawyer's Mug

We love you 3000, the Judge's Cup.

The Sports Committee of the Law Society of Singapore would like to thank all members of the legal fraternity who participated in the 2019 Games. Special mention must also be made to the friends, family members and supporters of our players who shouted themselves hoarse supporting our players at the respective games. We would also like to record our thanks to all sponsors, including Jubilee Sponsor, Eugene Thuraisingam LLP; Gold Sponsors, Allen & Gledhill LLP and K&L Gates Straits Law LLC; Silver Sponsors, Tan, Rajah & Cheah, Norton Rose Fulbright Ascendant and Tito Isaac & Co LLP; and Bronze Sponsors, Eversheds Harry Elias LLP.

At the end of the day, the broken spirits and sore muscles will heal and become a distant memory. But the friendships and camaraderie which were forged in the cauldron of competition during these special edition of the Games will forever be remembered and remain in our hearts (well, until 2069 at least).



Sports Committee 2019 and guests



Honouring the Pioneer Batch

Badminton

As I write this article, Manchester City has just snatched the Premier League title from Liverpool by a solitary point. The parallels between that, and this year's Bench & Bar badminton match between Singapore and Malaysia, were uncanny.

Legend has it that badminton was one of the four original sports played at the inaugural Bench & Bar Games back in 1969, alongside hockey, cricket and golf. This made it extra special, and an added incentive, to reclaim the long-lost badminton trophy for this 50th golden jubilee of the Games after years of absence from our Singapore shores.

We were back at the Singapore Swimming Club, our usual battleground, for the games which kicked off slightly past 7pm on the Friday evening.

Brandon and Jayden took to the courts in the 1st men's doubles match, but were unfortunately dispatched in straight sets. Not the best of starts for team Singapore. Next up in the ladies' doubles were Vanessa and Boon Xin. This time, the tides were turned and it was Singapore's turn to inflict defeat on the Malaysians in a straightforward two-set win.

Then Sarah and Aden stepped up for the mixed doubles match. Despite putting up an excellent fight and pushing the Malaysians into a second set deuce, they marginally lost the game to make the overall score 2-1 in favour of the Malaysians. At this point, we knew that the 2nd men's doubles match (Zhi Rong and Jeremy) was crucial. Losing it would mean Singapore being 1-3 down and effectively handing the trophy over to Malaysia. Whereas winning it would tie the scores at 2-2 and give us a strong shout at bringing home the trophy. We were confident of taking the 3rd men's doubles.

The crucial game began. Supporters from both sides were gathered around the court and the tension was palpable. The Malaysians got off to a flyer, taking the first set convincingly. Then, as though scripted in Hollywood, Singapore bounced back and rallied in the second set to take the game to a third deciding set. Supporters and players alike were visibly shaking with nervousness. Both pairs exchanged points evenly, with each point being cheered to raucous roars from the respective sides. Singapore reached match point first, holding a 20-17 lead. One more point would win the game for us. Miraculously, Malaysia fought back to tie the scores at 20-20 to force a deuce. The epic match went on for 4 more deuces, before the Malaysians somehow emerged victorious, 25-23. We were shocked and in disbelief. Singapore supporters were speechless; robbed at the death. Malaysian supporters were deafening. Malaysia won it again.

Deflated but not defeated, the remaining games continued with Daniel and Boon Tiong in the 3rd men's doubles, and Eddy and Roger in the veteran's exhibition match, both games of which Singapore emerged victorious as expected, partially restoring some pride.

Final score – Singapore 2 : 3 Malaysia.

Painful as the defeat was, we can only take heart that the title was only won by the slimmest of margins – a solitary point. As the other Liverpool fans console themselves, we too tell ourselves again, “next year will be our year”. We will never give up. You'll never walk alone.

Brandon Chung
Badminton Convenor



The Singapore badminton team on court before the Games



The team at the Closing Dinner celebrating our near victory

Hockey

LSS hockey has waited for a victory over the Malaysians for a decade now as once again we came short with a 2-1 defeat to the Malaysians.

Despite putting on the pressure early on, it was the Malaysians who scored first with a typically clinical short corner.

We continued to pile on the pressure and quickly equalised through a well taken stroke by Craig.

However, in the third period, the Malaysians took advantage of a defensive error to take the lead. Despite attacking the Malaysian goal for the rest of the match, we were not able to convert. The Malaysians held on for the victory and we congratulate them but more importantly thank them for a good game of hockey and a better round of celebrations at the festivities that followed that weekend. See you again next year!



Combined Causeway Team



The real reason we play Bench & Bar Hockey

Tennis

The tennis tournament was in danger of being completely rained out for the first time in at least 24 years. If that had happened, we would have shared the point with Malaysia as we did the golf tournament. In the case of golf, the half point was greeted with jubilation as if it were a victory for that was as close as we got to a golfing victory, but a half point in tennis would be considered a defeat.

The matches were scheduled to be played at the Keppel Club's outdoor courts because the Malaysians are loathe to play in indoor courts, especially at the WTA (Winchester Tennis Academy – not to be confused with the lesser-known Women's Tennis Association). Outdoor play on harder, faster courts and the cruel twists that the elements of sun and wind bring to bear is vastly different from the softer, slower courts at the WTA; not to mention the height restriction on lobbs on account of the roof – although one wonders why that would bother the Malaysians when all the lobsters were Singapore players.

Our convenor and captain did some horse trading with their Malaysian counterpart, Yeo, also known affectionately as “Thanos” (and yes, he is both convenor and captain). So, they agreed to play at WTA on the conditions that we shorten the games by playing the super-tiebreak of 10 points in place of a third set, with a deciding point at 40-40 in the games. When one wins 6-1 in the best of seven matches, one does not look back, but had we lost, we would probably have found ourselves asking, as the Malaysians might have done, “Would the result have been different had we not played at the WTA courts?”

“What might have been” questions are delicious topics of banter for the vanquished, but they are really absurd and pointless. What might have been is a question asked only because something else had been in its stead. Once space and time have been occupied by that which was, there is no room for what might have been – it’s just never going to happen. That does not mean no lessons can be learnt from history. We have been fortunate to have learnt well.

Last year, we were in a situation of trailing three matches to one and were a set down in two of the remaining three matches, meaning lose either of those two and we would have lost overall. Given up for dead by many (Malaysians), we clawed our way back to win the two precarious matches as well as the third to win 4-3 overall. Clawing back is not what we wished to repeat this year. Our Captain Keith Yong worked in mysterious ways – I know, God does that too, but KY has reached close enough to justify the reverence that religious people reserve for their deities – and though we sometimes do not know what he had in mind, the ultimate proof of his genius lay in part in acceding to the (unforgivable) request by Albert Teo to leave him out of this year’s tournament on account of (unproved) injury, and the same malleability that let him not insist on Chris Yik returning (as he promised) to play.

Though the men’s section was weathered thin, we had an abundance of riches in the ladies’ section. Four of our top players were ready and available. KY’s dilemma in choice for the men and ladies’ pairs was a demonstration of handling contrasting problems. The die was cast thus.

The first three matches were the Ladies’ doubles, the Mixed Doubles, and the Men’s first doubles. Grace, a player of deep experience paired with Christine, a player of grace, found themselves a break down in the first set against the Malaysian pair whose game plan was to keep the ball rolling high and deep on and on until the cows come home and the rooster goes to bed. Grace and Christine scoffed at this form of play because they knew this game and were past masters at it, and they had more – they had the ability to punish any short lob. And punish them they did. They broke the Malaysian pair at 5-6 and romped through the tiebreak 7-2 to take the first set. The second set was a workmanlike demonstration of patience, persistence, and more punishment. It was 7-6, 6-4 to Grace and Christine.

Juthika and Ray went into the Mixed doubles to contain Adelene and the young Ryan Vong, charged to bring the Cup home. The quick and nimble Ryan was unable to sufficiently protect his partner as the balanced pair from Singapore exploited their opponents’ imbalance and inexperience. 6-4, 6-1 it was. Then came trouble. Exhausted by his off-court duties and facing the Malaysians’ top pair, Jason and Issyam in the Men’s 1st doubles. They fought from 4-6 down in the first set to steal the second with a 6-1 score in the second set. The closing super tiebreak is when exhaustion takes its toll. Captain KY and Gavin Neo found the tiny gap of 5 points too wide to bridge and valiantly went down 5-10. Their loss is the team’s loss as Team Singapore takes collective responsibility – and so we will all help them to victory next year. That means if they win, we get a 7-0 victory – the new KPI.

The next three matches were significant. Paul, who hates to work in mysterious ways, partnered Leslie in the

Veteran's match. Chen Chee Yen, who only had \$10 to his name, partnered XT in the Men's 2nd doubles against Toi and James; and Mark Lim and Julian took on the Malaysians Wee and Denning in the Men's 3rd doubles.

Mark and Julian were playing in the far court when news filtered through that they were "losing". Paul and Leslie lost the first set 4-6. CCY and XT were struggling with a break down in the first set. If they lose, that's game set and match for LSS. Then things turned. First, CCY and XT found their rhythm, tangoed their way back winning the first set 7-6 and then did a foxtrot to a 6-1 score in the second set. Before the match Toi pulled out a bottle from his bag and proclaimed confidently, "Accelerade". Les, who was seated nearby took out his bottle and calmly said, "Our bottles are bigger".

Mark and Julian, contrary to earlier fake news, won the first set 6-3 and with pressure mounting, found themselves playing a tiebreak in the second set, thanks in part to a nervous line calls from the Malaysians at match point, but they calmly sliced and lobbed their opponents to an 8-6 victory in the tiebreak, winning the set, match, and tournament for LSS. The Singapore supporters (also known as "The Force") leapt wildly and screamed hysterically; a proper cacophony of maddened voices and dancing forms. Everyone knew what that meant. It meant that a message was sent to the Malaysian veterans still playing, to tell them that their cause was lost. Paul and Leslie went on to win their second set 6-4, forcing a super tiebreak which they won 11-9 against the game but dispirited veteran pair of Keat and Derrick, a pair of truly gentlemanly players.

When the Malaysians, Sarjie and Nadjmi, walked into the court after that, voices were heard whispering, "What are you doing? Dude, the contest is over." Well, you know, at the end of superhero movies, there is always a trailer for the sequel, the moment for teasing the audience with a new menace and the heroes who will meet it? The endgame is not the end. Choo Wei Pin and Marcus clinically underlined their performance with a 6-2, 6-2 victory against a powerful serving hulk of a player, Sarjie, and his stern looking partner who not only saw the past flashed by, but a glimpse of the future. He may not want to be reminded of his 2020 vision when we shall all meet again.

The event closed as usual with a joint dinner hosted by Team Singapore, and amidst fun, laughter, food, and drinks, Yeo wondered aloud about his coaches, "Last year we lost 3-4" he said questioningly, "This year 6-1". Did their coaches look downwards in embarrassment, or at Yeo with a similar question in mind? We shall watch this space.

The Watcher



Team Singapore



Convenor Tan Xu Teng receiving the Vong Poh Fah Trophy on behalf of Singapore's Team for winning tennis 6-1



Muhammad Imaduddin Bin Abd K

Member, Sports Committee 2019