



# GoodSport NEWS

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**NOC NEWS**

*Looking at Badminton objectively*



**A game that could be developed into big time**

**M**any moons ago, former Sri Lanka cricket captain Marvan Atapattu during a casual chat was duly impressed with the junior talent available for Badminton in our little island.

So much so he was of the view that in numbers the raw badminton talent in this country may be close to that of cricket – country's most lucrative and successful sport. He said that there is a bountiful of Badminton courts -

in and out of main cities of the country and at the same time almost all of them are full of young aspirants indulged in the game.

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Yet ironically at a certain point young racket wielders lose the fire in their bellies and game is left to sulk.

Nonetheless we harbour the thought that this particular game which is also a non-contact sport and Lankans also being a very wristy breed and also small in size they could dive into this game like their cousins in India, Thailand, Indonesia and China to name a few.

GoodSport confronted the CEO, Sri Lanka Badminton Association Trevor Reckerman, a man who loves and lives sport for a few clarifications in this regard and we began by inquiring as to what the present status of the sport is.

Reckerman explained "As you know the current administration took office in July 2019 and hence my President Rohan de Silva invited me to come on board as CEO. My initial understanding is that we have improved the administration to begin with. But, going forward our main focus in my view is the aspect of the sport.

There we have a long way to go – to develop our players to international standards and that should be our main focus.

We have indulged in this game for over sixty years and the sport is most pronounced internationally in the eastern region and in countries like India, China and Malaysia and we are a part of that universe; so automatically we have to compete with them before establishing as a regional force.

For me technical areas especially training will be a critical area to focus upon."

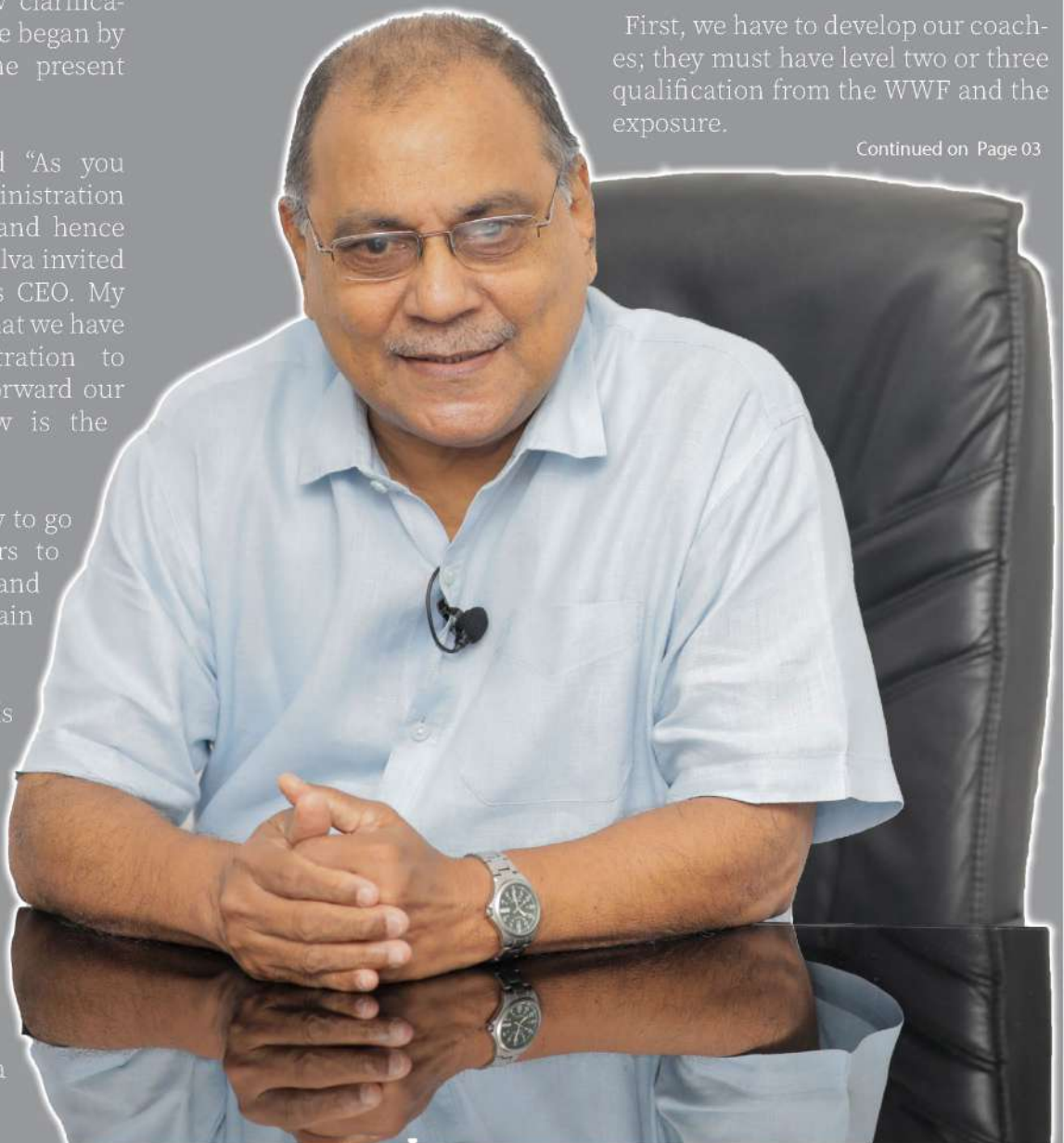
At this point GoodSport queried as how technical expertise in Badminton playing belt like India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and China is superior while Lankan standards are stagnant. Especially India which was on par with Sri Lanka a few years ago are now Medal winning standards. The Badminton CEO was of the view that they were interested what happened in the administration in the past, but, during the 18 months that they have worked together with a plan.

He added "At the same time especially India has been has been working with a plan and structure which is working for them. We need good coaches. In India there are some good coaches.

So, in reality we need money and we need human resources, I do not know whether we have that. Now we are working on it and we are in the process of looking for a director of coaching; preferably from outside of Sri Lanka, who will take up our development task. This will not happen in a year or two may be we are looking at a timeline of five years or so.

First, we have to develop our coaches; they must have level two or three qualification from the WWF and the exposure.

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The sad thing is our lack of exposure to World Badminton. Our coaches do not get the opportunity to work with other coaches and also see good international games; but for a long time that has not taken place.

“We have certain drawbacks because of we have been under the rule of interim committees and now we have to think of development strategies.

Right now we are working with the Ministry of Sports to bring down an experienced coach who is more of a technical director.

He should be a person who would understand explain on how we should work while we are engaged in international competition.

Because when you go out there you encounter different standards there you cannot stand to realise that they are far away from us, so we think setting up a few academies – at the same time there are practice centres whom they all themselves as academies, but they are not fully fledged academies; there is one coming up very soon which is professional.

The practice centres are a different kettle of fish, they are at recreational level. I think the SLBA should quickly focus upon bringing down professional help.

But, that is not cheap and not easy to come by, they will have to come here and stay for a period of time. Yes,

we have had discussions with Mahela Jayawardena who is heading the sports council in this regard.”

GoodSport then delved on the point of losing the fire in their bellies. At the nursery stages there are hundreds of young aspirants taking up to the game, but the majority by far give up half way leaving the game high and dry.

Reckerman said “That is something that we are confronted with big time.

The children take up the game at school level, but at one point it clashes with their studies and badminton does not give you the guarantee of employment and development.

The only sport that does it is cricket; any other sport that you take in this country it end up with the same tale of woes.

It was involved with football for long time and the situation was not different. So the children play the game, become the champions at various levels and then give up.

They find it difficult to continue any further without solid game foundation.

So we have to address that. I am pleased to note that the ministry of sports is taking up the matter seriously and for instance the high performance unit is talking about taking care of these national level athletes.

If that happens there is hope for sports. They are not talking about the athletes only, but also are talking about looking at ways of taking care of the athlete’s families.

It’s a great thing if that sort of vision comes to pass. This is because people like Mahela know what that sort of assistance means to sort.

“Now on part have started to give a stipend roughly in the region of Rs. 30,000/- per player for sustenance – this goes to our top grade players, we have identified top 12 players and they stand to get it.

We have been paying this sum to our players since last November.

There is another group of twelve players in the list and they too will stand to receive some kind of assistance.

However we do not know if we could sustain it but, this is at least a start”.

# The amazing story of true grit

*A story of cricket to all conquering Baseball field*

**S**ujeewa Wijayanayake could have moulded his life into any shape. If he was desirous of a career in the academic field it was there on a platter. Sujeewa finished his GCE O'Level Examinations with nine 'A's. He could have become a good cricketer. He played first XI cricket for Mahanama College, Colpetty. Initially, he received a grade five scholarship at Nalanda MV Minuwangoda and then packed his bags to move Colpetty. Since he received the nine 'A's in the O' Levels he moved to Ananda Maha Vidyalaya to change his life forever.

Once moving to Ananda, Sujeewa was toying with the idea of continuing with the game that he loved the most -- cricket. But, the competition for cricket at Ananda and attractions of the new game Baseball lured him in that direction.

He described that he had an advantage over the other because he was left-arm pitcher. He said in 2001 when he started his career in baseball only four schools – Ananda, Nalanda, D.S. Senanayake College and Royal in Colombo were playing the game in Colombo. Richmond and Mahinda in Galle and were in the fray while in Kandy it was Dharmarajah College. "I saw baseball as a novel idea and in 1999 I decided it was going to be Baseball and not cricket.

I initially started because I wanted to be a part of a sport and getting into the first XI side of Ananda coming in at grade 11 could be next to impossible.

"There I also noticed that baseball is almost the national sport in America and Japan it is one of the most popular sports like cricket in Sri Lanka and at the same time my background in cricket and being a left arm pitcher saw me being picked into the under 19 side pretty quickly.

So, such so by 2002 I had elevated myself to the position of the coach of the Ananda first side, a position that I held till 2006.

"However the biggest influence was that when I was a player in 2002, Japanese organisation JAICA brought down professional Umpires to train the Lankan Umpires.

He was there promoting the game in Sri Lanka during that time. However, at my end I made this an opportunity moving into the inner sanctum of baseball umpiring from this JAICA expert, I wanted to know what it was all about".



JAICA expert, I wanted to know what it was all about". During that period only Sujeewa decided that he was going to make Japan his headquarters. At that time he received a break as a coach in the Softball/Baseball Federation.

In 2003, he travelled to Thailand as the team co-ordinator of the under 18 team and in 2004 he was in Thailand once again following a coaching camp.

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There in Thailand there also a tournament where he participated as a player.

Sujeewa ended being selected the most valuable player at the end of the tournament. "During that time I was the coach of the Ananda College Baseball team as well as employed at the Pan Asia Bank.

In 2005 I toured as an official with the national junior under 18 team in Korea, then by 2006 I moved to Japan for higher studies and incidentally even my sister was there doing her post graduate studies also in Japan and then we ended up in the same campus.

Then a few months later I moved to the Asia Pacific University.

"That was the turning point in my baseball career. Initially I started to indulge in Baseball, however during that time I was encountering a lot of problems with regard to the language.

At the same time one must remember Japan is the number one Baseball playing country ahead of America.

In the world rankings Sri Lanka is rated at number 37 out of over 100 countries that play the game.

That proves that a disparity in standards. So while playing I felt the difference very clearly. Yet, my love for the game took me towards the Baseball Umpires School to enrol myself as an Umpire in 2007 during the vacation period.

There I learned all the nitty-gritty of the - from the rules to the technicalities of Baseball Umpiring.

"A year down the line I managed to qualify for the Primary league and I stood in those games during my off days and obtained my junior license in Baseball Umpiring at the same time. Then in 2010 I was out of the Asia Pacific University and there I kept myself occupied in the hospitality business in the Asia-Pacific region.

Then by 2016 I passed my license to the highest level of baseball in Japan and also the only person to have that qualification outside a Japanese national. Thereafter, I was soon elevated to the level of international games, once I received my international license."

Further Sujeewa said that he is a very proud to be only internationally qualified Baseball Umpire in Sri Lanka.

He further said that he has made use of this opportunity the maximum and has helped Sri Lanka's game in many ways including caches of Baseball equipment.

Yet, he said that his main concern and ambition is to train some Sri Lankan Baseball players to emulate him.

Sujeewa said his crowning glory came early this year when the Japanese Sports Ministry, Olympic Committee and the International Baseball and Softball Federation named him as one of the Umpires in Baseball for the 2020 Olympic Games which now will be held in 2021.

From last April he is acting as the Deputy Technical Manager of Baseball and Softball for the Olympic Games. Sujeewa says "I am proud to say that there are quite a few Japanese Umpires working under him."

