

Official Publication of the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka

GoodSport

December 2018

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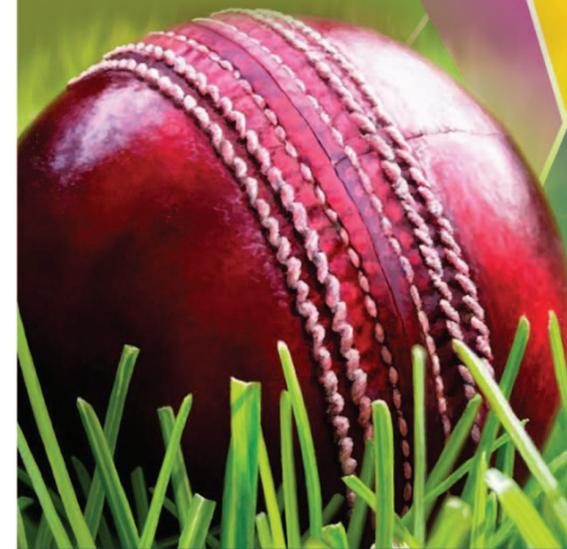
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European Photo Agency (epa.eu)
ThePapare.Com, Ceylon Athletics

GRAPHICS/DESIGN

Strategic Alliance (Pvt) Limited

MARKETING

Strategic Alliance (Pvt) Limited

PRINTING

Softwave Printing and Packaging (Pvt) Ltd.

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“THE CHALLENGES AT HAND” MAXWELL DE SILVA

Secretary General, National Olympic Committee

Since the new committee assumed their duties in February 2018, we have embarked on a journey based on stakeholder requirements objectively.

The pre-requisites to this challenge is the co-operation with the Ministry of Sports and the Department of Sports Development. There they would have to work very closely with the Ministry of Sports and in particular the Hon. Minister in assisting every single national federation. The National Olympic Committee (NOC) made sure the participation of their athletes for the Commonwealth and Asian Games.

We sponsored airfare for all athletes through the Prime Minister's Sports Fund and they continue to utilise this facility effectively and it will be used to assist athletes and officials, in their endeavours.

Identifying requirements of national federations, we have called all federations to submit their action plans and budgets etc. to NOC and we have advised the government in assisting them where needed by allocating funds for infrastructure development and assisting federations with funding for their player development.

Another very significant achievement was the appointing of the Women's Committee headed by Ms. Niloo Jayatilake of Golf Union. She is making headway in reviving their inactive area and a new policy paper on Gender Equality, Sexual Harassment in Sports will be circulated and published for implementation by all federations.

Capacity Building
 The National Olympic Committee also conducted a very successful Advanced Sports Management Course and a Sports Administration course. Here they encouraged every federation to nominate their senior office bearers

to follow these courses with the objective of sharpening their skills thus enhancing Federations' abilities to reach their respective goals. In the future we intend recommending to the Ministry of Sports that all National Federations and relevant officials are required to follow these courses thereby ensuring the right quality in meeting global challenges.

Media

This is another ground breaking and innovative step that they have taken. Since the new committee took over, they came out with a quarterly magazine in highlighting our athletes and National Federations. This step helped the NOC give the athletes and federations the much needed exposure. They have already employed a senior media personnel to handle NOC media and to get the required publicity for sports in general. Our new website and social media network is another step we have taken to elevate sports to the next level.

Signing of MOU with Foundation of Goodness

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between NOC Sri Lanka and Foundation of Goodness on 05th December 2018. It was attended by representatives from National Federations along with former cricketing icons -- Muttiah Muralitharan, Mahela Jayawardana and Kumar Sangakkara who came in as special invitees.

Another very important accomplishment was the Memorandum of Understanding between National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka and Croatian Olympic Committee. Both committees decided to develop a specific cooperation in sport and to enhance friendly relations between sportsmen and sportswomen of Croatia and Sri Lanka and hoping to create a greater understanding between our countries based on principles of

mutual respect and common interests. It was signed by a MOU on the 29th of November 2018 in Tokyo, Japan.

Sub-Committees

To ensure a smooth flow of activities the executive committee approved the following sub-committees:
 Women's Committee
 Finance Committee
 Ethics Committee
 Education Committee
 Medical Committee
 Media and Marketing Committee
 High Performance Committee
 Procurement Committee
 Nominations Committee

In general, the executive committee meets every first Wednesday of the month and have had nearly 10 meetings so far.

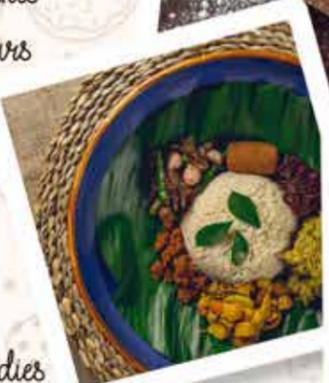
We appreciate if all federations could participate in our educational programmes thereby enhancing their capacity building as we find that some of the federations do not have expertise to handle day to day affairs. We have made representation to the government to support such associations through grants etc from the budget so that they could employ admin staff etc.

We are also working closely with the government in trying to secure land to house all such National Federations who does not have a place to operate and also we are working to fast track the high altitude training centre in Nuwara Eliya.



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2018 Summer Youth Olympic Games

The 2018 Summer Youth Olympic Games were a spectacular international sports, cultural and educational event held in Buenos Aires, Argentina between 6 and 18 October 2018.

They were the first Summer Youth Olympic Games held outside of Asia (also first in the Southern and Western Hemispheres), and the first Youth Games for either summer or winter held outside Eurasia. 4,000 young sports men and women representing 206 National Olympic Committees across the world participated in the games. Sri Lanka made its Youth Olympics debut in archery, basketball, gymnastics and shooting. Parami Wasanthi Maristella won Sri Lanka's first ever Youth Olympics medal, a bronze in the girls' 2000 metre steeplechase athletics event.

Text compiled by **Harsha Amarasinghe**
Photographs by **Sameera Peiris**



Photo: Ivo Gonzalez for OIS/IOC



Photo: Florian Eisele for OIS/IOC



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Photo: Ian Walton for OIS/IOC



In the process of sealing a bronze for Sri Lanka, Wasanthe, who schools at Kuliypitiya Central which is a distance away from Chilaw, clocked her personal best of 6 minutes and 33 seconds in the 2000m steeplechase.

From a very young age, Parami was a gem. In becoming a diamond, it needed the support, guidance, love, kindness and training of a very special person – Janith Jayasinghe, her coach.

Parami brings home honour

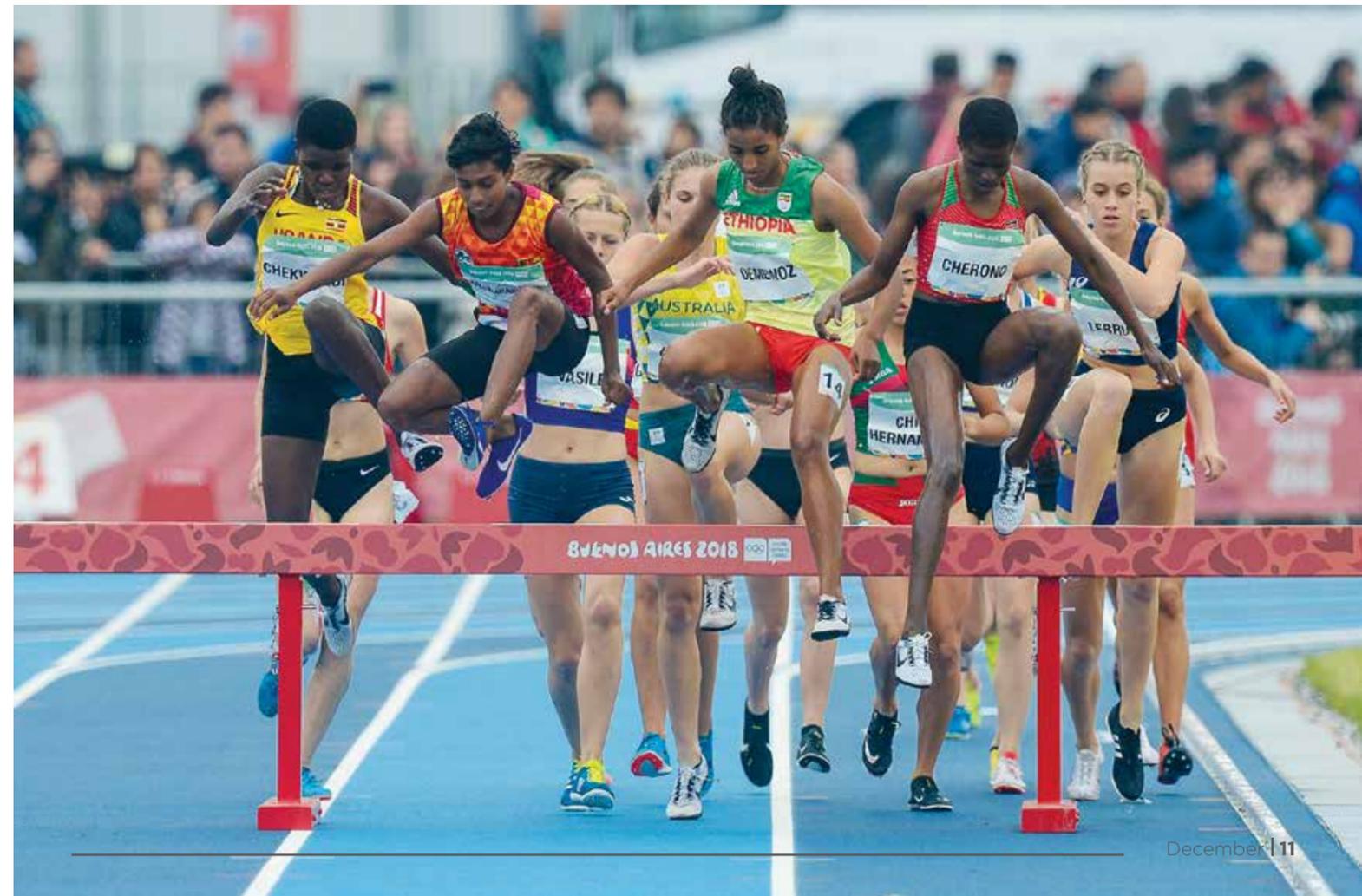
From sands to podium

Parami Wasanthe was always seen as a promising young athlete within the country's athletics community, but in October 2018 she made herself a household name by claiming a bronze in the 2000m Steeplechase out of nowhere.

Wasanthe was making waves at junior level like many others, but the 17-year-old went from being an athlete with potential to a Youth Olympic medal winner in Argentina.

Hailing from a modest family, Wasanthe's father is a fisherman which is one of the reasons why she would always train on the beaches of Chilaw. But from the beach to Youth Olympic podium? Who would have thought?

"I would go to the beach and run around. That is actually where it all started, but coming this far is a dream and I feel very fortunate and all my hard work has paid off," Wasanthe said.





“To be honest, I don’t think it would have been possible to achieve anything without my coach – Janith Jayasinghe. He knows me better than myself and understands what my strengths and weaknesses are. He has helped me through difficult times for which I am grateful for. I would also like to thank my parents. Their support has been amazing all this time,” she added.



While Wasanthi was making all the headlines, another female athlete, Shelinda Jansen, made great strides in 200m sprint. The spirited sensation from Gateway College finished ninth overall at Youth Olympics, but delivered a cracking run in the heat where she clocked 24.07 secs surpassing her previous personal best of 24.98 secs, which is only behind two former greats in Damayanthi Darsha and Susanthika Jayasinghe.

“My target was to clock atleast 24.80 secs but I ended up making it in 24.07 secs which is great. I thought to myself that I am going to make mother Lanka proud and I am so happy that it came off,” Jansen said.

Having made an incredible progress, Jansen also revealed that her next target is Olympic 2020.

“Well, I hope to take part in all the upcoming events Junior Asians, Junior World Championship and then eventually the Olympics 2020,” she added.





Meanwhile, Dilan Bogoda who hails from Kurunegala had a fantastic Youth Olympic 2018 as he finished seventh in the finals of men's 400m sprint. He recorded a personal best of 48.52 secs.



Seniru Amarasinghe represented Sri Lanka in the high jump and finished fourth in his category narrowly missing out on what could have been Sri Lanka's second medal at the Youth Olympics 2018.

"To be honest I am very surprised that I managed to jump 2.14m in my event, but obviously I am very disappointed that I missed out on a medal. Still it was very good experience for me and I could be happy with my performance in this tournament," the Royal College student said.

Having reached his personal best of 2.14m quite easily, many expected him to clear 2.16m which could have possibly earned him a medal.

"I was a bit sick at that moment and I think that caused the failed attempts, but I am very happy with my performance," revealed the youngster.

Amarasinghe claimed that he is also looking forward to take part in Olympics 2020 although it's a difficult task.

"I hope to take part in Olympics 2020 but then again that is a big step, so I will work really hard and hope to make it," he said.





Sri Lanka's 3x3 basketball set to blossom after debut delight

Finest moments in BB history

The Sri Lanka women's 3x3 basketball team that put in a sensational display in their debut at the Youth Olympic Games 2018 in Argentina has since made great progress.

Rashmi Taniya, Leia Hamza, Lubna Morseth and Nihari Athukorala Wickramage combined to seal a thrilling 17-15 victory over Egypt in their first game which will go down as one of the finest moments of country's 3x3 basketball history.

"It wasn't easy at first, but we never gave up and it ended up being a close match. It's great to play for your country at the Games. It's a feeling you can't explain," Leia Hamza said of their triumph.



Sri Lankan team was able to impress spectators since then, though they came second best against some physical teams like United State of America.

"Our girls were outstanding against even some top teams such as United State of America. The girls from USA were very tall and very physical, but despite losing the game, our girls gave them a very tough challenge. When you play that well against teams of that quality, irrespective of the result you could say that the future looks quite promising," Sri Lanka team manager for the tour Jayantha Bandara said showing optimism about the future of Sri Lanka 3x3 basketball team.





The exposure the team had gained in this particular tournament is also invaluable.

“When you take part in a tournament, you always compete to be the best, but on the other side the amount of things you could take out from such big event are really valuable and I am sure our girls learned a lot. It’s an investment for the future,” she stated.



Golden Girl Hasini following father’s footsteps

Started in Grade 2

Hasini Nusaka of Visakha Vidyalaya claimed a gold medal in the Mixed International Badminton Team event of the Youth Olympic Games 2018 in Argentina, a sport which she says she fell in love with because of her father.

“I started badminton when I was in Grade 2. My father had actually played badminton at university. So, I saw him playing the game and that made me want to play too,” Hasini said revealing how she discovered and connected with the sport.

She made Sri Lanka proud when she teamed up with seven other shuttlers from India, USA, Bulgaria, Sweden, Canada, Italy, and Cambodia on her way to secure the gold.

“It’s always very pleasing to be able to win a medal and being able to do that at an event like Youth Olympics is something I am very proud of. My team had four boys and four girls and we had to play ten matches. The team which obtained 110 points won this game,” young Nusaka said.

The 18-year-old also claimed that the experience gained in such a high profile event could be very useful.

“This is one of the biggest tournaments that we could possibly take part in and to play against and alongside some top players which mean you can get a lot of experience out of an event like this,” added the young shuttler.



Since the start of his career, the 17-year-old has been able to secure 24 gold medals in both domestic and international tournaments. In his journey to glory, Dalpatadu has won many admirers and supporters, but one person believed in him more than anybody else – his greatest strength; his father.

“Of course his support is unbelievable. When you win you would be appreciated by many, but when things don’t go to the plan, that’s when you need the support most. I have got to say my father has been my greatest strength and my mother has been very supportive. Even when I am out of country, they would always call me and encourage me,” Dalpatadu said.

Dalpatadu making waves at world stage

Victory against all odds

When the little known young Sri Lankan archer Ravien Dalpatadu had to face World Number 3 Feng Hao of China in the pre-quarterfinal of Men’s Recurve 60m at the Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, nobody would have given him a chance.

Instead of settling for a respectable defeat however, the archer from S. Thomas’ Bandarawela made it an opportunity to announce himself at the

world stage by claiming a 6-5 victory against all odds which should go down as the highest point of his career thus far.

“It was very satisfying to be able to beat the World Number 3 because I knew it won’t be easy. But then again this was an opportunity to show what I was capable of and the years of hard work finally paid-off. I was very happy with that,” Dalpatadu said of his triumph.





Sri Lanka, instead obtaining special permission from the Ministry of Education to take the exams while participating at the Asian Games in Indonesia earlier this year – the first ever Sri Lankan to sit for the Advanced Level examination outside Sri Lanka. Akalanka who had obtained 9 A's at the Ordinary Level exam was allowed to sit for English, Accounts and Aptitude tests.

"I am very thankful for that and I think that is very encouraging from the perspective of a sports personality because it shows that we are being given maximum support to pursue education as well," the grateful swimmer said of the opportunity presented to him.



Akalanka sends swimming records tumbling

An excellent academic as well!

St. Peter's College swimming sensation Akalanka Peiris who set a new national record in his pet event, the 50m Backstroke, is an example of how sacrifice pays off.

The 18-year-old shattered the record in 26.33 seconds during the Youth Olympic Games 2018 in Argentina although he failed to secure a medal. He did qualify for the semi-finals of the event though, and that too despite coming into the games having to take a break from the sport to focus on studies.

"I am actually very happy with my performance because I had a little

break from swimming due to my Advanced Level examination. So, being able to qualify for a semi-final in Youth Olympic Games is something I am really proud of," Peiris said of his achievement.

Akalanka enjoyed great success during this year as he had also set a new record in 50m Butterfly while representing the country in the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

In addition to being a very talented swimmer, Akalanka is an excellent academic. He sacrificed sitting his Advanced Level examination in





since then and I work hard to improve even further," added young Gehani.

Gehani has also been supported greatly by her family and that has been a huge strength to the young gymnast who hopes to represent Sri Lanka in the Olympics someday.

"I love sports generally but to come this far would not have been possible if not for my family and everyone else who have supported me right throughout. I would like to thank them, and as a gymnast my target is to represent Sri Lanka in Olympics. I reckon that will be a huge achievement if I could do that," she said.



Milka's Olympic dream

"I started at a very young age"

Gymnast Milka Gehani hopes the great progress she has made in the sport will lead to her representing her country in the Olympics in 2020.

A student of Methodist College, Colombo, young Milka looks to build up on her experience in the Youth Olympics where she performed well.

"That was actually my first big tournament away from Sri Lanka and I performed well during the Youth Olympics. I was a bit nervous but I

did well and what is most important for me is the exposure. I am very happy with my performance and I hope to do well in future," Gehani said.

Gehani has made brilliant progress so far in gymnastics having started in Grade 2.

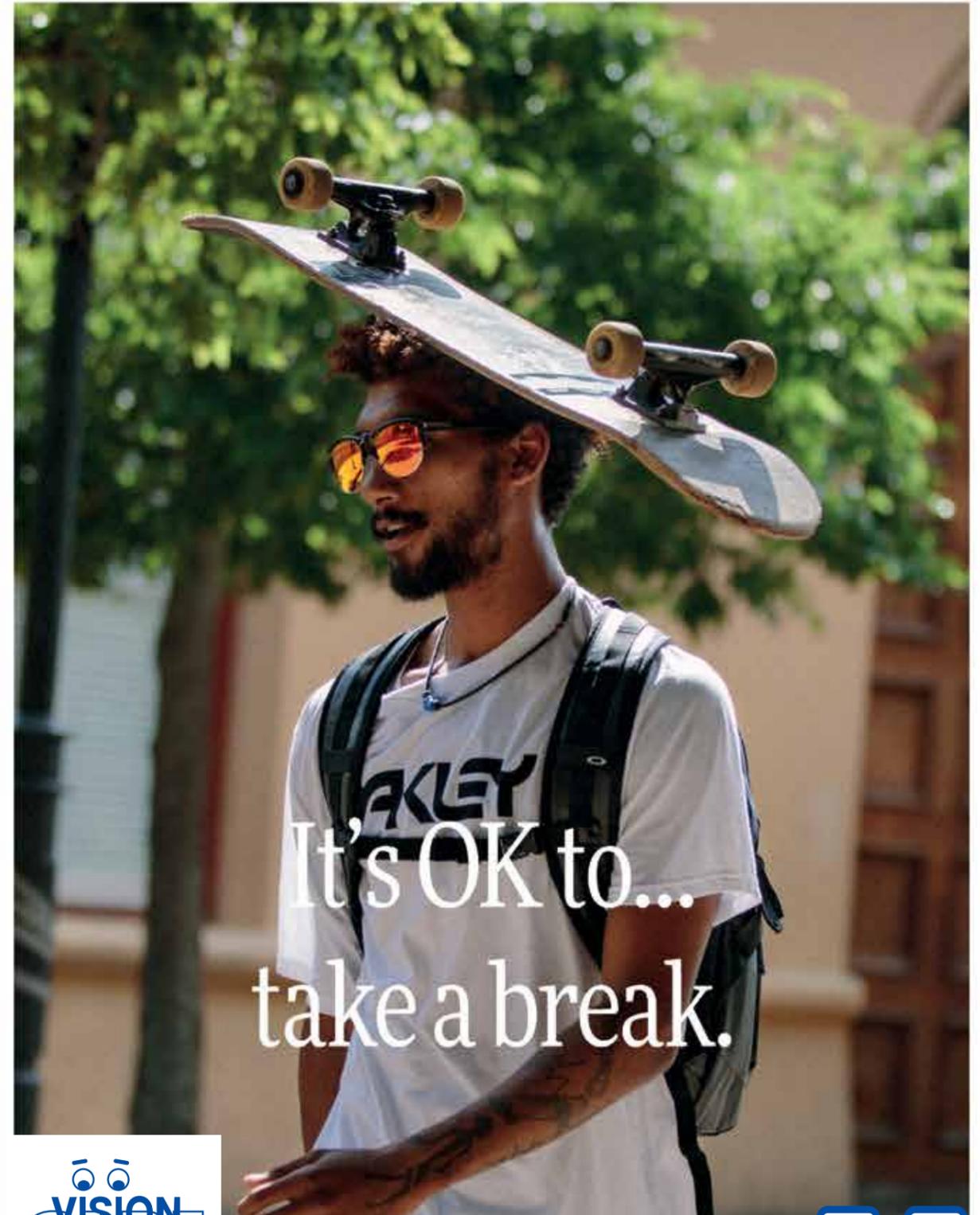
"I started at a very young age. I remember watching my elder sister being involved in gymnastics and that was when I really wanted to be a gymnast. Everything has gone well





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Shooting sensation Chanidu improves day by day

With courage and satisfaction

Shooting sensation Chanidu Senanayake, who represented Sri Lanka in the Youth Olympics 2018 in Argentina, believes that he is on the path to do great things for his country.

At the age of 15 young Senanayake has already showcased his talent having started just three years ago.

"I started in 2015 and during the last three years, I have done well. I think the improvements that I have made in shooting gives me a lot of courage to continue this and also it gives great satisfaction," Chanidu said of his improvement.

Chanidu, before taking shooting seriously, took a lot of interests in guns.

"My father is a member of Sri Lanka Army and there is some influence from that as well, but I think why I really fell in love with shooting is because of my love for guns. From a very young age I was curious and eventually shooting become my passion," revealed young Chanidu.

Although he failed to win a medal at Youth Olympics, he bettered his performance in Argentina.

"It was a great exposure for me personally. I could not win a medal for my country during the Youth Olympics but learned a lot. My performance also improved a lot. So it was a great learning curve for me," Chanidu said.

A school boy from Maliyadeva College, Chanidu also said that he is dreaming of representing Sri Lanka in the Olympics.

"That is a dream for any sports personality. Representing your country in the biggest sporting event is what you dream of. I hope I get there," he said.

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Photo:
Netball Singapore

A tall story

Head and shoulders above the rest

By Alvin Sallay

She is late. I can't spy her among the people milling around at the Chunnakam railway station, our rendezvous point. It will be easy to spot her, for after all she is 6 feet 10 inches tall. Sri Lanka's star Tharjini Sivalingam is the tallest netball player in the world.

The Inter-City express from Colombo pulls away from the station on its way to Kankesanthurai, the last stop. Tharjini told me she would meet me at Chunnakam, the second stop after Jaffna, as it was closer to her village. Soon photographer Thishan Dissanayake and I are the only

ones left on the station platform. The stationmaster asks if there is a problem.

"I'm waiting for Tharjini Sivalingam," I reply, wanting to know if her name is known in her hometown. "Oh, the tall netball player. Are you meeting her?" he asks in typical Sri Lankan manner where the obvious is mentioned – like meeting a friend at a cinema and him saying 'came to watch the movie machan'.

No reply is needed for the station master who carries on a monologue on Tharjini. I feel as if I can complete

my assignment here, right now, and catch the return train to Colombo for he seems to know her well.

For that matter, lots of others do too. On the train, a railway guard I bumped into in the dining car knew her too. He also knew that she had brought recognition to Sri Lanka by being a key part of the national netball squad that won the Asian Championship in Singapore in September.

We had struck up a conversation while I was nursing a coffee wishing there was a shot of elixir that would make

it an Irish one. The guard had begun talking after we had witnessed a baby elephant by the track struggling to draw its last breaths. Two elephants had been hit by the night mail train the previous night the guard enlightened me. Then curious as ever, he wanted to know why I was going to Jaffna. I explained why. "Oh! I know who she is," he says.

Yes, everyone knows Tharjini.

The stationmaster smiles brightly and greets someone in Tamil. I turn around and Tharjini is there with an apologetic look on her face. Her cousin, who has a tuk-tuk, was late she explains. Her smile turns into a frown. She hasn't factored in my photographer and his bag of equipment. We can't all squeeze into her cousin's three-wheeler, not when one of us is almost seven feet tall.

Tharjini quickly packs her visitors in the tuk-tuk and says she will follow. "I know everyone here. I will get a ride home. You carry on first."

So off we go. The streets of Evenai village are almost empty. It is a Sunday and traffic is sparse. After a bumpy 10 minutes we turn down a lane. The driver-cousin says in Tamil that this land all belongs to Tharjini's family. Or something to that effect, I gather from the little Tamil I understand.

The patriarch of the family, Thambaiyah Sivalingam, 82, is there to greet us into a modest two-bedroom house fronted by a large and cool verandah. The yard is swept and clean. Chairs have been placed. Soft drinks are brought out. Tharjini's mum Kanthimali asks if I would prefer a hot tea. A couple of aunts also fuss around us.

By the time the star attraction turns up, we are made to feel at home. We are also informed that lunch has been cooked for us. We thank them profusely but business first. We need to find out how a girl born and

SHE LETS THE OTHERS TELL HER STORY. BUT SHE INTERVENES NOW.

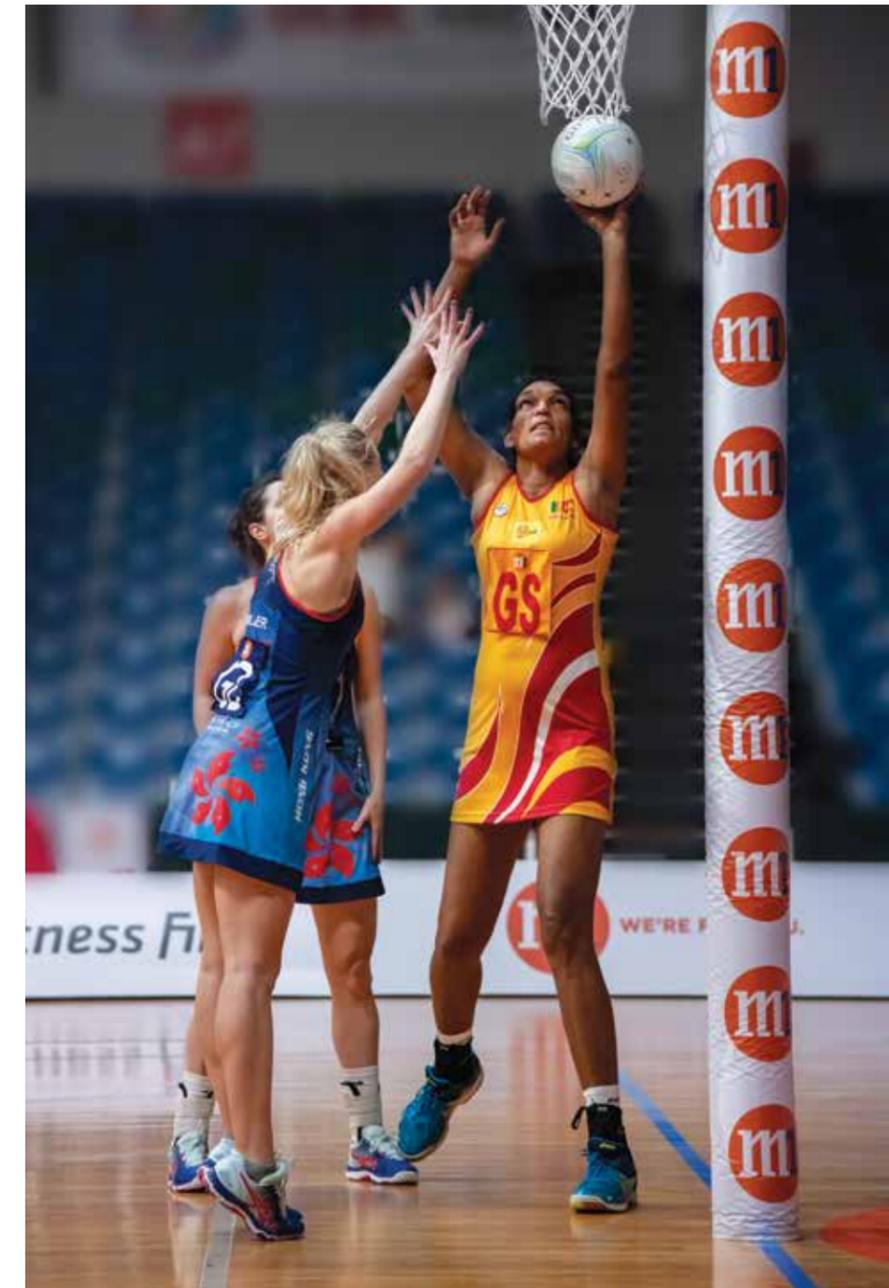


Photo:
Netball Singapore

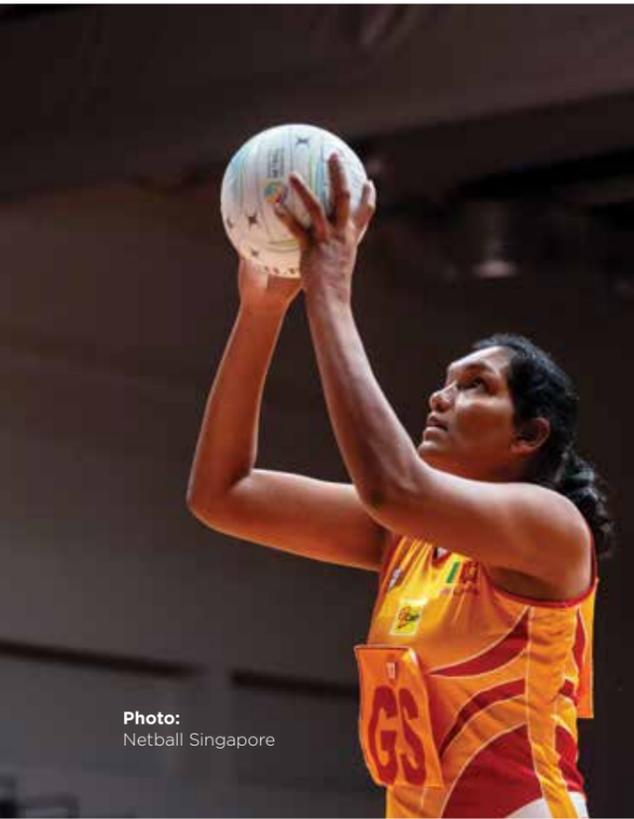


Photo: Netball Singapore

raised in Jaffna during troubled times became the toast of Colombo to be feted by Presidents.

On September 9, Tharjini and her teammates were garlanded with gold medals by Singapore's President Halimah Yacob after winning the Asian Netball Championship with a runaway 69-50 victory over hosts Singapore. It was the fifth time that Sri Lanka had become Asian champions. But this was after a long drought lasting nine years. While it was undoubtedly a team effort, Tharjini was the hand that delivered the telling blows.

As goal shooter, she stood head and shoulders above the rest, literally. With a 94 per cent strike rate, all that was needed was for the rest of the team to combine and get the ball to Tharjini. She did the rest. No surprise that Sri Lanka finished the 12-team Championship unbeaten.

The closest the opposition got to defeating Sri Lanka was when Malaysia fought tooth and nail before going down 62-59 in the preliminary round-robin competition. Tharjini once again excelled with her pinpoint shooting, but Sri Lanka also had to be thankful for the defensive efforts of captain Chaturangi Jayasooriya and Gayani Dissanayake for pulling off a narrow win.

"We all have to be together. And this team did that. One player cannot win a match, everyone has to pull together. It is after all a team sport," says Tharjini. "The 2018 team was united."

Coach Thilaka Jinadasa provided the inspiration that glued the team together. She praised the "immense

job" done by the goal attackers and defenders singling out "goal shooter Tharjini who helped us take the lead."

Rewind three decades and a bit more. The Sivalingams have six children, four sons and two daughters. Tharjini is the fifth. Dad Thambaiyah had land, a few acres in Evenai. He grew cash crops like tobacco, chillies, onions, plantains and, with a few cows and chickens, life was not uncomfortable.

It was not long before everyone in the village knew that Tharjini was a special girl. She grew and grew. When she was 10, a doctor told her parents that her growth spurt could be stopped but they had to go to Colombo for treatment.

This nugget is revealed to me by one of the aunts. "But the parents couldn't take Tharjini to Colombo because it was the height of the problems. Travelling to Colombo was out of the question."

The war had intervened in Tharjini's life for the first time. And not for the last. Soon after, the family was forced to move to Killinochchi, the hometown of mum Kanthimali, as life in Jaffna was becoming difficult.

A few months after her trip to Colombo had failed to materialise, Tharjini was asked by her school teacher Kanegaratnam Selvapragasam – who is also one of the many people telling me her story – to take part in the high jump.

"She was a very shy girl. Her height made her self-conscious. But I somehow persuaded her to try her hand in sports," reveals septuagenarian Selvapragasam.

Tharjini is a reserved person. She lets the others tell her story. But she intervenes now. "I was teased and bullied in school. The other students called me names: dinosaur and giraffe because of my long legs." It must have been a painful experience for a young 10-year-old girl.

But today, almost 30 years on, she adds: "But now everyone is proud of me. They all come and talk to me."

Life was hard growing up. Made harder by her physical size. She slept on the floor on a palmyrah mat because the beds didn't fit her. Her clothes had to be specially stitched by her mum and aunts. At school, things got bad when the Army asked the principal to close it down as it was a few 100 metres from the Palaly camp.

That was the beginning of a nomadic existence for the 400 primary students of Vayavilan Madhya Maha Vidyalaya. They had to move to five different locations in 13 years. Luckily for Tharjini she did not have to endure this hardship for long. She finished her O/Levels in 1995, aged 17. Her studies were interrupted due to the war and she only managed to complete her A/Levels in 2001. The next year she entered Batticaloa Eastern University to pursue a degree in economics.

In 2004 fate smiled on Tharjini who by then had started playing netball. She was coaxed into trying her hand at a netball tournament in Vavuniya where the national squad was also playing. Then First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa spotted her. "Everyone thought I was

wearing 'boru kakula'. They couldn't believe my height."

That was the start of her journey to stardom. She was quickly enrolled into the national team. A job was found for her at Seylan Bank in 2005, and Tharjini became the fulcrum of the national team.

"My first Asian Championship was in 2005 where we finished third. At the following edition, in 2009 in Malaysia, we won the title defeating Singapore,

WE ALL HAVE TO BE TOGETHER AND THIS TEAM DID THAT.

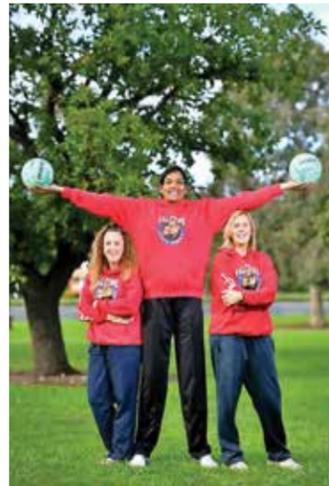
but then lost it under my captaincy in 2012. That was a hard blow for not only was I captain but we played at home and in front of our own fans. I remember we lost by one point to Singapore in the final at Sugathadasa Stadium," Tharjini recounts.

Standing tall and with her arms raised, Tharjini can reach a height of nearly eight feet. The netball hoop is 10 feet high. She only has to pop the ball over. In 2011, at the World Championship, she finished the competition by winning the Best Shooter award. It helped Sri Lanka finish 14th.

From 2014 to 2017, Tharjini didn't play for her country due to issues beyond her control. But this year, she made a comeback coinciding with the return of coach Jinadasa. After nine years, Sri Lanka was crowned Asian champions again.



Photo: ThePapare.Com



Right: Tharjini Sivalingam, the tallest netballer in the world, with coaches Marg Lind (left) and Nicole Richardson (right)
Photo: Damjan Janevski
Left: Tharjini in action for the City West Falcons, Australia
Photo: Grant Treeby

“Now the target is the World Championship in England (Liverpool) in July 2019. Sri Lanka is currently ranked 26th in the world. Our goal is to finish in the top eight,” says Tharjini. That would be a remarkable feat.

She has been playing against the best. Last year, Tharjini played six months for two clubs in Australia in the Victoria (Falcons) and Geelong (St. Albans) League tournaments. The first Sri Lankan player to play professionally in the highly competitive leagues, she finished as the best shooter in the Victoria league. Australia are the reigning world champions.

Her decision to play for Sri Lanka at the Asian Championship meant she had to give up her lucrative contracts this season. “I was offered a car, a good salary as well as a job as a

teacher in Melbourne. But I gave that all up to come and play for my country.”

Her dad moans this fact. “She has got nothing, even after being part of the team which won the Asian crown for Sri Lanka. I hope the government will recognise this team’s efforts and reward all the girls.”

Indeed. Especially Tharjini, who has sacrificed a lot and continues to sacrifice as she looks ahead to representing Sri Lanka at the World Championship. Being at the tail end of her career, she turns 40 on December 30 her lifespan as an athlete is limited.

But she hasn’t got any financial rewards for playing for her country, and at the same time gave up financial security offered

in Australia. All she has got is veiled threats from some disgruntled people in Jaffna asking why she is representing “the other flag”.

On a Sunday, if you walk into the St. Lawrence Church, Wellawatte, you might spot Tharjini in the pews. She is easy to spot, after all she stands out. She lives in a rented room in Bambalapitiya. Her parents are worried.

“I hope she can find a bigger place to live in Colombo. I hope someone will support her. She has brought so much of credit and joy to Sri Lanka, surely someone will,” believes her mum.

Tharjini smiles. The tallest netball player in both hemispheres lives in a world which is head and shoulders above the rest.

Alvin Sallay was chief sportswriter for the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong for more than two decades.



Sri Lanka’s national sport eyes more medal success

History of 100 years

There are two targets for the men’s and women’s national volleyball teams for 2019 – winning gold at the South Asian Games and a quarter-final placing in the Asian Senior Volleyball Championships.

If nothing else, 2018 saw Sri Lanka overcome a huge learning curve that will hold them in good stead for the coming years. They came in third in the men’s Asian Volleyball Challenge

Cup, hosted by Sri Lanka and featuring eight countries.

Other than that Sri Lanka participated in the 2018 Asian Girls Under 19 Volleyball Championships held in Vietnam where Sri Lanka were placed 15th from 15 teams. In the men’s championships Sri Lanka were placed 10th out of 23 teams in Bahrain.

At the 2018 Asian Boys Under 18 championships held in Iran, Sri Lanka were placed ninth out of 17 teams.



SRI LANKA HAS A HISTORY OF OVER 100 YEARS IN THE SPORT, HAVING FIRST BEING INTRODUCED BY AN AMERICAN IN 1916.

Photo: Sameera Peiris



Sri Lanka was also represented at the Asian Club Championships that took place in Myanmar, where they placed seventh out of 13 countries in the Men's competition. In the women's competition, held in Kazakhstan the team representing Sri Lanka were the last of nine teams.

The Sri Lanka Volleyball Federation had earmarked a top eight ranking in Asian Games volleyball tournament, as a realistic goal for Sri Lanka, but had to settle with a 13th place finish.

Sri Lanka has a history of over 100 years in the sport, having first being

introduced by an American in 1916. The game was promoted through the YMCA in Colombo.

It would go on to become the country's national sport – the only country where the sport has been bestowed with such a title.

While the national teams have not performed outstandingly there is still a huge interest in the sport in the country, with over 700 clubs regularly taking part in national volleyball tournaments. It is believed that 90 percent of schools in Sri Lanka have an interest in the sport.

Despite this popularity and 100-year history, Sri Lanka has been able to win just one tournament in the history of the sport. This came as far back as 1991 at the South Asian Games in Colombo, where the women's team won gold.

In Beach Volleyball too Sri Lanka is presently doing well, with players having made strides in this format of the sport.



Spectacular launch of *GoodSport*

The launch of the inaugural issue of 'GoodSport' - the official publication of the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka was held at Shangri-La Hotel in the presence of a large gathering of sport celebrities and eminent corporate personalities on 27th September. The launch marked a milestone in NOC's history spanning 81 years. The Chief Guest at the occasion was Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister who was presented with the first copy by NOC President Suresh Subramaniam. "The publication of "GoodSport" is an important step in NOC's strategy to raise the profile of all sports in the country and harness much-needed support from the corporate sector." said

Suresh Subramaniam. Also participating at the launch were NOC's other key players, Maxwell De Silva, Secretary General, Immediate Past President, Hemasiri Fernando, and Vice President Asanga Seneviratne.





Let's collaborate to create champions

NOC President Suresh Subramaniam's speech at the launch of 'GoodSport' Quarterly

I can still remember when Susanthika Jayasinghe became the first and only Asian to win an Olympic medal in a sprint event. What a day that was. What pride, what joy and what unity we all felt as she crossed that finish line. Most of us here know her story, we know that she was able to accomplish something that was seemingly impossible. But that's what champions do. They manage to achieve the impossible.

And that's what makes them heroes.

A very good evening to all of you gathered here today. Hon. Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe; Hon. Minister of Sports, Faizer Mustapha, distinguished invitees, my fellow committee members of NOC, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Presidents of National Federations, Athletes, Ladies and Gentlemen.

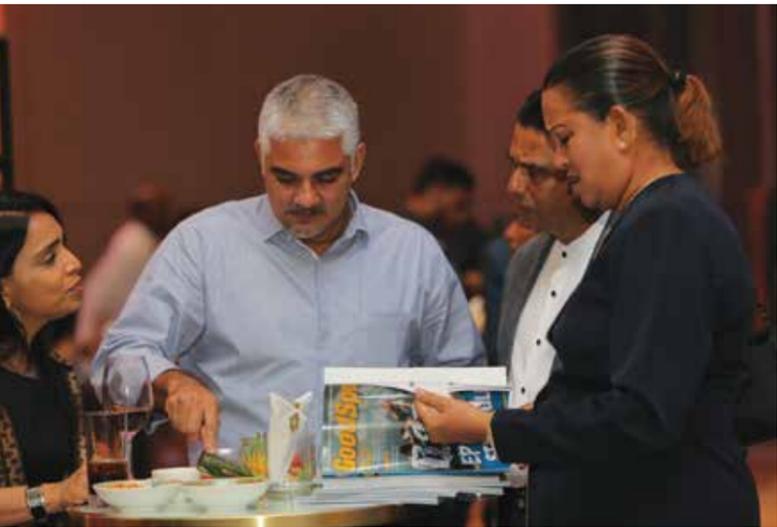
Throughout history sports has not only brought great nations together, it has also produced many of the heroes we have aspired to be. We celebrate with them in victory and mourn with them in times of defeat. But beyond that, have we truly been a part of their journey?

The tremendous promise that our athletes hold, is only paralleled to the tremendous misfortune that they



face. Their potential is rivalled only by the adversity they experience, and their hope to win a medal, to bring glory to our country, is matched toe to toe by the disparity they feel when they realize that they have to go it alone.

I recently had the opportunity to visit one of our promising junior athletes at his house. This athlete had the promise of bringing this country a gold medal in the future. Although the promise is great, his house where he and his family reside in, ladies and gentlemen, half the size of the stage I am standing on. His family eking out a meager existence, is engulfed in poverty and strife. Yet this child, has decided to commit to the great dream of bringing honour to our nation through sport.



You and I both know of athletes who travel vast distances to get to training facilities, sometimes sleeping on the floor of sports clubs, eating meals not suited for an athlete to perform at the highest level, yet they sacrifice for the hope of bringing pride to our nation.

Recently an athlete that I personally know came up to me and said, he had to make a choice between feeding his family, supporting his parents and his dream of achieving a medal for Sri Lanka. What choices they are faced with!

It begs the question, as these athletes, turn after turn have committed, sacrificed and made difficult choices, what have we done to ease the burden of a gold medal?

What commitments have we made for them? What sacrifices have we made for them and what choices have we made on behalf of them?

The Hong Kong government set up an elite athletes fund back in 2011 amounting to HK \$ 12.5 billion (approx 250 billion rupees). This money is invested and the returns are used annually. 11 billion rupees went directly to the athletes and in Singapore last year alone, 8 billion rupees were allocated towards their athletes.

Now we have made strides; the Prime Minister had allocated 50 million rupees towards the National Olympic

Committee and this is a start. But we need to build on this. You and I need to work together to create the momentum needed to sustainably fund these athletes; to help make a promise that we will take care of their needs and for them to focus on what they were born to do.

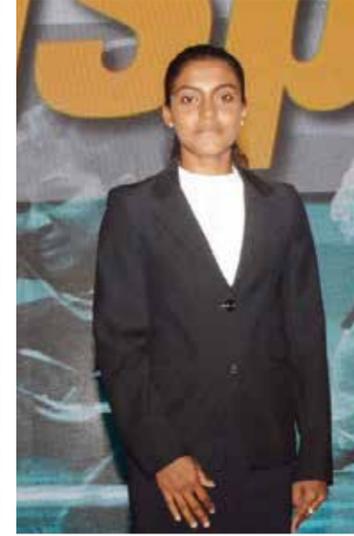
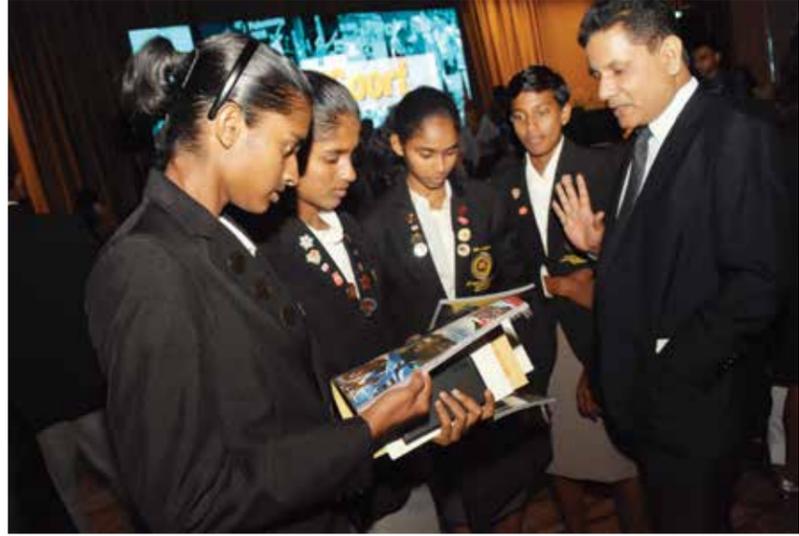
And it is with this hope that NOC is launching the first ever Olympic magazine. It's a first for Sri Lanka and the first quarterly magazine in South Asia. We hope to create visibility to the stories of our athletes, to put a face to the medal, a persona to the dream.

Right now if I were to ask you the names of the cricket team, sure many of you will be able to name at least five. However if I asked you to name one individual who represented Sri Lanka in the Asian Games, you would struggle.

First we need to know who our stars are, and then we need to support them.

When Usain Bolt crosses the finish line, when Michael Phelps finishes the last lap, they have a whole nation that finishes with them. Not by thought or prayer but by deed. These athletes are backed by an unstoppable momentum created by State institutions, sponsors and a support network that is self-organizing and self-invigorating. We need to build the same, or even better for our athletes.





Recently when I was in China I was introduced to the wearable technology clothing their athletes use. The technology seamlessly integrated with the fabric and allows them to train smarter, capture data and make smart decisions. In fact the training kit these athletes wear is so advanced that 45 minutes of training in that clothing is equivalent to the 5 hours of normal training. But our athletes wear the same clothing that you and I wear to the gym.

Would you go to your job, if you didn't get paid? Now think of the athletes! They do. They turn up everyday with nothing but passion and duty. We need to make sure that we have the money to support their dreams. Many of you who are gathered today know how much it takes to keep your staff motivated. Why not we spare a fraction of that to motivate our athletes who will uplift the image of our nation?

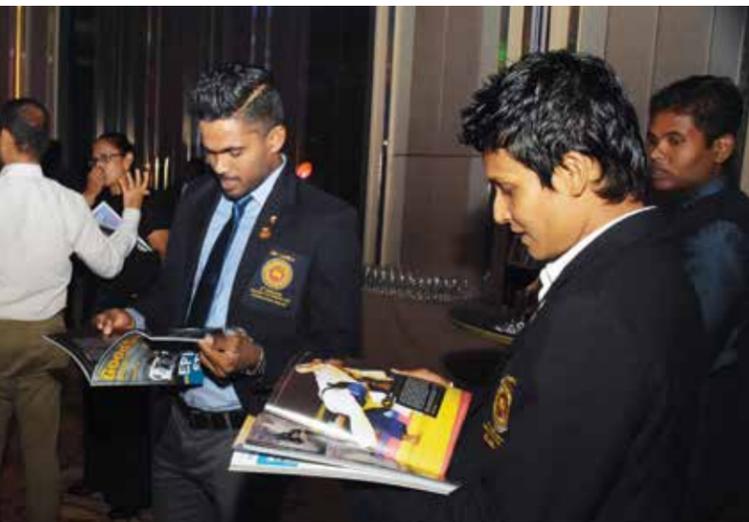
We are gradually building smarter facilities across the island. In the future no longer will athletes have to travel vast distances to reach Colombo to train. Convenience and peace of mind will allow them to focus more on their core task.

I am not asking you to do something I have not done, personally. I have committed to help these athletes. May I ask you to do the same.

This year at the Asian Games, for the first time in history the Sri Lankan flag was present at every event venue; we had all round participation. The 179 individuals who took part came with the same grit, the same tenacity and the same commitment, but we were outdone not by a fault of theirs, but by the lack of momentum, the backing and the structures that the other athletes had behind them.

Now is the time to collaborate to create champions. When Susanthika crossed the finish line, she crossed it alone. Not only did she have to fight the competition, but she had to fight against everything that our athletes face day in day out in their lives.

But we must change, so that when we have the Olympic gold medal, and when that medal is placed around that athlete, and the Lion Flag flutters and rises to the strains of the anthem, we will feel its weight, because we did commit, we did sacrifice and we made the right choices together.





Karlsson boost for Sri Lankan equestrianism

Our First Competitor

Equestrian, a relatively new sport to the island nation, saw the establishment of a parent body, the Sri Lanka Equestrian Association (SLEA) in the year 2002. Following affiliation to the Federation of Equestrian – the sport's world governing body – in the year 2004, SLEA has defied odds to organize a series of disciplines covering Show Jumping, Tent Pegging, Barrel Racing and Endurance Racing essentially at identified temporary venues in the metropolis and hill country. Relying on an assurance of the Ministry of Sports, incumbent President Suranjith Premadasa is confident of addressing the long felt primary concern of a permanent venue in the outskirts of Colombo – a pre-requisite to put in place a national event.

The sport of Equestrian in Sri Lanka boasts of her first competitor in the international stage in the form of Mathilda Karlsson – who has featured in Show Jumping events in Germany and Sweden. Karlsson opted to switch national affiliations from Sweden to Sri Lanka, the country of her birth. Mathilda's impressive performances have brought her on the verge of 2020 Olympic representation, if realized is bound to be a unique achievement for Sri Lanka.



SRI LANKA SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

A picture story on the local sports arena with a few renewed records at the 44th National Sports Festival and at the 96th National Athletic Championships 2018. This also highlights the javelin, shot put, discus events and the long and short distance running in men and women's competitions.

Photos by Ceylon Athletics & ThePapare.Com



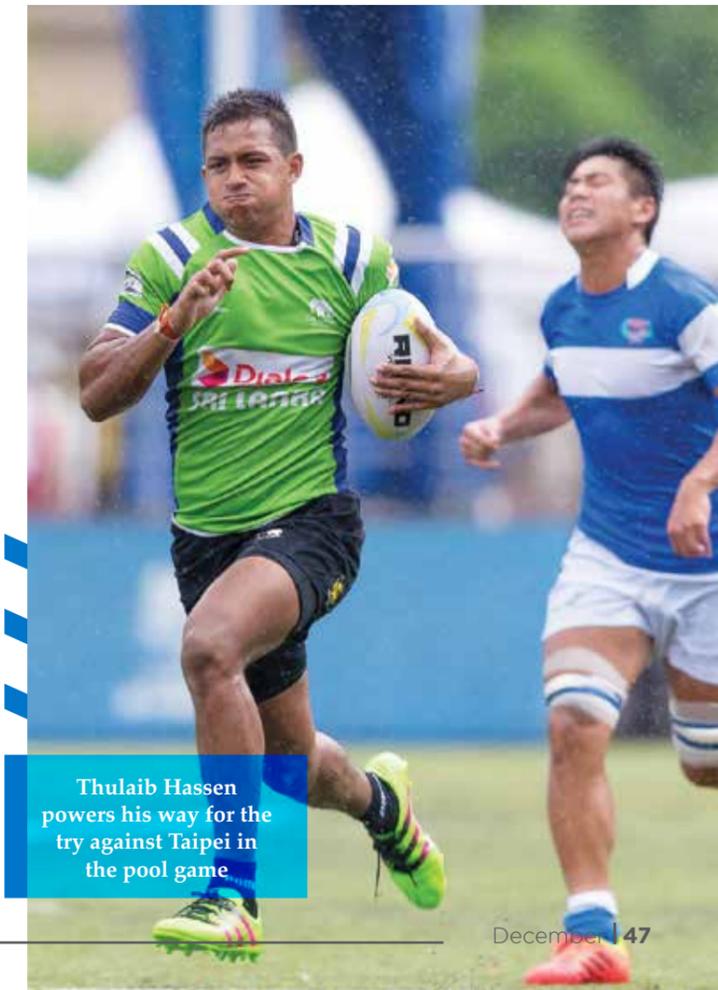
Sri Lanka U20 sevens Dinuk Amerasinghe with the ball cuts through Singaporean players



Sri Lanka U20 sevens captain Naveen Henakankanamage beats the South Korean defence at the Asia Rugby U20 sevens series held in Hong Kong



Janidu Dilshan on his fifth gear to go under the post try at Asia Rugby U20 sevens in Honk Kong



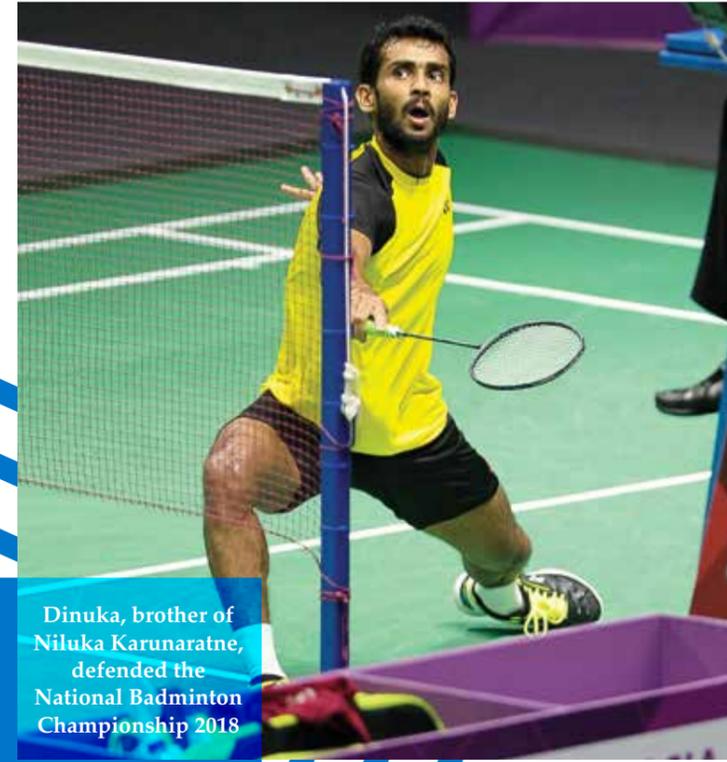
Thulaib Hassen powers his way for the try against Taipei in the pool game



Champion Sri Lanka netball team at the Invitational International Netball Tournament



Sri Lanka netball team in action against Singapore in the Invitational International Netball Tournament



Dinuka, brother of Niluka Karunaratne, defended the National Badminton Championship 2018



Thilini Hendaheva was crowned champion for the sixth consecutive time at the women's badminton nationals



PStar netball club player from England shoots against Sri Lanka development netball team



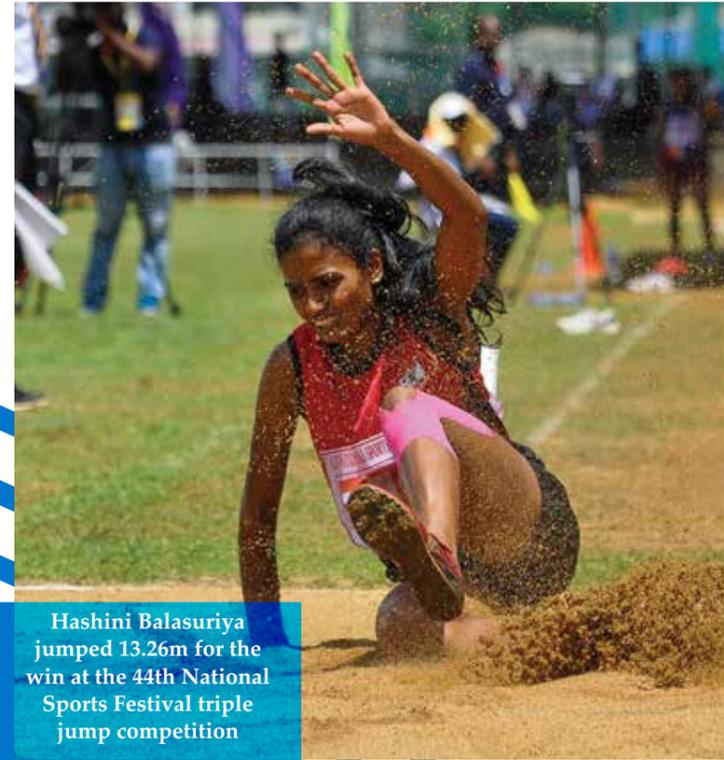
Sri Lanka development netball team who took part at the Invitational International Netball Tournament



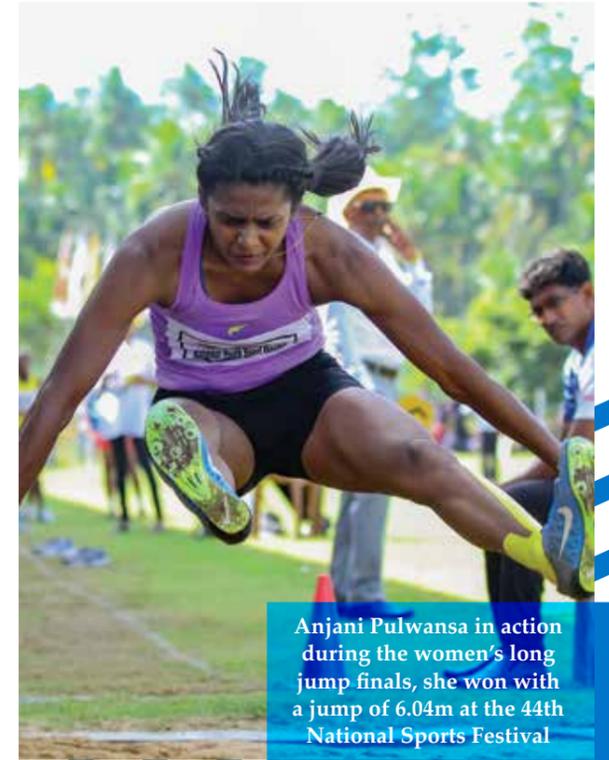
Kavindi Sahabandu in action at the 44th National Sports Festival



Aniqah Gaffoor, the U15 overall champion, at National Age Group Competition



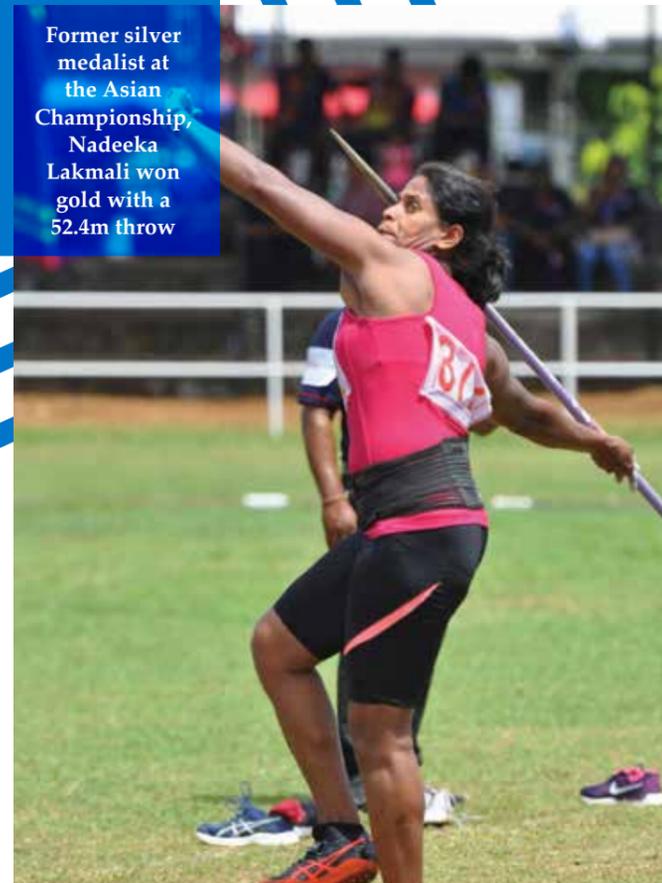
Hashini Balasuriya jumped 13.26m for the win at the 44th National Sports Festival triple jump competition



Anjani Pulwansa in action during the women's long jump finals, she won with a jump of 6.04m at the 44th National Sports Festival



Shevaan Ebenezer in action during the Water Polo Nationals



Former silver medalist at the Asian Championship, Nadeeka Lakmali won gold with a 52.4m throw



Vidusha Lakshani won in the triple jump at 96th National Athletic Championship with a new National Meet Record 13.60m



Aruna Darshana (Middle) during the home stretch of the 400m which he won with a timing 48.12secs at the 44th National Sports Festival

Sri Lanka's 800m duo Nimali Liyanarachchi (759) and Gayanthika Abeyrathne (772) in action as Nimali took the lead to win with a National Meet Record (NMR) with timing of 2:04.3secs at the 44th National Sports Festival

Hemantha Kumara (561) and Sanjeewa Lakmal (303) finished 2nd & 3rd respectively after Rusiru Chathuranga (not in pic) won the 1500m at the 44th National Sports Festival





Sri Lanka's fastest man, Himasha Eshan, won the 100m event with a New Meet Record 10.41secs in the 96th National Athletic Championship



Joyful Rusiru Chathuranga wins the 1500m gold at the 44th National Sports Festival in 3:54.59 secs



Uva Province takes the lead in the 4x400m relay finals at the 44th National Sports Festival



Nilani Rathnayaka (801) leading the way to the women's 1500m gold in 4:26.45 secs



Heptathlon and 110m hurdles champion Lakshika Sugandi at the 96th National Athletic Championship



Ishara Sandaruwan in action to win the pole vault clearing 4.80m at 44th National Sports Festival



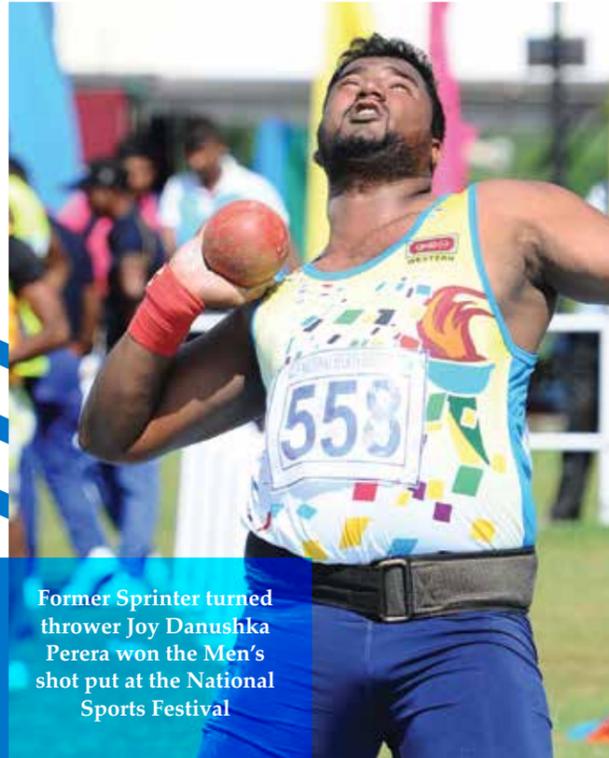
Imasha Udani in action during women's high jump at the 44th National Sports Festival



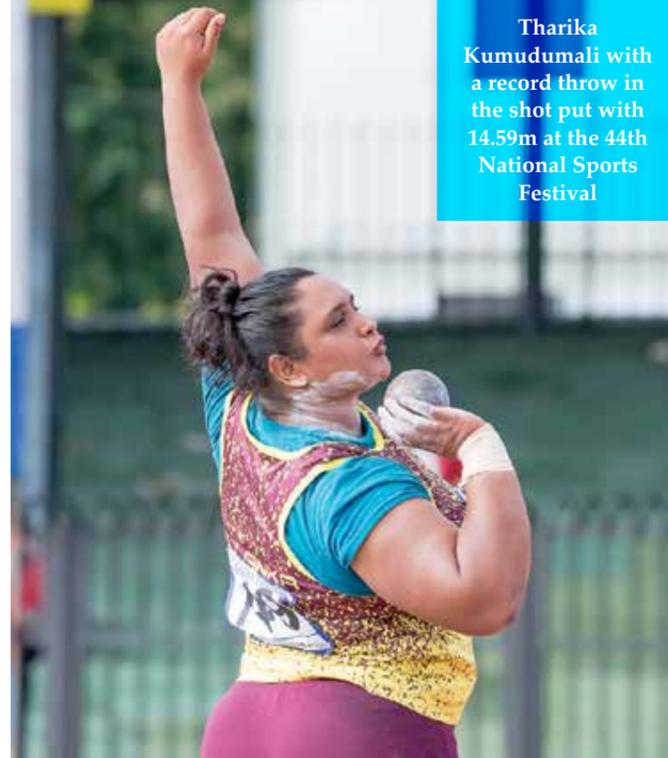
Manjula Kumara won the men's high jump (2.21m) at the 44th National Sports Festival



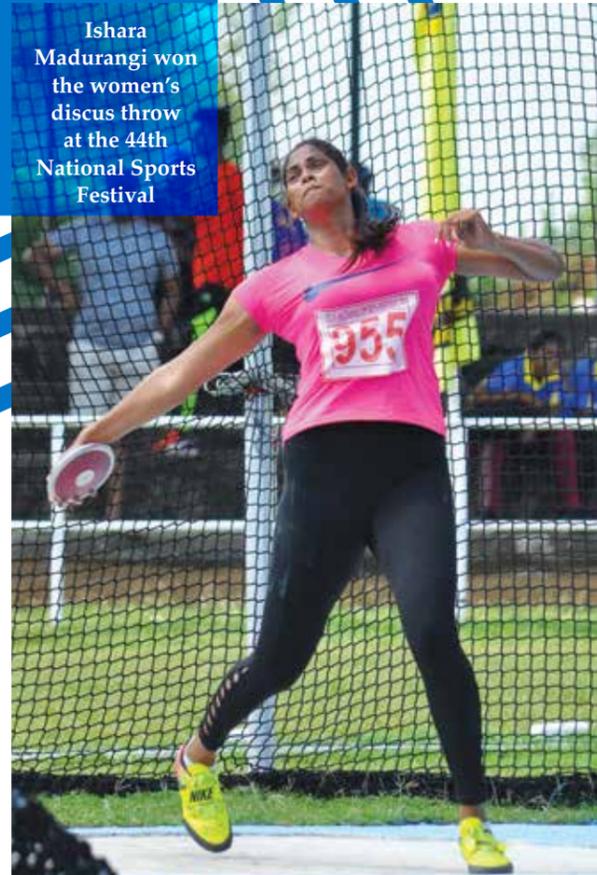
Ayesha Maduwanthi won gold in hammer-throw at the 44th National Sports Festival



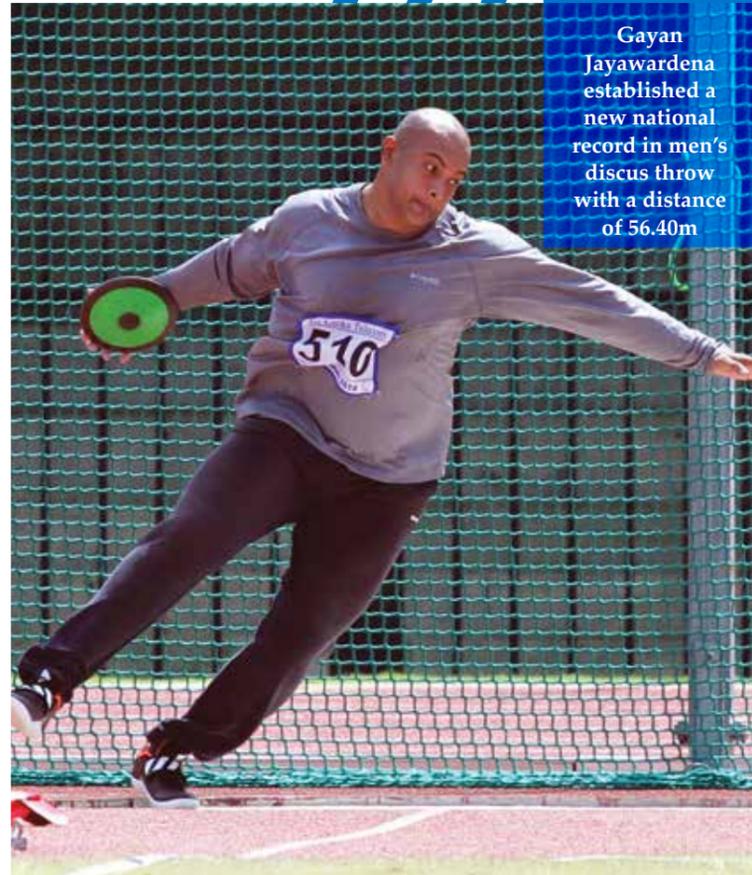
Former Sprinter turned thrower Joy Danushka Perera won the Men's shot put at the National Sports Festival



Tharika Kumudumali with a record throw in the shot put with 14.59m at the 44th National Sports Festival



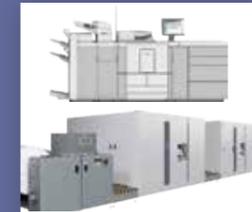
Ishara Madurangi won the women's discus throw at the 44th National Sports Festival



Gayan Jayawardena established a new national record in men's discus throw with a distance of 56.40m



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Iresh Kosala with a perfect hit at the Asian Games 2018

Photo: Sameera Peiris

GLOVE LOVE

View of Baseball in Sri Lanka

By Alvin Sallay

Thuslaith Sathiswaran handles the wooden baseball bat with ease. His swing is natural and he sweetly hits the ball a long distance. The 14-year-old from Jaffna Central College is enjoying his time away from the classroom.

And so are the other 200-odd students from 11 schools dotted around Jaffna who are gathered at the Duraipappah Stadium for the first awareness programme being carried out by the Sri Lanka Amateur Baseball and Softball Association.

“Our dream is to have 20,000 players across Sri Lanka by 2025 and make it one of the top five sports in the country,” says Fazil Hussain, President of the Baseball Association.

Hussain is also looking relaxed as he surveys the hive of activity at the stadium named after a former Mayor of Jaffna who was brutally killed by the LTTE when terrorism raised its ugly head in the early years. Today, in his memory, a field of dreams has been built and baseball is holding fort.

The children first witness two teams, from the Army and Navy play an exhibition match with the rules being interpreted by a commentator. “I’m very familiar with cricket but this is the first time I’m seeing baseball being played,” says Legini Jogalingam, 13, from Holy Family Convent.

Baseball is not exactly new to Sri Lanka, even if it is all Greek to the students in Jaffna. The game was introduced to the country in the

mid-80s by the American Embassy in Colombo. The then Minister of Fisheries Festus Perera played a huge hand in getting it up-and-running with the help of Lee Ann Ross, a dynamic lady attached to the American Embassy.

Four teams were initially taught the game – Sri Lanka Air Force, Shakthi Baseball Club, Gold Fish Baseball Club and Royal College, the first school in the country which took to the game. The staff at the US Embassy were also involved.

When American warships arrived in Colombo, games were organized with the local teams. The USS Kitty Hawk played two games against local teams at the Army Grounds, now turned into a Five Star hotel land.

The first tournament was played in 1995 following which a national tournament was played on an annual basis. Rapid progress has taken place. Sri Lanka is ranked 40th in the world. In Asia, we are seventh. In West Asia we are ranked number one. The Sri Lanka Under-18 national team finished fifth at the recent Asian U-18 Championship.

Now the plan is to widen the net and catch more players. But as chief executive officer of the SLABSA, Priyantha Ekanayake points out, the sport faces two major challenges – grounds and equipment.

“These are our two biggest problems. But we are confident we can overcome both,” says Ekanayake, former national rugby captain and CEO of Sri Lanka Rugby before switching his allegiance due to personal reasons.

Ekanayake is determined that baseball does not follow the slippery road rugby has embarked on and is keen that the constitution of the SLABSA

has provisions which will prevent the clubs from having an upper hand over the national body as is the case in rugby today.

But that is another story. At present, Ekanayake is more than happy to roll up his sleeves and get involved with the promotion of the game at grassroots level. He wanders off to take another count of the schoolchildren who have turned up from famous Jaffna education institutions including St. John’s, St. Patrick’s, Central College, Holy Family Convent, Hartley College, Vembadi Girls High School and Vermely Girls School among others.

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation announcer Yashodara Balasingham has been drafted in as a translator to help get the message across to the students. The Karainagar broadcaster helps me interview Shobika Jayabalasubramaniam, a Grade 10 student from Jaffna Hindu Ladies College who is holding the bat gifted to each school by the SLABSA.

“THESE ARE OUR TWO BIGGEST PROBLEMS. BUT WE ARE CONFIDENT WE CAN OVERCOME BOTH”

Chamika Yasas (pitcher) at the Asian Games 2018

Photo: Sameera Peiris





“It looks like it is an interesting game. I play cricket with my little brother so I know how to hold a bat,” she says. Not quite the same in baseball, but this does not deter her.

This enthusiasm is what Hussain and company hope to tap into. While the Jaffna and Killinochchi trip – the whole caboodle moved there the next day to reach out to schools in that area – is all about getting the students involved, in the long-term it is the teachers that will matter.

“We must get the teachers involved. If you get one teacher interested, that will lead to perhaps 30 or 40 children getting into the game. It is all about sustaining this programme,” Hussain says.

In October, the SLABSA welcomed on board sponsors Horizon Campus and Ninewells Hospitals as partners in their development drive. Talks are ongoing with American Clubs to get them to support the push in the way of providing equipment, financial help and sponsorships.

Recently, Ekanayake went to Canada and USA where he met leading members of the expatriate community as well as officials from the Toronto Blue Jays and The Philadelphia Phillies who compete in Major League Baseball. There is a huge interest from them in supporting baseball in Jaffna and in Sri Lanka according to Ekanayake.

“But the first thing we must do is to raise the profile of the sport in Sri Lanka. Once we achieve a high profile, then we can go back to these people and ask for help. We must have a development programme up-and-running first,” Hussain adds.

Sathiswaran, Jogalingam and Jayabalasubramaniam might not know it but they could well have triggered off a new sport in Sri Lanka. Forget sixes, it is time to hit those home runs.

With help from JICA – Japan International Corporate Agency – who have already provided two coaches the Association is now looking at taking the game to each district. Hanwella

Priyantha Ekanayake bats during a baseball development programme

Photo:
Waseem Ahamed



A young kid from Hanwella Central College with a high bat lift

Photo:
Waseem Ahamed

and Avissawella are next on line followed by Batticaloa, Amparai and Trincomalee.

Kochi San, one of the Japanese coaches speaks Sinhalese and Tamil fluently. He tells me Sri Lankans are “very talented” and have a raw and natural ability to play baseball. Not surprising since Elle is a popular pastime in rural Sri Lanka and similar to baseball with a hitter, a pitcher and fielders.

Presently 30 clubs and 22 schools play baseball mainly in the Western, Southern and Central Provinces. And, of course, it is played by the Armed Forces. Hussain is confident the game will catch on.

“We will do something every month so that people can see what this sport is all about. I’m very confident we can soon attract large numbers,” Hussain predicts.

Once those numbers are shown, baseball can then go to clubs and

“IT LOOKS LIKE IT IS AN INTERESTING GAME. I PLAY CRICKET WITH MY LITTLE BROTHER SO I KNOW HOW TO HOLD A BAT”

colleges in the US, Japan and even Chinese Taipei and ask for assistance. ‘Baseball for All’ is the mantra of the Association. Watching these kids at the Duraiappah Stadium, it is not a bad tagline and will surely catch on.

Alvin Sallay was chief sportswriter for the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong for more than two decades.





INTERNATIONAL STARS HIGHLIGHTS

A look back at the year from 18 sports around the world in 2018. Top names and the winners has been captioned in this section including the recap of the Football World Cup Winners.

Photos - European Press Agency (EPA)



Top: Katie Ledecky of the USA is on her way to win the women's 800m Freestyle final during the 17th FINA Swimming World Championships in the Duna Arena in Budapest, Hungary

Middle: Vladimir Morozov of Russia is on his way to win the men's 100-meter medley final of the Swimming World Cup in Duna Arena in Budapest, Hungary

Bottom: Sarah Sjöström of Sweden celebrates after winning the women's 50m Butterfly Final at the Glasgow 2018 European Swimming Championships in Glasgow, Britain



AQUATICS

Some of the world's top swimmers were on show at the 2018 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships held in Tokyo, Japan in August. Perennial superpowers of the pool, the United States of America, topped the medal table with 45 medals, of which 20 were gold. 21-year-old sensation Katie Ledecky, won gold in three of the four individual events she took part in, including the Women's 800m freestyle where she bettered her previous Championship record.

Sweden's Sarah Sjöström pipped Hungary's Katinka Hosszú to finish as this year's best women's swimmer in the seven-event FINA World Cup series, which features two long course meets and five over short course. While the women's ranking was decided by 33 points, Russia's Vladimir Morozov finished well ahead of compatriot Kirill Prigoda to top the men's ranking.

In the diving pool, China exerted their dominance, making a clean sweep of all 11 gold medals at the 2018 FINA Diving World Cup held in China. They added four silvers to their tally, with Canada finishing a distant second with two silver and two bronze medals.



Christian Coleman (L) of the USA celebrates after crossing the finish line to win the men's 100m race at the Memorial Van Damme IAAF Diamond League international athletics meeting in Brussels, Belgium



Top Left: Poland relay team celebrates with the world record for the men's 4x400 metres relay



Top Right: Renaud Lavillenie of France competes in the men's Pole Vault



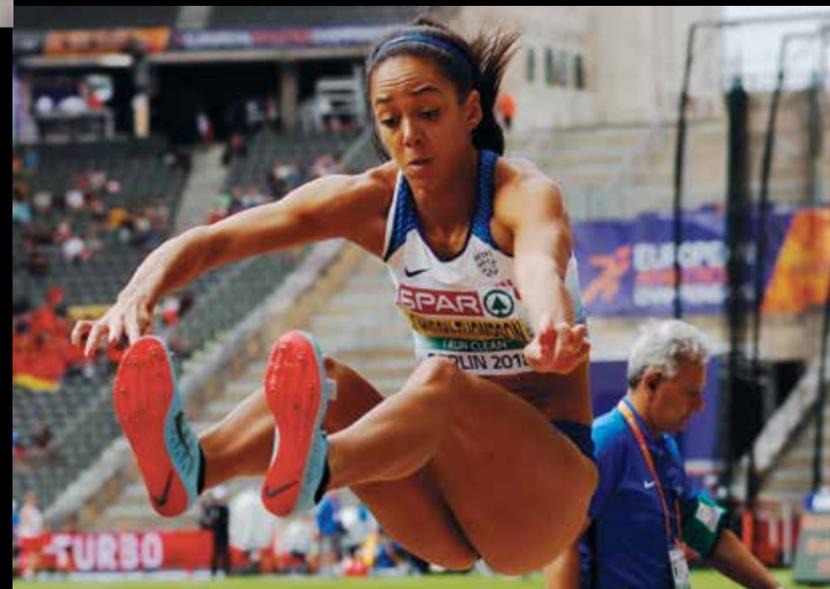
Left: Akani Simbine of South Africa celebrates his gold medal win in the Men's 100m final

Middle: Brandon Starc of Australia in action during the Men's High Jump

Right: Caster Semenya (L) of South Africa is on her way to win the women's 800m

Right Middle: Genzebe Dibaba of Ethiopia on her way to gold in the Women's 1500 metres

Left Middle & Bottom Row: Katarina Johnson-Thompson of Britain competes in the Long Jump, 100m Hurdles, Shot Put & the Javelin Throw of the Heptathlon



ATHLETICS

With six gold medals, the United States finished on top of the medal table at the 2018 IAAF Indoor World Championships held in Birmingham, United Kingdom. Their gold medal-haul included a first placed finish in the 60m Sprint for Chris Coleman, completed in Championship Record time. France's Renaud Lavillenie, a two-time Summer Olympic medalist, added a third Indoor World Championship medal to his name in the Men's Pole Vault, though he could not better the World Record he set in 2014. Poland's 4x400m Men's relay team set a new World Record in the event when they edged out the United States to the gold medal.

In the women's competition Ethiopia's Genzebe Dibaba doubled up on gold medals, winning the 1500m and 3000m events. Great Britain's own Katarina Johnson-Thompson won her first Indoor World Championship gold when she topped the points table in the Pentathlon.

South Africa's Akani Simbine made his mark on world athletics when he raced to the gold medal in the Men's 100m event at the 2018 Commonwealth Games at Gold Coast, Australia. Jamaica's Yohan Blake was among the athletes that Simbine beat to win the event. Isaac Makwala of Botswana won two golds, in the Men's 400m and

the 4x400m Relay, while Australia's Brandon Starc, brother of international cricketer Mitchell Starc, won gold in the Men's High Jump event.

Another Botswanian Amantle Montsho raced to gold in the Women's 400m event, but South Africa's Caster Semenya was the star of the women's competition when she bagged gold in the 800m and 1500m events. Johnson-Thompson added her second major medal of the year, when she won gold in the Women's Heptathlon.





BADMINTON

China reclaimed the Thomas' Cup after beating Japan in the final of the 2018 edition, while Japan won the Uber Cup for the first time since 1981.

It was China's 10th Thomas' Cup title, a tournament that features the 16-best men's badminton playing countries. China were unbeaten in the tournament, reclaiming the title they last won in 2012. Grouped with France, India and Australia, the Chinese men's team had two of the top five ranked players, Yuqi Shi and Long Chen, in their contingent. The quality showed as they lost just two rubbers – one in their 3-1 semi-final victory over Indonesia, and the other in the final against Japan which they won by the same margin – on the way to claiming the title. Defending champions Denmark meanwhile, with number one Viktor Axelsen in their team, made it out as the top team in their group, before losing to Japan in the semi-finals.

Japan, with world number two Akane Yamaguchi to call on, breezed through the first round of the Uber Cup – the women's equivalent to the Thomas' Cup – en route to their sixth title. Japan eased through group play, against Canada, India and Australia, and then beat Chinese Taipei, South Korea and Thailand to win the tournament.



Top: Shi Yuqi from China in action

Top Middle: Long Chen of China

Bottom: Akane Yamaguchi of Japan



BASEBALL

Among the major international baseball competitions held this year was the Women's Baseball World Cup, and the Asian Games Men's baseball tournament.

South Korea, the third ranked men's team in the world, edged out the second-best, Japan, in the final of the Asian Games tournament while Chinese Taipei won the Bronze medal play-off. Three teams made their debut, Sri Lanka, Laos and Indonesia, with only Indonesia making it to the main draw of the tournament on virtue of being the hosts. Thailand, Sri Lanka and Laos took part in a qualifying round, with Thailand earning the right to join the seven other teams in the main competition. South Korea finished second in their group, behind

Chinese Taipei, but a 5-1 victory over Japan in the Super Round meant that they qualified for the gold medal match against the Japanese. A 3-0 win in that encounter saw South Korea clinch the medal. Sri Lanka finished ninth out of 10 teams, with the win over Laos a respectable return for the first time participants.

Japan's women's team however, were able to clinch the Baseball World Cup for the seventh consecutive time, beating Chinese Taipei 6-0 in the final. The 12-team tournament was played in the United States of America, with the hosts finishing with the third best record in the super round.



Japan celebrates the women's baseball world title

Photo: www.wbsc.org



Li Qian of China (red) and Nouchka Fontijn of Netherlands (blue) in action during the women's Middle (69-75)kg final match of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games Boxing event

BOXING

China topped the medal standings at the 2018 International Boxing Association (AIBA) held in India in November. Four out of the five medals the Chinese won were golds, with Dan Dou (Light welterweight - 64 kg), Qian Li (Middleweight - 75kg), Lina Wang (Light heavyweight - 81 kg) and Xiaoli Yang (Heavyweight - +81 kg) beating out their opponents in their respective finals. Indian legend Mary Kom won the hosts' only medal of the tournament, in the Light flyweight (45-48 kg) category.

BASKETBALL

Flush with talent from the Women's National Basketball Association, the United States of America, were crowned Champions of the Women's Basketball World Cup played in the Spain. After going undefeated in the first round, the American team beat Nigeria and Belgium in the quarter- and semi-final rounds respectively, before trouncing Australia in the final. Breanna Stewart was adjudged Most Valuable Player of the tournament for her all-round play, and was the leading scorer among her American compatriots, averaging 16.3 points per game.

Serbia, meanwhile, recorded a close 16-13 win over the Netherlands to win the 2018 FIBA 3x3 World Cup held in the Philippines in June. Serbia have now won four out of the five tournaments that have been played so far. In the Women's competition, Italy were title winners beating Russia 16-12, with France taking third.



Breanna Stewart (R) of the USA in action



Top Left: Remco Evenepoel of Belgium celebrates winning the Men's Junior Road Race



Top Right: Team Sky rider Geraint Thomas (L) of Britain, wearing the overall leader yellow jersey, celebrates his win with Chris Froome (R) of Britain following the 21st and final stage of the 105th edition of the Tour de France cycling race over 116km between Houilles and Paris

Bottom: Anna van der Breggen of the Netherlands celebrates while crossing the finish line to win the women's Elite Road Race of the UCI Road Cycling World Championships over 155.6km from Kufstein to Innsbruck, Austria

CYCLING

For the second successive year, the Netherlands bagged the most medals at the UCI Road World Championships held in Austria piping Belgium. Both teams won three golds each, but the Netherlands, who won 12 medals overall, won a silver and two bronze more than the Belgians. The three golds for the Dutch, came in the women's competitions, with Anna van der Breggen winning the road race and Annemiek van Vleuten taking the time-trial gold, while Rozemarijn Ammerlaan won the women's junior time trial event. Two of the golds Belgium bagged was won by Remco Evenepoel who won the junior men's road race and time trial. Spanish rider Alejandro Valverde sprinted the last hundred metres of the 259.4km men's road race title, to win his first world championship, ahead of Romain Bardet of France and Michael Woods of Canada.

Geraint Thomas of Great Britain won the yellow jersey at what is considered the pinnacle of road racing, the grueling Tour de France, finishing 1 minute and 51 seconds ahead of Tom Dumoulin, with defending champion Chris Froome finishing a further 33 seconds behind in third.





Top: French players celebrate with the trophy after winning the FIFA World Cup 2018 final between France and Croatia in Moscow



FOOTBALL

A tournament that will be remembered as the first to use the controversial Video Assistant Referee system as much as it will be remembered for the surging runs of France's Kylian Mbappe, the FIFA World Cup didn't fail to deliver on the excitement and surprises that are usually associated with the world's showpiece sporting event.

Russia, the lowest ranked team to ever host the World Cup, were the biggest surprise of the tournament making it all the way to the quarter-finals, knocking out 2008 champions Spain along the way. The bigger surprise, in terms of big name exits, was Germany who continued the recent tradition of defending champions being eliminated in the first round of the World Cup, as they lost to Mexico and South Korea to finish at the bottom of their group.

Kylian Mbappe of France (L) and Ivan Strinic of Croatia (C) in action during the FIFA World Cup 2018 final between France and Croatia in Moscow, Russia



French national team head coach Didier Deschamps poses with his Best FIFA Men's Coach award during the Best FIFA Football Awards 2018 in London, Great Britain

A 1-0 win over Peru and a goalless draw against Denmark saw them top the group. They faced a disjointed but dangerous Argentina in the knock-out and were trailing 2-1 early in the second-half. But Benjamin Pavard struck what was easily the goal of the tournament and Mbappe added a brace to ease panic and lead France to a 4-3 win, which was arguably also the best game of the tournament. A 2-0 win over Uruguay in the quarter-finals and the win over Belgium put France in their third World Cup final in 20 years. There they would go on to beat a brave and resolute Croatia, whose efforts were not truly reflected in the 4-2 scoreline. It also meant that French coach Didier Deschamps joined Brazil's Mário Zagallo and Germany's Franz Beckenbauer as the only people to have won the football World Cup as a player and then a coach.

Gareth Southgate's youthful England team almost made their first World Cup final since 1966 but lost to Croatia in extra-time in the semi-finals. There was some consolation for their captain Harry Kane though, winning the Golden Boot, for his tournament leading six goals.



England's Harry Kane receives the golden boot during the UEFA Nations League Group 1 match between England and Spain at Wembley stadium in London, Britain

There was no shortage of goals either, with only one 0-0 draw in the whole of the first round, with Spain and Portugal playing out a 3-3 draw in one of the more exciting games of the tournament. Both those teams were also on the cusp of elimination from the group stages, before scrapping through to the knockout round. That was as far as their journey went, losing to Uruguay and Russia respectively.

Perennial favourites, Brazil, won their group before defeating Mexico in the second round, but came up against a strong Belgium team who were outside favourites to win the tournament. A 1-0 loss to France in the semi-finals however ended the Belgium dream.

France, one of the teams with the best odds to be crowned champions, made a slow start in their opening game against Australia, before beating them 2-1.



Patrick Reed of USA hits a shot from a bunker during the final round of DP World Tour Championship European Tour Golf tournament 2018 at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai, United Arab Emirates



Brooks Koepka of the US holds the Wanamaker trophy on the 18th green after winning the 100th PGA Championship golf tournament at Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis, Missouri, USA

GOLF

28-year-old American Brooks Koepka had a year to remember, winning two of the four majors, and becoming the world's best golfer. His one-stroke win over Tommy Fleetwood saw him become the first golfer since 1989 to successfully defend the US Open title, when Curtis Strange completed back to back wins. A record breaking score at the centenary PGA Championship, saw Koepka pip the resurgent Tiger Woods to the title. The nature of his win, in beating out Woods, was symbolic, as Woods was the last player to win the US Open and PGA Championship in the same year. American Patrick Reed won his first major when he claimed the Masters Tournament, while Francesco Molinari became the first Italian golfer to win a major championship, when he came out on top at the Open Championship.



Spain's Valero Rivera (R) in action against Niclas Ekberg (L) of Sweden during the EHF European Men's Handball Championship 2018 final match between Spain and Sweden in Zagreb, Croatia

HANDBALL

Regional neighbours Qatar and Bahrain squared off in a tense final in the 2018 Men's Asian Handball Championships, before the former won its third consecutive title. Overturning a one-point halftime deficit, Qatar won the final 33-31. South Korea sealed third place with 29-21 win over Saudi Arabia. All four nations also qualified for next year's World Handball championships by virtue of their qualification to the semi-finals.

Spain won their first European men's handball title, when they defeated four-time champions Sweden 29-23 in the final. Trailing by two at half-time, Spain's exceptional second-half play saw them overturn the deficit and win the title on their fifth appearance in the finals. France, who lost to Spain in the semi-finals beat Denmark to third place, while hosts Croatia finished fifth overall.

JUDO

Over 700 Judokas from 124 countries participated in the 2018 World Judo Championships, where Japan repeated the success they had in 2017 to finish with the most medals. A majority of Japan's eight gold medals came with women's competition, winning all but two individuals events. Japan also bagged the Mixed Team event ahead of France, Russia and Unified Korea.



Great Britain's Smythe-Davis and Japan's Tsukasa Yoshida (L) in the final of the 57 kg category at the World Championships Seniors Baku 2018

Photo: www.ijf.org



Sri Lankan National Netball team against Singapore National Team in the Asian Championship 2018

Photo:
Netball Singapore

NETBALL

A return to the international netball for Tharjini Sivalingam brought immediate success for Sri Lanka at the Asian Netball Championships 2018. Having last won the tournament in 2009, the accuracy of the daunting Sivalingam meant that Sri Lanka continued their reign of winningest team at the Asian Championship, winning their fifth crown. Also instrumental in this success was coach Thilaka Jinadasa who marshalled the squad excellently, to a level of almost flawless teamwork that helped Sri Lanka to a 69-50 win over hosts Singapore. Sri Lanka were unbeaten in the tournament, winning

their three preliminary group matches against India and Chinese Taipei, before easing past Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore in the Cup Group of the second round. Paired with Hong Kong in the semi-finals, Sri Lanka made light work of their opponents with a 55-46 win, and then going on to win even more emphatically, by 19 points, in the final against Singapore. Sivalingam, rightly so, was adjudged player of the tournament. Her next task will be leading the line when Sri Lanka takes part in the Netball World Cup in July 2019.

ROWING

Italy held off the United States of America to top the medal table at the World Rowing Championships, held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Despite winning less total medals – eight to the Americans’ 10 – Italy came out at the top on virtue of winning one silver more than the United States. Both countries bagged three golds apiece with Italy’s three golds coming in the Men’s Quadruple Sculls, Lightweight Men’s Coxless Pair and also the Lightweight Women’s Coxless Pair, where sisters Serene and Giorgia Lo Bue beat Americans Jennifer Sager and Jillian Zieff.

The United States won gold in the Women’s Coxless Four, Women’s Eight and PR3 Women’s Coxless Pair events.



Top: Serena Lo Bue (B), Giorgia Lo Bue (S) Italy, Gold, lightweight women’s pair 2018 World Rowing Championship

Bottom: Heats, Matteo Castaldo (B), Bruno Rosetti, Matteo Lodo, Marco Di Costanzo (S), men’s four, Italy, 2018 World Rowing Championship

Photo:
www.worldrowing.com



RUGBY

South Africa may have won their second successive World Rugby Sevens Series title, but it would not have been possible had Fiji, who had a seven-point lead, not slipped up in the 10th and final leg of the series. South Africa's best chance was clinching top spot in the final leg and hoping Fiji didn't make the cup semi-final, while Fiji only needed a top three finish to seal the title regardless of what the Blitzboks achieved. The more realistic of those permutations was for Fiji to pull through – they had after all won five of the last nine legs – but their loss to England in the quarter-finals opened the door for South Africa, and they duly responded. A 24-14 win over England in the Cup finals saw the Blitzboks unseat Fiji, and claim the Sevens Series title by two points. It was a reward for their consistency, making the semi-finals in every leg, while Fiji faulted in the early stages of the series. American Carlin Isles finished the ten-leg series as the highest try scorer with 49 tries while Nathan Hirayama of Canada tallied the most overall points with 334. However, Perry Baker of USA won the award for the World Rugby sevens player of the year.

Despite suffering their first Rugby Championship defeat in three years, New Zealand successfully defended their crown in the Southern Hemisphere tournament and improved their overall tally to six. The defeat came in what will go down as a classic as South Africa defending stoutly at the end to win by two points, 36-34. Except for that it was business as usual for the world champions, who recorded four wins with a bonus point, including a 40-12 win over rivals Australia, in which Flyhalf Beauden Barrett scored four tries. That was among three wins New Zealand registered against the Wallabies in 2018 to defend the Bledisloe Cup for the 16th straight year. Argentina finished last among the four teams, but recorded their best points tally, of 8, since joining the tournament, thanks to wins over Australia and South Africa. Pumas Flyhalf Nicolas Sanchez was the top points scorer with 67 points.



Photo:
www.worldrugby.org



Photo:
www.worldrugby.org

Top Left: Perry Baker of USA beats Welsh defense during the rugby sevens World Cup in San Francisco

Top Right: Beauden Barrett of New Zealand runs away from Agustin Creevy of Argentina during the Investic Rugby Championship test match, Barrett who won the world player award in 2016 & 2017 missed out the hat-trick to Irishmen Johnny Sexton

Bottom Left: South Africa sevens team winning the world sevens series for the second consecutive season

Bottom Right: Ireland's Johnny Sexton kicks a penalty goal during the Third Test rugby match between Australia and Ireland, Sexton won the World Rugby Player of the year 2018 award





SOFTBALL

Current world number one in softball, the United States of America, won their 11th Women's World Softball Championship edging out hosts Japan 7-6. So dominant have the Americans been in the sport that they have lost just three of the last 14 world championships, held biennially. Japan and the United States had met in the semi-finals where the US won 4-3. Canada won the bronze medal.

USA against Japan in finals of 11th woman's world softball championship

Photo:
wswc.wbsc.org



Zhendong Fan in action during the men's semi-final table tennis match against Jingkun Liang both of China at the Seamaster Austrian Open in Linz, Austria

TABLE TENNIS

In a year when Zhendong Fan's 29-month run as table tennis' second ranked player ended – only because he finally overtook Germany's Timo Boll to become world number one – the 21-year-old Chinese star completed a hat-trick of world championship wins. He first teamed up with Xin Xu and Long Ma to go unbeaten through the ITTF Team World Cup, beating Japan in the final. The trio teamed up once again, along with Gaoyuan Lin and Chuqin Wang, to win the World Team Table Tennis Championships, before Zhendong beat Boll to win his second ITTF Men's World Cup title.

His efforts were mirrored by former women's world number one, Ning Ding, who won golds in the same team events, before beating Yuling Zhu 4-0 in the final of the ITTF Women's World Cup.

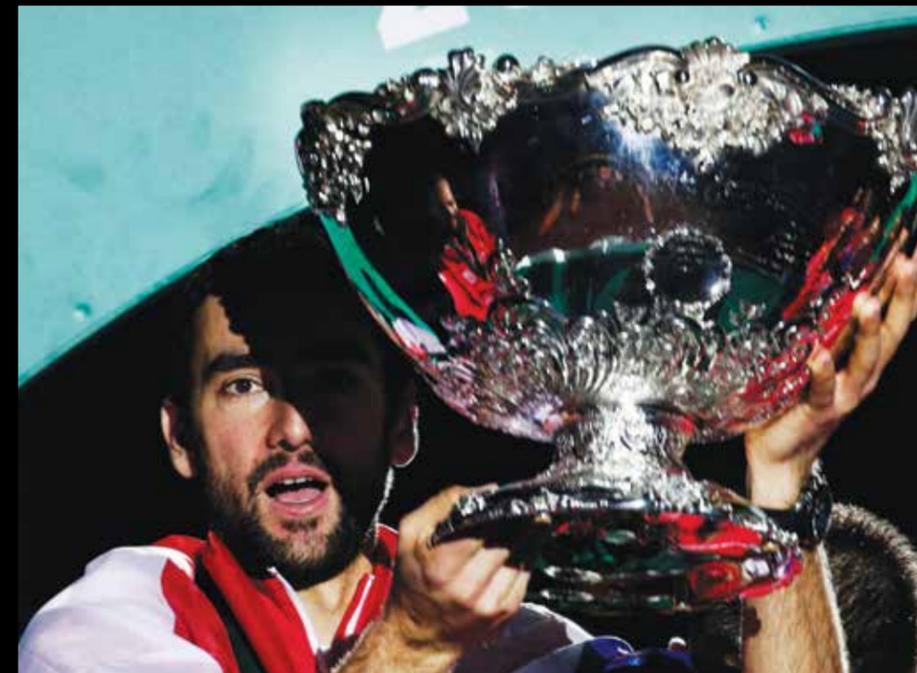


TENNIS

The Czech Republic won their sixth Fed Cup in eight years when they defeated the United States 3-0 in the final. Playing in front of a home crowd, Katerina Siniakova beat Sofia Kenin to clinch the tie. No team has ever won a Fed Cup final after losing the first two games, and it was a piece of history the Americans could not change.

Serbian Novak Djokovic made up for his grand slam title-less 2017, by winning Wimbledon and the US Open, to inch closer to his rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal on the all-time list. With 14 grand slams to his name he is now tied for third with Pete Sampras. Both Federer and Nadal also added to their tallies – Federer winning the Australian Open and Nadal the French Open. Nadal has three titles less than Federer who sits on 20 grand slam titles.

Former women's world number one Caroline Wozniacki won her first grand slam title, finally delivering on the promise that saw her reach the final of the same tournament in 2009 when she was still 19 years old. With a 7-6, 3-6, 6-4 win, Wozniacki beat current world number one Simona Halep to win her maiden title. Halep, who herself had not won a grand slam title, bounced back from that defeat to beat American Sloane Stephens in the final of the French Open five months later. German Angelique Kerber and Naomi Osaka also won major titles, Wimbledon and the US Open respectively, both beating Serena Williams in the final and denying the American a record-equaling 24th grand slam title.



Top Left: Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns to Germany's Alexander Zverev during the final of the ATP World Tour Finals tennis tournament at the O2 Arena in London, Britain

Top Right: Elina Svitolina of Ukraine reacts during her singles round robin match against Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark at the BNP Paribas WTA Finals 2018 at the Indoor Stadium in Singapore

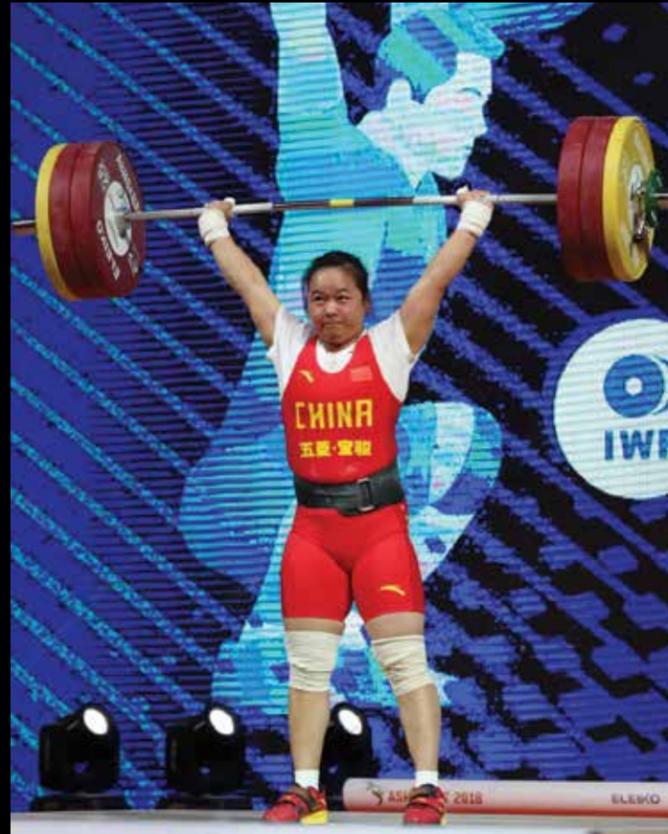
Middle Left: Marin Cilic of Croatia celebrates with the trophy after winning the Davis Cup Final against France at the Pierre Mauroy Stadium in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, near Lille, France

Bottom Left: Naomi Osaka of Japan in action against Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands, during their singles round robin match of the BNP Paribas WTA Finals 2018 held at the Indoor Stadium in Singapore



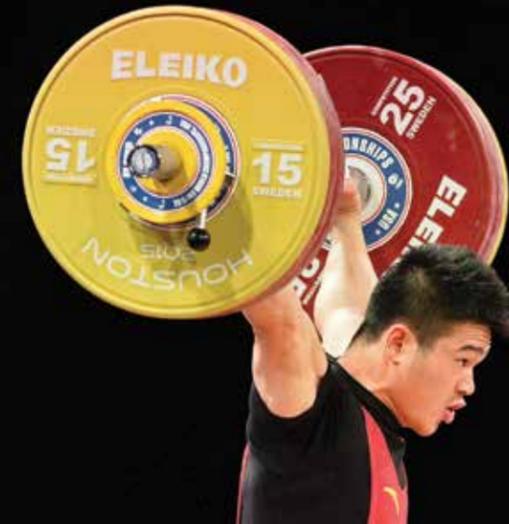
WEIGHTLIFTING

Chinese weightlifters raked in the medals at the World Weightlifting Championships, winning 53 medals, well ahead of all other countries. Thailand finished respectable second with a haul of 17 gold medals with North Korea winning 12 medals.



Zhang Wangli (CHN) took it all in the women's 71kg
Photo: www.iwf.net

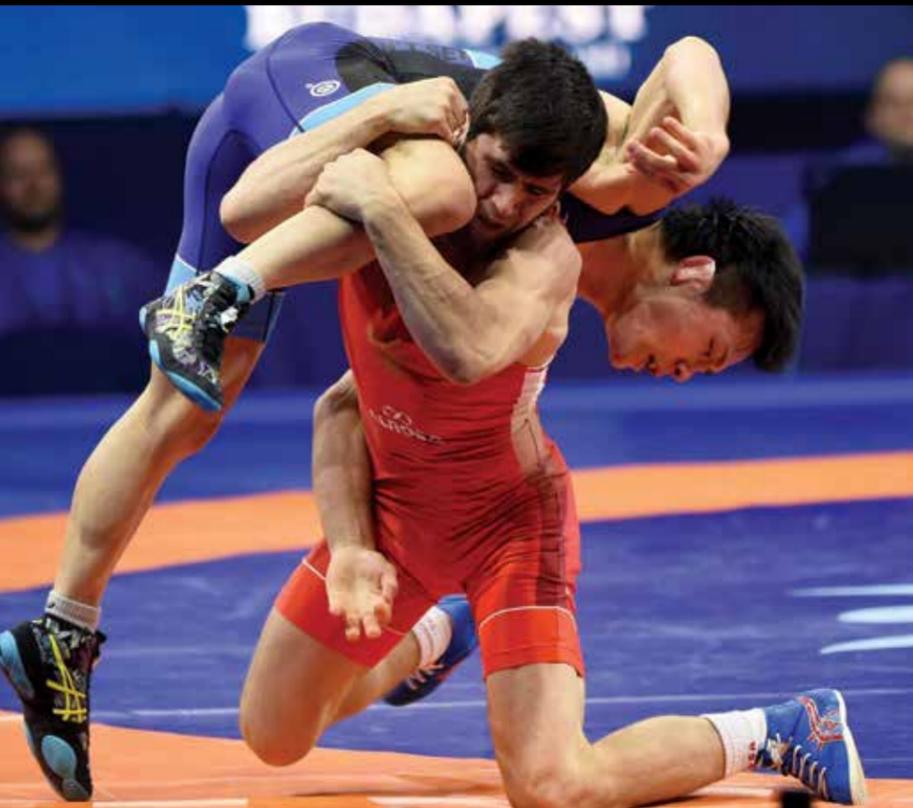
The Olympic and World Champion SHI Zhiyong (CHI) won all three Gold Medals, achieving 5 world records altogether, with 360kg in the Total.



WRESTLING

A 10 gold medal haul at the World Wrestling Championship underlined Russia's supremacy in the sport, dominating both the Men's categories – Freestyle and Greco-Roman disciplines. In the women's competition, Japan bagged four golds which contributed to their overall total of 10. Russian wrestlers also performed well at the Junior World Wrestling Championships where they topped the medal and points tables.

Yuki Takahashi (blue) of Japan and Zaur Uguev of Russia fight in the semifinal of men's freestyle 57 kg category of Wrestling World Championships





Sri Lanka hockey looks to replicate success of the '60s

RANKED 9 OUT OF 20

While it hasn't seen much tangible success over the last year, Sri Lanka's men's hockey team saw some resurgence, qualifying for the Asian Games in August.

At the Asian Games in Jakarta, Sri Lanka won two of their five matches, finishing eighth overall.

This is despite seeing limited development nationwide, as the Sri Lanka Hockey Federation continues to function without an elected administration.

Currently, Sri Lanka men's field hockey team is ranked ninth out of 20 countries in Asia, and 38th among the 91 countries that play hockey. The women's team is ranked 12th from 15 countries, and placed 48th in the world rankings.

Hockey in Sri Lanka originated in state plantations, believed to have been introduced by the British in the 1890s, and taken up by Sri Lanka Army.

The game caught on in the Central Province in Kandy and Matale after 1910, where the game still sees a large interest.



The best era for Sri Lanka Hockey was undoubtedly in the 1960s where several outstanding players emerged. Among them, Herbert and Ranjit Wijekoon, Subash Fernando, Chitra Kumara, Sarath Wimalasinghe, Ranjith Alahakone, who excelled in the men's game, with the likes of Manel Wijekone Wimalarathne, Goti Aluwihare and Kemangani Aluwihare drawing interest in the women's game.

Wijekoon takes a special place in Sri Lanka's hockey history, having once been named in the World team as a representative of Asian countries.

Hockey among schools is forging ahead with tournaments being played annually without a break. The sport which was restricted to Colombo, Kandy and Matale has now spread to other areas of the island as well.

St. Aloysius' College, Galle won the National Schools Games Hockey Championships two times in a row.



NOCSL inspires 31 Federations under its wing

The International Olympic Committee is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement. It acts as a catalyst for collaboration between all parties of the Olympic family, from the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) the International Sports Federations (IFs), the athletes and the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) shepherds success through a wide range of programmes and projects. It supports all affiliated member organisations of the Olympic Movement and strongly encourages, the promotion of the Olympic values. The IOC, according to the Olympic Charter, is to encourage and support the promotion of ethics in sport and the education of youth through sport.

The National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka is closely guided by the IOC and has a team of 12 office bearers-headed by the President of NOCSL, to encourage and maintain 31 Federations covering Olympic sports in Sri Lanka. Good Sport presents the recent achievements of some of our Federations that inspire Olympic sportsmanship in Sri Lanka.





Nilani Rathnayaka in action in the 3000m steeplechase event at Asian Games 2018
Photo: Sameera Peiris

Athletics shows signs of resurgence

If not number one amongst the 64 sports played in the country, athletics can certainly be considered to be one of the oldest.

With a history supposedly dating back over a 100 years, athletics is the only discipline in which Sri Lanka has brought Olympic success.

Athletics in Sri Lanka is said to have commenced in 1896 with the forming of Ceylon Athletics, which gives the multi-discipline sport a history of 122 years, having becoming an affiliated member with the IAAF in 1922.

Athletics has produced numerous medals for Sri Lanka in almost all major competitions the country has taken part in -- from the Olympic Games to the South Asian Games, the Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, Youth Olympic Games and Lusophony Games.

Sri Lanka has also won medals at the World Athletics Championships, World Cup Athletics and Asian Athletics (Senior and Junior) Championships.

Sri Lanka's first medal in the sport came in the year 1948, when Duncan

White won silver in the 400m Hurdles event. 52 years later Sri Lanka won its only other Olympic medal at the Sydney Olympic Games when Susanthika Jayasinghe bagged a silver in the 200m.

Sri Lanka has seen success in the Asian Games, winning 27 medals including 10 gold, 06 silver and 11 bronze medals.

Sri Lanka has also won a gold, silver and bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games. Legendary White won the gold medal at the Auckland Commonwealth Games,

while Sriyani Kulawansa won silver and Sugath Tillekeratne won Bronze at the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Games.

Jayasinghe is also the only athlete to have medaled in the World Athletics Championships, having done so in 1997 and 2007.

Since its inception in 1984 with the Kathmandu Games, the South Asian Games has been the event that Sri Lanka has won the most medals – 1,114 medals in all, with 210 gold, 351 silver and 553 bronze medals.

Sri Lanka's golden era in athletics was undoubtedly between 1990 and 2000. At the SAF Games in 1991 in Colombo, for the first time, Sri Lanka out-medaled India to top the Athletics Championships. That decade was book-ended with the 2000 Sydney Olympics. In between, the likes of Jayasinghe, Sugath Tillekeratne, Sriyani Kulawansa, Damayanthi Dharsha and several prominent athletes, who became national heroes, emerged.

This year has seen Sri Lanka progress in athletics. At the South Asian Junior Athletics meet held in Colombo Sri Lanka won 41 medals – 12 gold, 10 silver and 19 bronze.

The year also saw a total of 19 National Records and 24 Junior National Records being established.

At the 96th National Championships, Long jumper D. A. G. J. Prasad Wimalasiri of Sri Lanka Army was awarded the N. Vyravanathan Memorial Challenge Trophy, for best overall individual performance, for his new meet record in the men's long jump event. He also won the Wilton Bartleet Challenge Trophy for the best performance in Men's events, and also the N. M. Vasagam Challenge Trophy for the best performance in Men's jumping events.

Nilani Ratnayake, who set a new national record in the women's 3000m steeplechase event won the Colombo Canteen Committee Challenge Cup for best achievement in women's events. She also won the Grayline Group Challenge Trophy for best performance in a women's middle-distance event.

Among the top performers were A.L.A.I. Rathnasena of the Sri Lanka Air Force, who was awarded the Duncan White Challenge Cup for the best men's hurdler and D. Sampath Ranasinghe of Sri Lanka Army who was awarded the C.C. Dissanayake Challenge Trophy for the best men's performance in throwing.

The Horlicks Challenge Trophy, given to the best Men's sprinter, went to S. Aruna Darshana of the Sri Lanka Schools Athletics Association while the same award for Women, the Chandi Kannangara Challenge Trophy, was awarded to R. Nadeesha of Sri Lanka Army.

Ushan Thiwanka Perera of Gampaha District Athletics Association, with a jump of 2.18m, was adjudged the best high jump performance and received the Anthony Abeyasinghe Challenge Trophy.

S. A. Lamahewa won the Huxley's Wintogino Challenge Trophy for best long distance performance for women, having won the 5000m event.

The Glucolin Challenge for the best womens' hurdler went to W.V.L.

Sugandi of Sri Lanka Army, while the award for best womens' javelin thrower, the Salonpas Challenge Trophy, went to H.L.N.D. Lekamge also of Sri Lanka Army.

Sri Lanka Army's G.R. Chathuranga won the trophy for best mens' middle distance runner, the Governor General's Cup.

Junior athletes like Shelinda Jansen, Parami Wasanthi, Anura Darshana, Pasindu Kodikara, Amasha de Silva, Dilshi Kumarasinghe, Senuri Amarasinghe and Dilan Bogoda have all shone for Sri Lanka.

At the Asian Junior Athletics Championships held in Japan, Sri Lanka pocketed nine medals – 3 gold, 4 silver and 2 bronze medals – which was Sri Lanka's best effort in the history of this particular event.

For the first time in the history of the Youth Olympics, Sri Lanka won a medal through Parami Wasanthi in the 2000m Steeplechase.



Rumeshika Rathnayake leads in the 200m heat 3 at Asian Games 2018
Photo: Sameera Peiris



Boxing - A consistent medal winning sport

Success in boxing, a sport Sri Lanka has consistently won medals in, is not a new phenomenon.

Sri Lanka has performed well in the sport ever since their maiden appearance at the 1938 Commonwealth Games in Sydney, when A. W. Henricas emerged victorious in the Men's featherweight category.

Thereafter, Sri Lanka secured three medals at the 1950 Commonwealth

Games in Auckland, New Zealand. Albert Perera won a silver medal in the bantamweight, K. Edwin also won a silver medal in the flyweight and A. I. Obeysekera won a bronze medal in the middleweight bout.

Sri Lanka have also won five medals while competing at the Asian Games.

Hemapala Jayasuriya (bantamweight) won a Silver Medal at the 1954 Games in Manila, Philippines, Chandradasa Jayasuriya (lightweight) won a bronze medal at the same meet,

Senarath Jayasuriya (flyweight) won a bronze medal at the 1962 Games in Jakarta, Indonesia, H. S. Caldera (bantamweight) won a bronze medal at the 1978 Games in Bangkok, Thailand and Nimal Perera (flyweight) won a bronze medal at the same meet.

Sri Lanka first participated in an Olympic Games at the 1948 event in London, England with Edi Gray, Leslie Handunge, Aleck Obeysekera and Albert Perera representing the country.

Since then a total of 14 boxers have represented the country at seven Olympic Games.

Sri Lanka fielded two boxers each for the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, 1960 Rome Olympic Games and 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games.

In addition, Sri Lanka fielded one boxer each for the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games and for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

The sport has also grown popular among the schools in the recent past with Vidyartha College, Vidyarathna Piriwena Horana, St. Sylvester's College, Trinity College, Peradeniya MMV, Sri Dherananda MV, Pilimathalawa, Bandaranayake College Veyangoda, Royal College Colombo, Mahanama College Colombo and St. Joseph's College Colombo as the front runners.

Boxing has also grown popular in the mercantile sector with MAS Holdings Group making a great effort to promote the sport through their islandwide network.

MAS Slimline bagged the Men's Championship while Unichela, Panadura clinched the Women's Championship at the 2018 National Boxing Meet.

Meanwhile, Anusha Kodituwakku became the first female boxer to win a medal for Sri Lanka when she won a bronze medal at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia.

Manju Wanniarachchi and Anuradha Ratnayake are the other boxers who have won international medals for Sri Lanka.



Top Right: Thiwanka Ranasinghe wins the round of 16 bout against South African Siyabulela Mphongoshi

Bottom Left: Anusha Kodithuwakku punches Madoka Wada of Japan at Asian Games 2018

Bottom Right: Hansika Kasturiarachchi swings at Kazakhstan's Saniya Sultankyzy at Asian Games 2018

Photos: Thusith Wijedoru





camp was organised with Indian national dragon boat coach Sunil Kewat in charge. The team was picked after comprehensive trials from rowers selected from all four Esquel factories in Sri Lanka – Ja-Ela, Yakkala, Koggala and Kegalle.

The local team finished their quota of four races with two first-placed finishes and two second-places. They were edged out by China (Gaoming) and a team from Vietnam on countback – decided by a few-tenths of a second - and had to settle for third place overall.

“Even though our team finished third we managed to capture the hearts of all with our timing, technique and effort we put into every race. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the team, and they made many new friends and experienced first-hand the excitement of an international competition,” Perera added.

Top Right: Chathura Vishwanath warming up before the race

Middle: Sri Lankan dragon boat team

Bottom: Sri Lankan dragon boat team paddlers in action

Photo: Julie Craminati



Jayasekera and his Argonauts bring the fleece home to Sri Lanka

It wasn't quite Jason and the Argonauts, but a novice Dragon Boat team from Sri Lanka, went in search of their Golden Fleece to China in May. They returned home with a bronze medal and covered in glory.

“They were the first dragon boat team to leave Sri Lanka shores to compete in an international Dragon Boat competition and they won third place while being the underdogs in the event. It is a remarkable feat,” said

a happy Prithi Perera, president of the National Association for Canoeing and Kayaking Sri Lanka (NACKSL).

A team of 30 Sri Lankans went to China to take part in the Esquel Group's 40th anniversary dragon boat competition in Gaoming, Guangdong Province. Nine teams from six countries where Esquel Group has a presence took part in the anniversary celebrations. Four of these teams were taking part for the first time, including Sri Lanka.

“We went as underdogs and to finish with a bronze medal in our first international competition was a massive feat. It wasn't a cakewalk as a lot of hard work and preparation went into it. But I always had faith in the team as I knew our strength was technique and synchronisation,” said elated captain Achintha Jayasekera.

The local association joined hands with Esquel and launched the sport in Sri Lanka with an eye on taking part in this event. A three-month training





Cycling has grown into a medal-winning sport

A popular sport primarily in rural Sri Lanka, cycling has quickly grown into a sport with medal prospects for the country.

The first major cycling competition was held in 1950 under the patronage of former Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawela, and was worked off from Galle Face to High Level Road. The event was won by D. K. Gunaratne.

The national cycling governing body has seen many changes since its inauguration as the Cycling Association in 1955 before being renamed as the Sri Lanka Cycling Union. It became the Cycling

Federation of Sri Lanka (CFSL) in the 1970s.

Cycling first gained popularity with the organizing of the Tour De Lanka race which was initiated in 1960. The first winner of the Tour De Lanka Race was Jinadasa Alwis. Thereafter, several top riders emerged from the Tour De Lanka race including Maurice Coomarawell, Boniface Perera, A. M. Sumanaweera and the Henderson brothers.

The current President of the CFSL N. Karunaratne also had the honour of finishing among the top three in the Tour De Lanka Race.

However, only Coomarawell had the credit of participating in an Olympic Games cycling event, having done so at the 1960 games in Rome.

Despite not producing an Olympic medalist as yet, cycling has received many honours at Asian level.

Sri Lanka won a bronze medal at the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok through the efforts of Trevor de Silva. Sri Lanka has also won nine gold medals at the South Asian Games. Further the Nation also emerged victors in the Men's Team Championship at the Pakistan International Cycling Tour held in 2000.

More recently, Jeewan Jayasinghe of the Sri Lanka Air Force emerged as the fastest sprinter at the 2016 South Asian Games in India. There are nearly 200 riders who possess a licence from the federation while there are over 1,000 riders who are unregistered.

The leading riders (men) in the country are Jeewan Jayasinghe, Buddhika Warnakulasuriya, Avishka Madonza, Dane Nugera and Darshana Prasad. Among women riders the top competitors are Panchali Sulochana, Dinesha Dilrukshi, Sudarika Priyadarshani and Madushani Priyadarshani.

The T-Cup Cycle Tour is the only international event held annually in Sri Lanka. In addition, the Nationals (junior and senior), Tour De Air Force and the SLT Speed-up Race was also held this year.



Riders from Sri Lanka's biggest cycling event, The T-Cup which consist of 335km ride in 3 days

Photo: ThePapare.Com





Sri Lankan footballer Afeel Mohamed in yellow against Lithuania

“Vision Football 2030” to reverse poor national fortunes

Football remains a sport that Sri Lanka lags in when compared to the rest of the world, sitting among the bottom ranked teams.

Sri Lanka is said to have a football history dating back to the 1890s, but it was not until 1939 that the Football Federation of Sri Lanka (FFSL) was founded.

The FFSL became a member of the world governing body Federation International De Football Association

(FIFA) in 1952 and two years later became a member of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Sri Lanka also became a member of the South Asian Football Federation (SAAF) in 1997.

Sri Lanka is currently ranked 201 in the world, having moved up to 199 earlier in the year.

To revive the fortunes of the national team, the FFSL in February drafted in a highly rated local coach, Rummy

Packeerali, as head coach. Sri Lanka has played six international fixtures since – four friendlies and two competitive matches in the SAFF Cup 2018 in Bangladesh.

In the SAFF Cup, Sri Lanka drew with eventual champions Maldives 0-all, and then lost to India, who were also finalists, 2-0.

Two of the friendly matches came against a representative team from Lithuania – resulting in a 0-all draw

and 0-2 defeat for Sri Lanka – while they beat Bangladesh 1-0 in another friendly.

There was also a 1-4 defeat to Malaysia, in a friendly played in Colombo.

Despite this lack of success, club football is widely played, among men and women island-wide, with some 700 clubs participating in the four major men's tournaments – the FA Cup, the Dialog Champions League and the Premier League division one and two respectively.

FFSL has however, drawn up an exhaustive plan for the future titled 'Football for Everyone – Vision 2030', hoping to make it one of the top sports in the country and make Sri Lanka a competitive force in world football.



Top: Asela Madushan in yellow against Malaysia
Bottom: Asikur Rahuman challenging Lithuania
Photo: Sameera Peiris





Sachin De Silva in action at the Asian Games 2018
Photo: Thusith Wijedoru

Greenways' new heroes

Golf in Sri Lanka was inaugurated in the year 1896 through the Royal Colombo Golf Club (RCGC).

The sport has thrice been included in an Olympic Games – Paris (1900), St. Lucia (1904) and Rio (2016) – though Sri Lanka are yet to feature at that level.

The sport was initially played in and around the suburbs of Colombo but later it became a popular event in Kandy and in Nuwara Eliya.

Now the sport has grown fast and it is played among the three armed-forces as well.

The Sri Lanka Golf Union (SLGU) was established in the year 1949 and it became an affiliated member of the International Golf Federation in 2012. There are over 1,000 golfers registered with the SLGU.

The RCGC is one of the oldest golf clubs in the world and has a history of over 140 years.

The Sri Lanka Amateur Golf Championship is considered as one of the major international events with several overseas golfers also vying for honours.

Sri Lanka's international success in the event is limited to two silver medals won at Asian Games level.

Nandasena Perera Silver won a Silver Medal at the 1990 Beijing Games and Anura Rohitha also won a silver medal at the 2002 Busan Games.

In addition, Sachin de Silva, Amrith Soysa, Lalith Kumara and Sisira Kumara participated at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta, Indonesia.

There are few talented female golfers in the country as well with schoolgirls Tanya Balasuriya and Kela Perera at the fore.

The current National Golf Pool comprise of 15 men and two women. The SLGU conducted a total of 14 National level events in addition to five international events.

There are no golf events conducted at Inter-Schools level but there are several schoolboys and schoolgirls who are associated with the sport.



Top: Royal Colombo Golf Club - Club Championship 2018 winners, Rusi Captain & Kayla Perera
Bottom Left: Sisira Kumara
Bottom Right: Amrith De Soysa
Photo: Thusith Wijedoru





Revamping handball to achieve greater heights

Considered the second fastest sport in the world and one of the most popular sports in Europe, handball has had a relatively short history in Sri Lanka.

It was introduced by Hemasiri Ferando, Secretary of Defence and immediate past President of National Olympic Committee, in 2009, who served as its first President.

Major General Dampath Fernando the incumbent President of National

Handball Federation was the first General Secretary and together initially introduced this sport to Tri Services and Sri Lanka Prison Department as a stepping stone and subsequently popularized among other stakeholders over the past few years.

Major General Fernando initiated this tourney in order to develop and popularize this sport in Sri Lanka, especially attracting youth to take up this sport.

The 'Sri Lanka Handball Fiesta 2018', the first of its kind perhaps in the whole of handball history of Sri Lanka organized at Panagoda Indoor Stadium Sri Lanka culminated earlier this month, with the participation of 24 clubs. The overall Championship was won by the Army in both women's and men's category.



Laser-Run duo make Sri Lanka proud at World Championships

Asanka Nilaweera and Suresh Kelum did Sri Lanka proud finishing in seventh and 10th positions respectively at the 2018 Laser-Run World Championships in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland in September.

The pair representing Sri Lanka, which was appearing for the first time in a world-class modern pentathlon competition, were unfazed by the historic occasion as they both finished in the top 10 beating several more

experienced athletes from top-ranking countries in Dublin.

The two members of the Sri Lanka Armed Forces – Nilaweera is with the Sri Lanka Air Force and Kelum with the Sri Lanka Army – lived up to their reputation as two of the best athletes locally as they more than held their own among 450 competitors from 20 countries.

Nilaweera and Kelum were the top two performers at the last Laser-Run

City Tour event held in Bandaragama in August and had been consistently finishing at the top in previous City Tour events held in 2017 and 2018 under the auspices of the national governing body, the Modern Pentathlon Federation of Sri Lanka (MPFSL).

“It is a proud moment for both these athletes as well as for the Federation which was only established three years ago,” said Nishanthe Piyasena, MPFSL President.

“Since 2015, we have held four global laser-run events in Sri Lanka covering rural areas like Dehiowita, Bandaragama. Under the guidance of the International Federation

(UIPM), we also conducted a training programme for coaches in April with 20 coaches obtaining a Level 1 certificate.”

“The Federation is now looking forward to start islandwide workshops to propagate the sport with the help of the Ministry of Sport and support from the National Olympic Committee so that we can produce elite athletes capable of winning medals internationally,” Piyasena added.

The Laser-Run is a new creation of the UIPM and launched in 2015 combining the last two events in modern pentathlon which is shooting and cross-country running. In

Laser-Run, there are four rounds of laser pistol shooting and four rounds of running. Athletes shoot a designated target until they register five successful hits, or for 50 seconds, whichever comes first. Then they will run a round of 800 metres. They repeat this until all four rounds in both events are completed.

Modern Pentathlon is an Olympic sport and the other three events athletes participate in are fencing, freestyle swimming and equestrian show jumping. Since the latter event is prohibitive to most countries, an abridged version has been created – Laser-Run.





Sri Lankan roller-skaters take on the best in Asia

With the participation of four roller-skaters at the Asian Games, 2018 has been a year of progress for the National Roller-Skating Association of Sri Lanka.

Accompanied by two coaches, this was the first time Sri Lanka competed in an international games in the sport of roller-skating.

At the Asian Games, Japan topped the medal table, winning three gold medals out of the six events that were held, while Chinese Taipei won two

gold, and Philippines won the other. Japan won five medals in total, two more than Taipei who finished with the second most medals.

The National and Junior National Championships were held in November with the participation of almost 280 roller-skaters. The two main events were won by Lasantha Pramuditha of Torrential Sports Club who won the Men's national event and Samithri Maleesha Perera of Pepena Kekulu Sports Club who won the women's event.





Top: Danushka Ranjan beats the Welsh defense to score the try

Photos: Sameera Peiris

So close but yet so far

Borneo 7s – March 2018 (Sandakan, Malaysia)

Sri Lanka 7s team was off to a flyer in 2018 with the Borneo 7s in Malaysia. The 'Tuskers' led by Sudarshana Muthuthanthri, showcased a stunning display thumping a record 80 – 00 score line against the Islanders Rugby Club from Malaysia.

The Tuskers prevailed 12 – 00 in a testing physical battle against a much fancied Sabah Eagles on day two. As a result Sri Lanka locked horns against the 2017 champions and the hosts, Borneo Eagles. Despite a commendable performance in terms of skill, pace and tackling Sri Lanka fell short 12 – 17.

Next in line was a bronze medal clash with the Asian rivals Hong Kong. A Sudam Sooriarachchi try came a little too late as the Tuskers went down 17 – 20.

Commonwealth Games – April 2018 (Gold Coast, Australia)

Commonwealth Games gives the rare opportunity for Sri Lanka to showcase her talent against the best in the world. The opening game saw the Tuskers stun Olympic Gold Medalists Fiji with a Danushka Ranjan solo try within the first 30 seconds. However, the scoreboard didn't do justice at the end as it read 63 – 05 in favour of Fiji. Ben Ryan a former Fiji 7s coach was amazed with Sri Lanka's performance

despite the big loss. Unfortunately Sri Lanka went down fighting against Wales (12 – 42) and Uganda (10 – 33) and failed to qualify for the knock-out stage despite Ranjan scoring the first try in all three games.

Paris World Games – July 2018 (Paris, France)

Considered a precursor for the Asian Games, with a few new faces Sri Lanka won the championship in Paris albeit the standard of competition did not reach the desired levels.

Asian Games – August 2018 (Jakarta, Indonesia)

It was a case of so close but yet so far as Sri Lanka missed out on a golden opportunity of an unprecedented

medal following the 10 – 12 defeat to Asian power house Japan in the semi-finals. The semi-final clash seemed to have taken a toll as Sri Lanka succumbed to a 14 – 36 defeat at the hands of South Korea.

Asian Sevens Series – (September / October)

The series that originated in 2009 consists of three (3) rounds. Srinath Sooriyabandara led the team for the first time in Hong Kong and the Tuskers finished an impressive third. A much improved Philippines team predominantly fielding foreign based players (meeting the World Rugby criteria of eligibility) overcame Sri Lanka twice, first for a fifth place finish in South Korea with a 17 - 19 outcome and thereafter winning 07 - 19 in Colombo for a bronze medal finish. A disappointing showing in South Korea and the set back in the Colombo leg meant that overall Sri Lanka had to be content with a placing behind Philippines, Hong Kong and the Champions Japan.



Top: Danush Dayan snipes through Uganda at the CWG 2018

Bottom: Srinath Sooriyabandara finds space in the Fiji defence at the CWG 2018

Photos: Sameera Peiris





Randhika Kumudumali beat Singapore defence
Photo: Sameera Peiria



Speedster Dulani Pallikondage in action
Photo: Sameera Peiria



Ayesha Perera went through the gate for a try
Photo: Sameera Peiria

The women's team which won the first ever silverware as Champions of Borneo 7s in 2017 could not repeat the performance in 2018. However captain Randhika Kumudumali's team managed to gain bronze medal honours.

Leadership reigns were handed over to veteran Navy player Sandika Hemakumari for the Asian Seven's Series. Sri Lanka finished fifth in all three legs beating Thailand thrice in the 5th / 6th play-off. The scores read 22 - 10, 22 - 05 and 07 - 05 respectively. Bridging the disparity with the top four Asian teams remain a herculean task.



Charani Theekshana escaped Hong Kong players
Photo: Sameera Peiria



Thanuja Weerakkodi in action against Hong Kong
Photo: Sameera Peiria



Harshana Godamanna - Recipient of Davis Cup Commitment award this year for representing SL in over 50 ties with distinction

Youth to the fore on tennis courts

Sri Lankan tennis saw a resurgence of youth in 2018, excelling in local and international competition.

The national tennis calendar commenced with the men and women participating in the prestigious Davis Cup and Federation Cup, the annual World Championships for tennis, in February.

Sri Lanka were without the services of Harshana Godamanna, the country's highest ranked Men's ITF/ATP

player, for the first tie of the Davis Cup against Thailand, so the onus was on two younger players, Sharmal Dissanayake and Yasitha de Silva to carry the team forward.

Harshana was awarded the Davis Cup Commitment award, by the International Tennis Federation for his dedicated service towards the competition. He had represented Sri Lanka at 50 Davis Cup ties.

After the two opening singles rubbers were split – Dissanayake won while

de Silva lost to Thailand's number one player – team captain Rohan de Silva chose the same two players for the doubles tie and they pulled off a sensational win to give Sri Lanka a 2-1 lead. Unfortunately Dissanayake was unable to feature in the reverse singles, with Alex Fairbanks stepping in. Fairbanks and de Silva lost their rubbers, which saw Sri Lanka lose the tie 2-3.

That meant Sri Lanka had to face a strong Indonesia in a relegation play-off, and buoyed by the presence



From top left: Anika Seneviratne - ITF ranked National Triple Champion, led our Fed Cup and Asian Games campaigns this year, Sharmal Dissanayake - Men's ATP ranked, won a National Double & led our Davis Cup and Asian Games, teams Anjalika Kurera - National runner-up, Asian Games 2018, Thangarajah Dineshkanthan - National (Clay Court) Champion & Alana Seneviratne - National Doubles Champion
Photos: Kamal Wanniarachchi & Thishan Dissanayake

of Godamanna, Sri Lanka took an early lead. But after losing the second singles, doubles and reverse singles matches Sri Lanka were defeated 1-3 and relegated to Group 3 for next year's competition.

In the Fed Cup, Sri Lanka were in Asia/Oceania Group 2, and after beating Lebanon and Bahrain, went down to Indonesia and Pakistan. In the tie that could have potentially earned Sri Lanka a berth in the semi-finals, Anika Seneviratne gave her team an early lead beating Ushna

Suhail, but the Pakistanis levelled the tie through Mahin Qureshi, who beat Nethmi Waduge. Sri Lanka then fielded a makeshift doubles pairing, of Seneviratne and Waduge, who lost the deciding rubber which meant they could only finish in ninth.

The rapid growth of tennis at grass roots level was evident by the number of participants at the numerous ranking tournaments organized by Sri Lanka Tennis Association and affiliated members.



Yasitha De Silva in action



The 103rd Nationals was dominated by Sri Lanka's two top Men's and Women's players, 24-year-old Dissanayake and 16-year-old Seneviratne.

Dissanayake defended the hard court title he won in 2017 beating Dineshkanthan Thangarajah in straight sets before teaming up with Alex Fairbanks to add the doubles title.

Seneviratne, partnering her sister, 15-year-old Alana in the Women's Doubles, defended the title she won last year. The teenage sisters created history in the process by becoming the first sisters to win a Senior National title which followed their Colombo Championships Clay Court title. Anika also successfully defended the Mixed Doubles title partnering Thangarajah for the third year in succession.

As a result she claimed a prestigious Triple Crown at the 103rd Nationals.

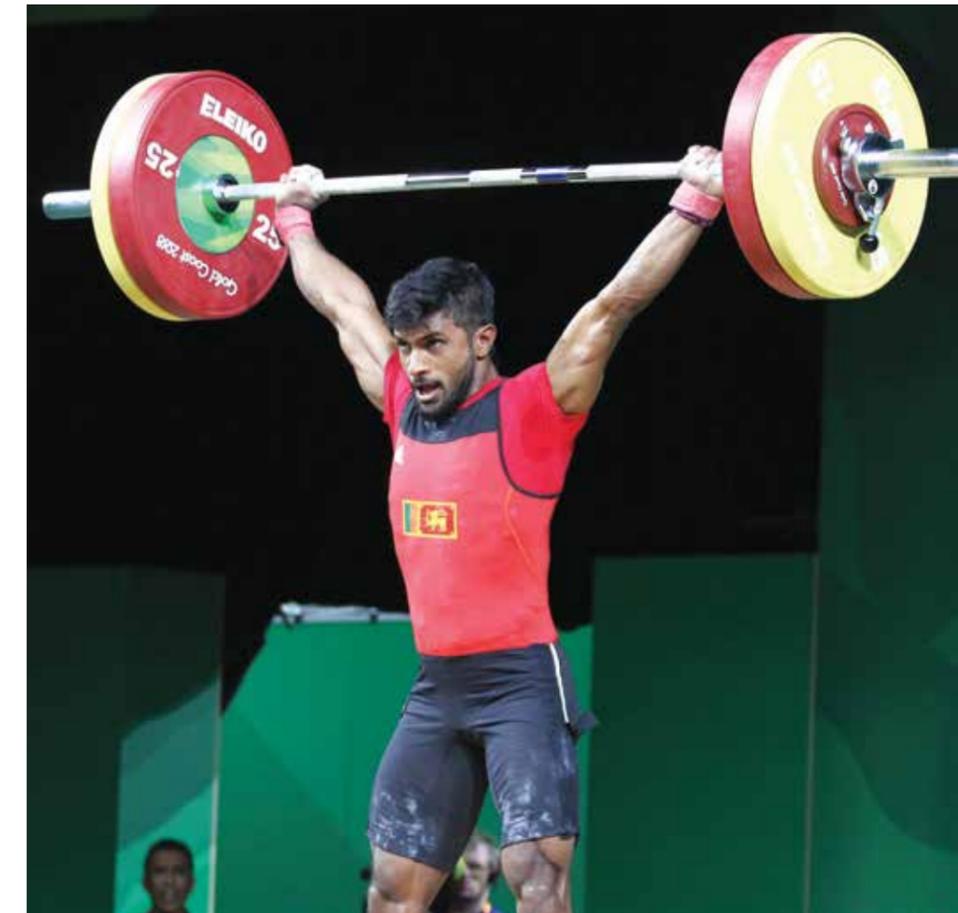
Anika and Alana now have the distinction of having won every age group and the Open title in Doubles at the Nationals, whilst Anika has the distinction of achieving a similar record in the singles event as well.

In the Clay Court Nationals, Seneviratne won the Women's Singles title and Thangarajah took the Men's Singles and Doubles titles with a superb display of controlled, power tennis. Neither one of them dropped a set and were in total control during the two week tournament. Thangarajah beat top seed Sanka Athukorala 7/6, 6/3 In the final. He then teamed up with Sanjeev Mohankumar to overcome Delwar Hussain and Rohan De Silva 6/4, 6/2 to clinch the doubles.

Seneviratne meanwhile, became the first player, men or women, to win the clay and hard court national titles in the same year.

Thangarajah won the SSC Men's Singles title but lost the final of the Colombo Championship to Dassanayake in a thriller that last more than four hours. 14-year-old Anjalika Kurera made waves with a superb effort to win both the SSC and Colombo Championships Women's Singles titles. She was the runner up in the National women's singles.





Top Right: Chaturanga Lakmal won a Bronze medal (56kg) at the CWG 2018
Bottom Left: Dinusha Gomes first female weightlifting medalist for Sri Lanka after she won the Bronze (48kg) at CWG 2018
Bottom Right: Indika Dissanayake won a Silver medal (69kg) at CWG 2018
Photo: Thusith Wijedoru

clinched the 62kg title at the 2006 Games in Melbourne, Australia.

Widanage also bagged the silver medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, India while Sudesh Peiris won a Bronze Medal at the same event.

In addition, Peiris won a silver medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games held in Glasgow, Scotland.

At the 2018, Commonwealth Games held in Gold Coast, Australia, Indika Dissanayake won a silver medal while Chaturanga Lakmal and Hansani Gomes won a bronze Medal each.

Gomes is the first ever female weightlifter to win an international medal for Sri Lanka while competing in a Women's event.

Sri Lanka have also won several medals at South Asian Games (SAG) and the first weightlifter to win a gold medal in a SAG was Wijewickrema at the 1991 Games held in Colombo.

After the 1991 SAG, the sport began to spread across the Western Province and also throughout the North Western Province.

The Senior Nationals and the Junior Nationals are the two main events in the weightlifting calendar and this is the only sport in the country which maintains a National Pool throughout the year.

Weightlifting charts a course towards international success

Following the success of Chinthana Widanage at the 2010 Commonwealth Games, weightlifting has quickly become a sport that promises more medals for Sri Lanka.

Introduced at the Colombo YMCA almost 70 years ago, it was taken forward by the three armed forces, police and universities.

Sri Lanka participated unofficially in several international weightlifting

events in the 1970s, before the first official representation came in 1982 when three competitors took part in Asian Games in New Delhi, India.

Sri Lanka have also participated in four Olympic Games with Sunil Silva becoming the first weightlifter to represent the country at the 1984 Los Angeles Games.

Thereafter, Asela Wijewickrema represented Sri Lanka at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and

Widanage represented the country at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

In addition, Sudesh Peiris had the honour of representing the country at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Sri Lanka have won seven medals at Commonwealth Games including one gold, three silver and three bronze.

Widanage brought honour by winning the only Commonwealth Games gold medal for Sri Lanka when he





Akalanka Peiris in action on 4x100m freestyle

Top: Matthew Abeysinghe dives in the Asian Games 2018

Photo: Sameera Peiris

Bottom: Vinoli Kaluarachchi participated in the 100m freestyle event at the Commonwealth Games 2018

Photo: Peter H. Bick

Menaka de Silva (2004 Athens), Daniel Lee and Mayumi Raheem (2008 Beijing), Heshan Unamboowe and Rasika Udugampola (2012 London), and Matthew Abeysinghe and Kimiko Raheem (2016 Rio).

In addition, Janaka Biyanwela participated in diving events at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games.

Sri Lankan swimmers have dominated the South Asian Games since its inception in 1984 with Bolling leading the front.

Bolling won a total of 15 gold medals in the South Asian Games from 1984 to 1991.

He won a total of six gold medals at the 2006 South Asian Games which is another unique achievement.



Yet in search of elusive Olympic success

Although swimming has a large participation in the country, and despite several big names emerging, Sri Lankan swimmers have excelled only at South Asian level.

Sri Lankan swimmers have earned a high reputation for their outstanding performances in South Asian Championships and currently they are ranked second in this region.

Sri Lanka made their maiden appearance in an Olympic Games

when Alan Smith and Geoffrey Mark represented the country at the 1952 Helsinki Games.

Smith participated in diving while Mark participated in swimming. However, both competitors were not Sri Lankans by birth.

Thereafter, Tony Williams another non-Sri Lankan represented the country at the 1960 Rome Olympic Games.

Julian Bolling was the first Sri Lankan-born swimmer to represent

the country in an Olympic Games when he participated at the 1984 Games in Los Angeles, USA. Bolling has the unique honour of representing the country in three Olympic Games when he participated in the 1984 (Los Angeles), 1988 (Seoul) and 1992 (Barcelona) editions.

The other swimmers who have represented the country in Olympic Games are Conrad Francis and Theekshana Ratnasekera (2000 Sydney), Francis and



Sri Lanka 4x100m freestyle relay team from left:

Cherantha De Silva, Akalanka Peiris, Matthew Abeysinghe & Kyle Abeysinghe at the Asian Games 2018

Photo: Sameera Peiris

However, his achievement was bettered by Matthew Abeysinghe who won seven gold medals, two silver medals and a bronze medal at the 2016 South Asian Games.

Deepika Chanmugam has been one of the outstanding women swimmers winning a medal at the first South Asian Games in Kathmandu, Nepal.

She also went on to represent country at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

Chanmugam was first Sri Lankan female swimmer to represent the island in an international event.

Sri Lanka's participation at Olympic Games has been mainly due to the Wild Card system from 1952 to 2012.

After Chanmugam, the best female swimmers to emerge from Sri Lanka are sisters Mayumi Raheem and Kimiko Raheem.

Kimiko won five gold medals and one silver medal at the 2016 South Asian Games in India.

Meanwhile, sea swimming in Ambalangoda, Mount Lavinia and the Fish Tails Swimming events are very popular in the island.



Left: Suresh Subramaniam, President of NOC handover the MOU to Kushil Gunasekera (L) **Right:** Muttiah Muralitharan and Kumar Sangakkara signing the MOU



Foundation of goodness joins hands with NOC

Bridging the gap between the urban and rural

By Saabir Cader

Foundation of Goodness (FoG) signed a memorandum with the National Olympic Committee (NOC) to harness and enhance training and development in the rural talent. The signing took place at the Olympic House on 5th December 2018.

FoG, through their 'Unconditional Compassion' with a holistic approach to bridging the gap between the urban and rural sector in Sri Lanka is empowering over 35000 lives in over 200 villages free of cost. The FoG's sports academy in Seenigama was developed post-tsunami with the involvement of our cricketing legends in the likes of Muttiah Muralitharan, Russel Arnold, Mahela Jayawardena and Kumar Sangakkara along with Ashan Malasekera, Rohan Iriyagolla, Pratheepan Karunakaran who are the trustees for the founder Kushil Gunasekera.

Founder and the Chief Trustee of FoG, Kushil Gunasekera said, "I'm really

pleased and delighted that we were able to enter in to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the National Olympic Committee which is a landmark achievement.

"This will give us lot of encouragement, confidence and belief that we can do better, hopefully will take the sports arena in to another level in the years to come with the backing of the NOC."

President of the NOC Suresh Subramaniam said, "Sports is the only thing that does not have any barriers such as caste, creed or race. NOC is very happy to join hands with legends like Muttiah Muralitharan, Mahela Jayawardena and Kumar Sangakkara who had brought Sri Lanka great pride and honour."

"The hard work done by Kushil and Ashan made me believe joining hands with FoG, we can pursue the goal that the NOC had after the new committee

took over this year to produce Olympic medalists in the future.

"Therefore, both NOC and FoG will work together on this mission for the betterment of Sri Lankan sports."

Meanwhile, Kumar Sangakkara said "We are very grateful to Mr. Suresh Subramaniam, Mr. Maxwell De Silva, Mr Asanga Seneviratne and the rest of the National Olympic Committee for having the faith that the Foundation of Goodness can deliver on the ideas that was founded upon, bridging the gap between urban and rural youth of Sri Lanka and to ensure that the rural youth of all parts of Sri Lanka are given the best facilities and best opportunities to further the talents to become productive members of Sri Lankan society."

POINT OF VIEW

Is your child the next Sanga?

Guyanga Weerasekera

A veteran tennis pro, Guyanga Weerasekera has an MBA from Loughborough University and was a member of the senior team. He represented Sri Lanka at the 2009 Davis Cup competition and was ranked 390 in the ITF junior world ranking. He was the national number one in the U-18 category from 2007-09. He is a keen golfer with a handicap of 13.

Kumar Sangakkara, Tiger Woods and Roger Federer need no special introduction. All of them are incredible world champions in their respective sports. It is common knowledge that they have achieved the status they hold now with hours of desire, dedication, determination, and discipline.

We have all heard about these traits before. We have heard how each champion had to 'work hard' to be the world's best. However, the focus of this article does not revolve around how important it is to put in the thousand hours of hard work. It is simply that every champion athlete, Olympic gold medalist, World Cup winner and World Record holder all started out in life as 'a kid with a dream'.

No champion emerged victorious as a virtue of birthright as each victory had to be earned. In the recorded history of the PGA tour, there have been only nine father-son pairs who have recorded tournament victories, while on the ATP tennis tour only Phil and Taylor Dent have achieved this feat and when Mitch Marsh won the 2015 Cricket World Cup, he and Geoff became the first father-son duo to win the highest prize of the sport. So as history suggests, talent or greatness is definitely not inherited. So then, what gives?

In the age of easily accessible media streams, children have the comfort of following every move of sports stars and watching their previous performances on the internet. Thus, they have no shortage of 'material for

inspiration'. This is crucial, especially at a young age, to see an athlete break Usain Bolt's 9.58s or to watch Dinesh Karthik's last-ball 6 against Bangladesh that won his team the Nidahas Trophy.

Such substance provides children the euphoria and the material to 'dream'. In Sri Lanka, watching cricket requires no additional effort. But say your nine-year old has recently been selected to the school Under 11 football or athletics team, exposing the child to watching a Ronaldo free kick or a watching that glorious Susanthika moment in Sydney would ignite the spark of inspiration that would eventually be the foundation for the success of the child's sporting prowess.

It is also important for such inspiration to be somewhat relevant in a local context. While it may benefit the child if parents are able to fly the child to London to watch Federer at Wimbledon, it would be even more effective to watch Harshana Godammana battle out a Davis Cup match in the Colombo heat against Vietnam.

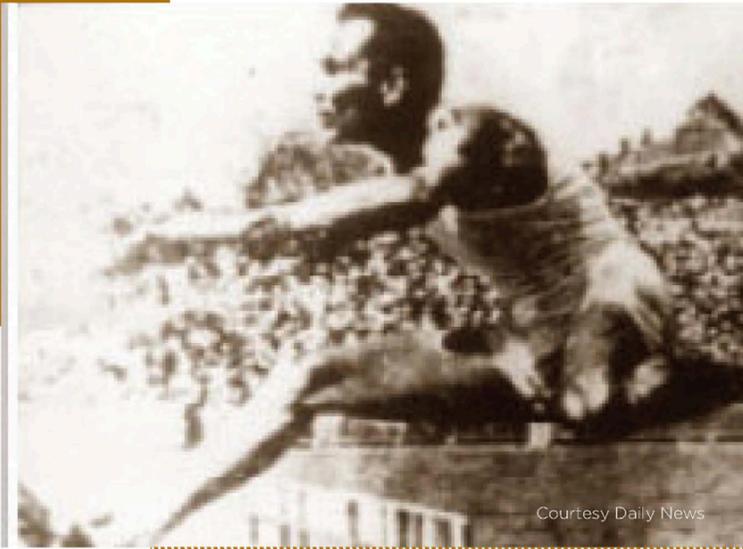
Such exposure is deemed necessary as the child is able to relate to the situation more closely than at Wimbledon. It is a similar situation when accompanying your child to watch the Asian Rugby 7s at the Race Course Grounds or watching basketball's Colombo Super League. Sri Lanka is a sporty nation and most events, barring cricket, can be watched for free.

The importance of bringing up a 'worry-free kid' is essential for peak performance. Unfortunately, it is parental nature to compare your child to his or her closest rival. Through my experience, both as a competitor and coach, it is very common to hear the words "Look at him, why can't you beat him? You are better than him". These words create worry in the child-athlete's mind, who then focuses on beating an individual as opposed to training themselves to go through the process of what is in their control.

As a parent, it would be more effective to compare your child to a benchmark athlete as it would put less pressure on the child as well. It is more effective to say, "This is what Michael Phelps' diet comprises of" or "Tiger Woods practices hitting a 1000 golf balls a

day; can you see how much effort is required to be the best?"

Kids will always be kids. 'Fun' will be the focal point of their day, and it is through 'fun' that the child athlete will continue to love the game and continue to be motivated. However, it is the responsibility of the coach and parents to draw the line between fun and priorities. When Tiger Woods was just five, his first golf instructor Rudy Duran, famously said, "To me, the family was raising a child, not a golfer. The golf was just something he had an aptitude for. There was no mistake that the parents made the rules and kids followed the rules, but it wasn't a harsh environment. It seemed quite normal. Homework came first, golf came second, end of story."



Courtesy Daily News

The Last Shot

Duncan White Sri Lanka's first Olympic medal winner

By C Vijitha Fernando

Deshamanya Major Duncan White's 100th birth anniversary and 20th death anniversary were celebrated earlier this year.

Born in Lathpandura, Badureliya in the Kalutara District, White did not however, live to see his dream realize.

In a Press interview on February 25, 1992 White, Sri Lanka's first Olympic medal winner said, "I hope someone will win an Olympic medal before my death". It was only in the year 2000 that an Olympic medal was won by a Sri Lankan after a lapse of 52 years.

White was an exceptional sportsman and excelled particularly in athletics, and was a skilled 400 metre hurdler. In his career as an athlete

he demonstrated discipline, respect, humbleness and above all as an exemplary sportsman, as many of his colleagues at Trinity College, Kandy and friends would attest.

Duncan had his education at Trinity College where he received Trinity's coveted "Lion" even before gaining school "colours" for his record breaking performances at Public Schools Championships. He left Trinity College in 1937 and was commissioned to the Ceylon Light Infantry in 1942. Duncan's outstanding achievement at the 1948 Olympics prompted the Government to award him a scholarship to Loughborough University.

Duncan's remarkable effort in racing to the silver medal in the 400 metre hurdles event at the 1948 XIXth Olympic Games held in London was an achievement unmatched for over 65 years and it took 52 years for Sri Lanka to gain Olympic recognition

as no Sri Lankan came close to an Olympic prospect.

The Duncan White Sports Foundation was founded on March 01, 1990 on his 72nd Birthday on the initiative of former Minister Milinda Moragoda and Civil Servant James H. Lanerolle, Counselor at the Sri Lanka Embassy in Washington DC. These two met in an exclusive restaurant in Washington DC in 1988 and in their eagerness to recognize a Sri Lankan, other than a politician, came up with the name of Duncan White.

The distinguished personalities that rallied to honour Duncan with a Foundation in his name, gave Dual Citizenship status and a National Award of a "Deshamanya" were also exceptional people. If they weren't, Duncan would not have enjoyed the recognition he deserved after more than six decades.



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