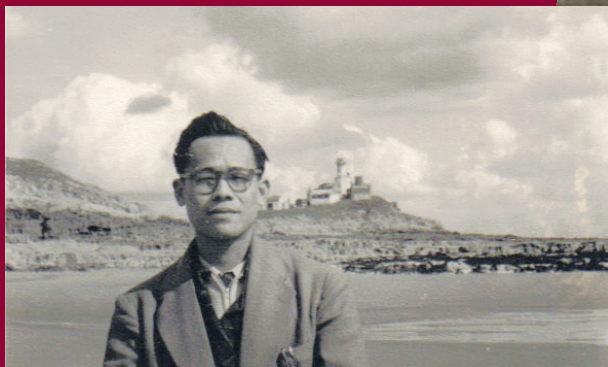
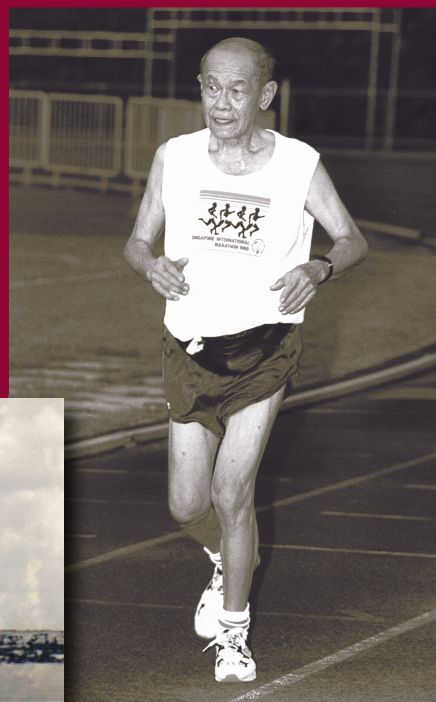
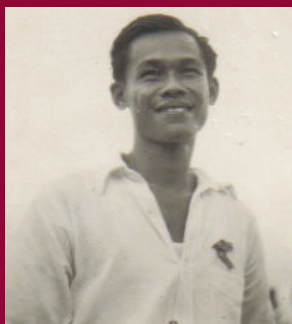


Goh Teck Phuan

1921 - 2006



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

Early Life

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

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

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

Sports Administrator

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

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Fund Raiser

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

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

Organiser

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

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

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

Mentor

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

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

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

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

After Retirement

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

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

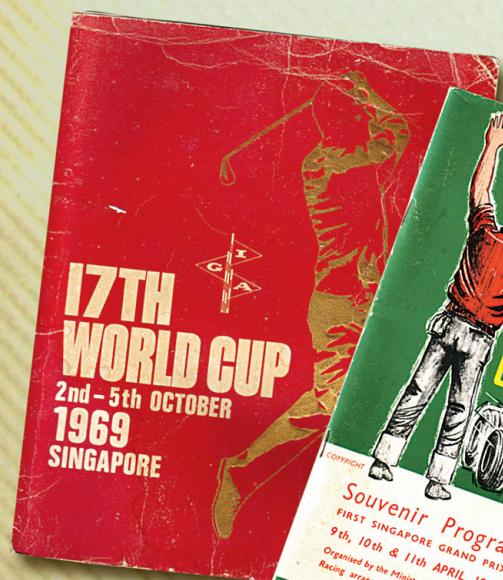
Legacy

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

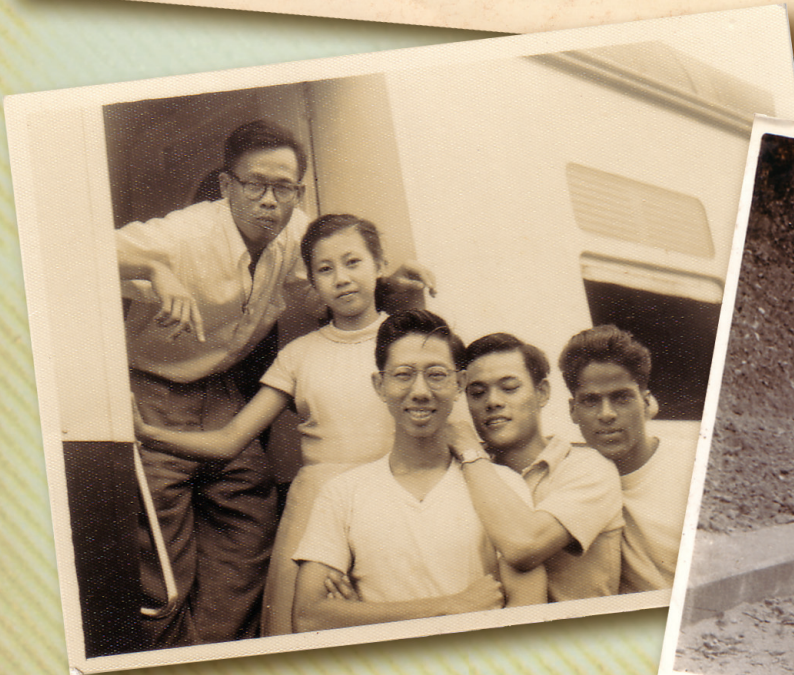
Given his tireless contributions, it was no surprise when Goh was awarded the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) veterans' pin in 2001. He was also conferred the Sporting Singapore Inspiration Award in 2003. Looking back, perhaps the most impressive thing about Goh's achievements is the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

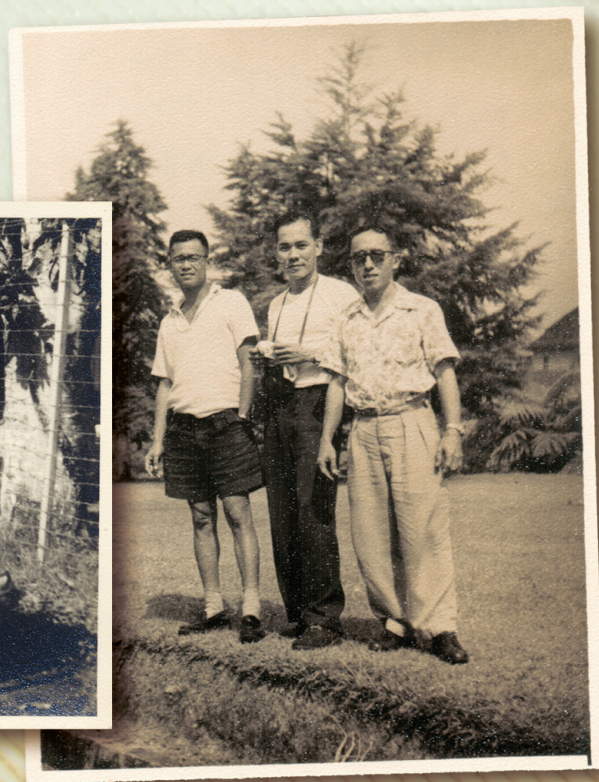
A famous quote - delivered by Goh's son, Ivan, at his funeral service in church - reads: "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it for I shall not pass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

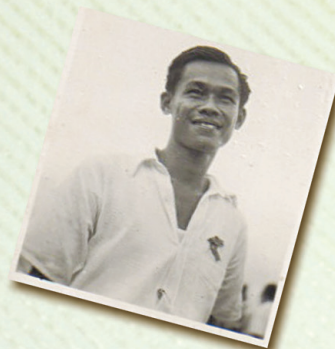
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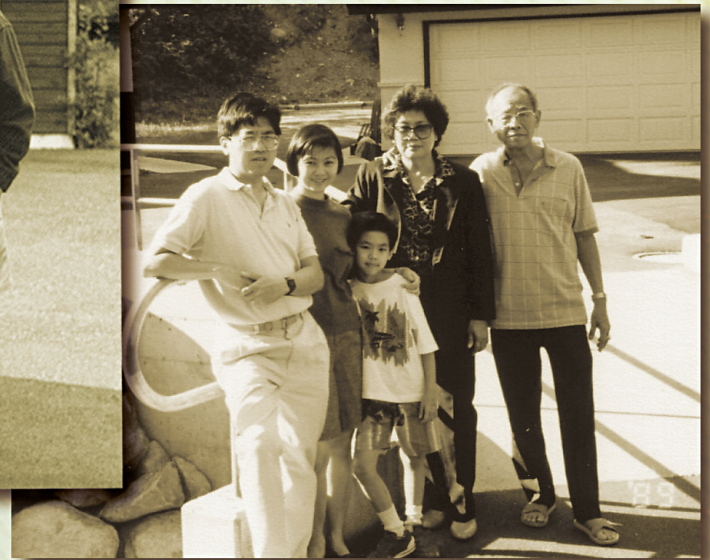












TRIBUTES FOR A GOOD MAN

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

- Loh Lin Kok

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

- Kesavan Soon

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

- Maurice Nicholas

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

- Evelyn Tan

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

- Mani Jegathesan

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

- Lim Jit Imm

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

- Ho Mun Cheong

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

- Glory Barnabas

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

- M. Sivalingam

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

- C. Kunalan

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

- Yeo Kian Chai

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

- Loh Chan Pew

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

- K. Jayamani

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

M. Harichandra

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

Low Sin Chock