

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

"In terms of competitions, the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, was a special moment for me. I ran in the 800m heats with the American runner, Thomas Courtney, who eventually won the finals. Over the course of my career, C. Kunalan stood out among local athletes. He was one of those chaps who persevered. He wasn't big or tall but made up for it by trying very hard."

- M. Harichandra

"At the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur, I competed in the 10,000m as a new Singaporean citizen and former minister Mr E. W. Barker was there to wish me the best of luck before the race. After I won my first race as a Singaporean, he hugged me and said, 'You are my citizen.' I remember that race (the 10,000m) vividly. It was at 3.45pm and I was running barefoot. In the last lap, the runner from Myanmar was about 70m to 80m ahead of me but I caught him in the last 100m. He made the mistake of turning back frequently to look at me and I knew I had to go all out. I overtook him in the last 50m and set my best lap time of 55 secs. Also memorable for me was how I created a stir by running barefoot at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. I was used to running barefoot as I couldn't afford shoes when I started running. Psychologically, I felt I could run faster without them. Sportswear companies like Adidas, Puma and Nike gave me track suits and spikes after learning about my situation."

- P. C. Suppiah

"Winning for Singapore on home ground at the 1973 SEA Games was one of my proudest moments as an athlete. Representing the country at the Olympics in Munich in 1972 was another proud moment as the Olympics is the furthest one can go as an athlete."

- Noor Azhar Hamid

"Over the course of my career, C. Kunalan stood out among local athletes. He was one of those chaps who persevered."

"Memorable for me was how I created a stir by running barefoot at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. I was used to running barefoot as I couldn't afford shoes when I started running."

"Winning for Singapore on home ground at the 1973 SEA Games was one of my proudest moments."

19

“I was delighted to be named Sportswoman of the Year in 1976 and 1980 as the award is one of the biggest achievements for every athlete.”

“ACS coach Tan Soo Hian was instrumental in developing me as an athlete. He was not a strict coach but he was effective.”

“Overall, I remember we were like a happy family. We looked forward to our training at Farrer Park Stadium.”

“One of the proudest moments in my athletics career was being able to represent the nation in the SEA Games and other major competitions. I was also delighted to be named Sportswoman of the Year in 1976 and 1980 as the award is one of the biggest achievements for every athlete. The biggest competition I competed in was the IAAF World Cup in 1977 in Düsseldorf, Germany. It was a continental event and I represented Asia in the 3,000m. While I didn’t win any medal, I was happy that I set the national record of 10:03.”

- **K. Jayamani**

“ACS coach Tan Soo Hian was instrumental in developing me as an athlete. He was not a strict coach but he was effective. Also he was very kind. I came from an ordinary family and didn’t have any money to buy spikes. But he bought me a pair of spikes with his own money.”

- **Tang Weng Fei**

“There were two significant moments in my athletics career. The first was when we won a bronze medal for the 4x100m relay at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok. The relay team comprised C. Kunalan, Bava Natahar, the late Gunasena Migale and I. At that time, I was only 18 years old and it was my first Asian Games. The second big moment for me was winning the bronze medal for the 400m at the Asian Track and Field in 1973 in Manila. I set a national record of 47.8 secs for that event. Overall, I remember we were like a happy family. We looked forward to our training at Farrer Park Stadium. After training, we would sit at the sarabat stall to chat. There was camaraderie as all races, Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian, sat at the stall enjoying our tea, coffee and Indian prata. When we were selected to represent Singapore, we felt very honoured.”

- **Ho Mun Cheong**

“In the early days, coaches like Patrick Zehnder, Chow Weng Kai, Ng Liang Chiang, Tan Kim Seng, Osman Merican, M. Harichandra and I had different squads and we trained the athletes at Farrer Park. We were all friends but we were also very competitive. Because of this, the standards were very high. For example, Singapore athletics’ best performance was at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, Iran, where Chee Swee Lee won the gold in the 400m, the 4x400m women’s relay team finished second, and the 4x100 men’s and women’s teams won bronzes. The NSPB (National Sports Promotion Board) had helped the athletes get time off from work to train. Under that system, the results showed.”

- Maurice Nicholas

“One of my best races was at the 1973 SEAP Games in Singapore where I beat the Burmese runner, Than Than, in the 200m. My gut feeling told me that I would do well. I knew I had to come out of the blocks fast and beat her around the bend. She was in lane 1 while I was in lane 3 so I couldn’t see her. I had to benchmark myself against Myanmar’s second fastest runner. Coming around the bend, Than had caught up with me and I told myself I couldn’t let the race go. I had to lunge forward at the finish line. It was a photo finish. They took 30 minutes to decide the winner. Another memorable race was the 4x400m relay at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. I ran the first leg while Lee Tai Jong, Maimoon Bakar and Chee Swee Lee ran the other three legs. The Japanese team had led us by quite far. We were about eight to 10m behind in the last leg. Swee Lee caught up and the Japanese beat us by only a hair’s breath for the gold. We won the silver and set the national record of 3:43.85. It was very special.”

- Glory Barnabas

“Singapore athletics’ best performance was at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, Iran, where Chee Swee Lee won the gold in the 400m.”

“One of my best races was at the 1973 SEAP Games in Singapore where I beat the Burmese runner, Than Than, in the 200m.”

“As for significant moments in Singapore’s athletics history, I would single out Chee Swee Lee winning the 400m gold in the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran.”

“Personally, my involvement in track started in mid 1963. That year, we went to Kuala Lumpur to compete in the Merdeka Games. I just couldn’t believe it as I had come from nowhere to represent Singapore ‘state’ in the Malaysian games. Running against the rest of the Malaysian states and coming in 2nd in the 200m in the Merdeka Stadium was just a great feeling. As for significant moments in Singapore’s athletics history, I would single out Chee Swee Lee winning the 400m gold in the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran. Outstanding! I know how much she sacrificed and trained. For me, the 1974 Asian Games was also significant. Winning the bronze in the 4x100m against the best in Asia was memorable. I helped to set the national record that stood for 20 years, only to see it broken in 1994 by a team I coached. In 1974, our 4x400m relay team also set a national record which still stands today.”

- C. Kunalan

“Some of the moments in my athletics career were winning the sprint double at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok and earning the accolade of the ‘fastest man in Asia’.”

“Every phase of one’s life has defining moments. Some of the moments in my athletics career were winning the sprint double at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok and earning the accolade of the ‘fastest man in Asia’. Another moment was qualifying for the 200m semi finals of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964. The athletics scene in my time was quite exciting as there were few distractions then. The competition was very keen and there were many enthusiastic followers and spectators. It was all entirely amateur, with no monetary support or rewards. Officials were mainly teachers who volunteered. They took us to races in their cars, often at their own expense. In those days, Farrer Park was the gathering point. Its opening was a big boost to Singapore athletics. For many years, it was the centre stage for athletics drama. Most athletes gathered there as a daily ritual. Many friendships were forged and many champions were born.”

- Mani Jegathesan

“For many years, my goal was to go to the Olympics as it represents the highest level that an athlete can aim for. I set this target as the Olympics was the only major competition that I hadn’t been to. At the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the feeling was just something that I cannot describe. The Olympics is the most prestigious event in the world and I was so proud. As for my best races, they took place at the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur. I was second in the 100m and 4x100m relay, and third in the 200m and 4x400m. I ran in four races. It was tough physically but I overcame the challenge by being mentally tough.”

- Yeo Kian Chai

“In those days, there were not that many overseas competitions. At the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo, I got a culture shock. I had spent all my time in Singapore and was shocked by the different kinds of food and the chilly weather. In terms of personal memories, I have a few which remain vivid even today. I was the first schoolboy to win the 100m and 200m at the Malaysian Open in 1957. I was just 18 years old then. I was also the only schoolboy to qualify for the Olympics in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia. It was quite an awesome experience and I met big names, including American athlete Robert Morrow, who went on to win the 100m gold. Earlier, in 1955, the great Jesse Owens came to Singapore for a seminar. He saw me running in the field playing rugby and asked me to do a demonstration. After that, he told my teacher that I had potential and the school got me a personal coach, Ali Ahmad, who was a former champion. I was 15 or 16 at that time and didn’t even know who Jesse Owens was!”

- Kesavan Soon

“At the 1972 Olympics in Munich, the feeling was just something that I cannot describe.”

“I was the only schoolboy to qualify for the Olympics in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia. It was quite an awesome experience and I met big names, including American athlete Robert Morrow, who went on to win the 100m gold.”

“As athletes, we used to train at Macritchie Reservoir, Farrer Park and Rifle Range Road. There was a strong sense of belonging to the running fraternity then.”

“At that time, we all ran for sportsmanship, for country, and for the love of sports.”

“My favourite event as an athlete was the 1,500m which I enjoyed for its strategy and tactical acumen. Among those I would credit for my progress were Maurice Nicholas, who started coaching me when I was 16, and Goh Teck Phuan whose guidance was much valued. As athletes, we used to train at Macritchie Reservoir, Farrer Park and Rifle Range Road. There was a strong sense of belonging to the running fraternity then. With opportunities for bonding, it was natural for us to treat the running circle as our extended family. The most eventful moment for me was winning the first Singapore Marathon in 1976. Over 10,000 people took part. I was then a middle distance runner. So winning a long distance event was a surprise. In terms of coaching, one memory I treasure would be K. Jayamani winning the marathon gold at the 1983 SEA Games held in Singapore. I felt proud to be able to play a part in building on the good work her former coach Maurice Nicholas had done with her when I started coaching her in 1981.”

- M. Sivalingam

“Two moments stand out for me. In 1954, I was selected for the Asian Games in Manila. It was so memorable for me because I was the dark horse, yet I won the silver medal in the 100m. The Japanese runner and I finished with the same timing of 12.5 secs but she was awarded the gold. Representing Singapore at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne was also memorable. To don national colours as a sportsman or sportswoman, you must think first of doing well for your country. At that time, we all ran for sportsmanship, for country, and for the love of sports.”

- Mary Klass

“The athletics scene in the 50s was very different. Everyone wanted to run and represent his school at the interschool relays. There were five big teams – Anglo Chinese School, Raffles Institution, St Joseph’s Institution, St Andrew’s School, and Victoria School. There were no other attractions in life for us. We just wanted to run and make the team. One of the significant moments in my career was meeting American Olympian Jesse Owens in the 50s. It was truly inspiring to meet such a great runner. After my retirement, I joined SAAA as the vice president of training and selection – organising training programmes, overseeing preparations for the SEA Games, and talent spotting athletes with potential. I developed a rapport with youngsters like Hamkah Afik, Mohd Hosni and James Wong.”

- Lim Jit Imm

“Athletics has given me some great memories and developed in me some positive traits. In terms of memories, I can recall how my time as an athlete started when I was a schoolboy in Chinese High. We didn’t have a coach. There were only seniors to guide us. Once I ran 47.8 secs for the 400m at the Singapore Open. That was exciting as it was my personal best. Also, at the triangular meet between Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau in 1983, I put in good timings for my races and won medals. I will not forget how I enjoyed myself so much. This is partly why I’m a supporter of Swift Athletic Association as a sponsor today. I really respect this group of die-hard volunteers. It’s not easy running the association but they keep going. As for traits developed from my sport, I will single out discipline. If you want to succeed, you need discipline. Because of it, I’m quite deadline driven. If I fix a time to finish something, I will keep to it and not postpone it.”

- Sng Sze Hiang

“One of the significant moments in my career was meeting American Olympian Jesse Owens in the 50s.”

“As for traits developed from my sport, I will single out discipline. If you want to succeed, you need discipline.”

“One significant moment for me was when I managed to qualify for the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne.”

“One significant moment for me was when I managed to qualify for the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. I was a schoolgirl runner then and it was the first time I was away from Singapore. It was overwhelming to be a part of a huge event like the Olympics. At that time, it was intimidating. But it was an eye opener as well to see what there was beyond Singapore. There was a great feeling of friendship and camaraderie among the athletes.”

- Janet Jesudason

“The team spirit we developed has remained with me up till now.”

“One of my fondest memories was when our team made the annual trip up to Malacca to participate in the annual Inter-State Competition in 1963. That year, the team drove up in 6 cars, won 6 events and broke 6 records. It was almost magical. The team spirit we developed has remained with me up till now. Today, as a coach, I try to instill life skills and build athletes who are willing to fight against the odds.”

- Loh Chan Pew

“Training in Germany was such an eye-opener as things were so professional.”

“I first took part in the SEA Games in Singapore in 1973. It was my first time taking part in the decathlon and I came in second, breaking the national and SEA Games record. In the 1980s, I was sent to Germany to train and was attached to the German sports university in Cologne. Training there was such an eye-opener as things were so professional. After returning from Germany in the late 80s, I didn't have time for decathlon and my coach was in Germany. He suggested that I try doing sprints instead. At the ASEAN Cup in Jakarta, I almost beat the top Thai sprinter and finished second with a time of 10.56 secs.”

- Tang Ngai Kin

“Winning three gold medals in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay at the Merdeka Games in Kuala Lumpur had to be one of my proudest moments. It was such a good feeling to hear the national anthem being played three times at the Merdeka Stadium. As for team mates, I remember, among others, Chan Onn Leng, who was one of Asia’s best hurdlers, as well as my seniors Tan Soo Hian and his brother, Tan Soo Liat. We were all Swift members and used to run at Jalan Besar Stadium. That was a colourful place. Then there was the Beatty Secondary School field where I also trained. It couldn’t even fit in a 200m track, so we had to run round and round. That trained me in running the curves on the track. The guys used to joke that I was so good on the curve because my left leg was shorter than my right leg.”

- Low Sin Chock

“I didn’t make it in football as I was too short and skinny. But I was doing well in cross country and was discovered by Tan Soo Hian. Looking back at my athletics career, I must admit there were some personal disappointments due to unfulfilled potential. For example, I didn’t make the team for the 1981 SEA Games and left for the United Kingdom in 1982 for my studies. Still, there were some memorable races. In 1981, for instance, I raced against some of Asia’s best, including athletes from Japan, at the Thailand Open. It was scary as I went into the race knowing they were fast runners. I led the pack for about 550m and came in fourth eventually. For me, it was satisfying as I had a sense of what it meant to be competitive even when racing against top athletes. Apart from the running, I would always appreciate my track career for the good memories as well as wonderful friends.”

- Tan Ming Jen

“The guys used to joke that I was so good on the curve because my left leg was shorter than my right leg.”

“Apart from the running, I would always appreciate my track career for the good memories as well as wonderful friends.”