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# GoodSport

December 2022



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# GoodSport

Commonwealth Edition  
December 2022





## FOREWORD

# SURESH SUBRAMANIAM

PRESIDENT - NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE OF SRI LANKA

## SIZING UP THE CHALLENGES IN ITS OWN PERSPECTIVE

It is five years since the present administration of the National Olympic Committee has become the shepherds of Olympic related sports and its administrations. Hence, it is time that we took an inner look at the competitive exchanges and take stock of the road ahead. Yes, the road ahead might become a bit more challenging yet the wagon has to move on, nonetheless in this unforgiving and ever changing sports environment it is high time we too become willing partners of his humongous task of accomplishment.

In this tiny island of splendour, we have 72 sports of which 35 are recognised by the International Olympic Committee. Ironically sparing two or three entities, none of the other Sports Federations even have an administrative headquarters to have a smooth flow in accomplishing their day-to-day chores. Most of them perform their duties from their private residences and have their meetings at restaurants and private clubs yet they function through sheer dedication for the sake of the sport in which they had been a part of at one point of time in history. They are volunteers who love the game, but they are being served with a different spoon.

The onus should be shouldered by the high office of the Ministry of Sports – the keepers of the castle. If the government could provide an answer to this seeming stumbling block a lot of other miseries could be resolved.

As a responsible administrative unit the National Olympic Committee is more than ready to resolve this anomaly if the incumbent government could provide us with a suitable location.

The responsibilities and the services provided by these volunteers cannot be measured by any yardstick. In spite of being volunteers, they are taken for granted and treated shabbily. Mind you if one dreadful day they all decide to pack their bags; the entire sports wagon may come to a standstill. Yes, there may be some bad eggs in this mix that not every volunteer administrator should go into one basket.

Under these pitiful circumstances how could one expect to produce international class sports men or women on a regular basis? To take that big leap forward we still lack the required basics. Intrinsically for a sport to grow healthy, the foundation should be strong and solid. To be competitive internationally, one must move ahead with the digitalization of the sport and competition. Tennis is a shining example. Since their digitalization and automation in 2018, the junior under 12, under 14 and under 16 competition began to yield, they began to win regularly and now they are in the qualifying round. Now they have passed that wildcard stage, in the next stage they are looking at its international exposure. We need international competition, but, owing to the current status of the country no one looks forward to being a part of the Lankan international circuit.

For instance, the popularity of athletics in Sri Lanka is huge. But, sadly we hardly have any

competitions; the only competition in athletics may be the contest to hold office. During the past ten years what have we done? Let us face the truth that is bitter.

On paper it is very easy to draw-up short term, mid-term and long term plans. It is just a piece of paper. Initially I encouraged the notion of participation, we were of the opinion that every sport should be represented at all possible international events. We have followed suit for the past four years. Now in the fifth year we have changed our goal post. Now it is not automatic participation, now we will include only athletes who can win at that level. We will include only athletes who have proved that they have the capability of winning at the highest level.

One reason is we do not want to take huge contingents and at the same time the country is experiencing financial constraints. Also we want each federation to put their heart and soul to see them enhance their level of competitiveness. The freebie is now over; we will be very stringent at the coming Asian Games in China.



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Joseph Kenny

Niloo Jayathilaka

Suranjith Premadasa

Kanchana Jayarathna

#### TREASURER

Gamini Jayasinghe

#### GOODSPORT

#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

S. R. Pathiravithana

#### CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS

S. R. Pathiravithana

Yasodara Dunuwille Koralege

#### CONTRIBUTORS

S. R. Pathiravithana

Yasodara Dunuwille Koralege

Gobinath Sivarajah

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

The Papare

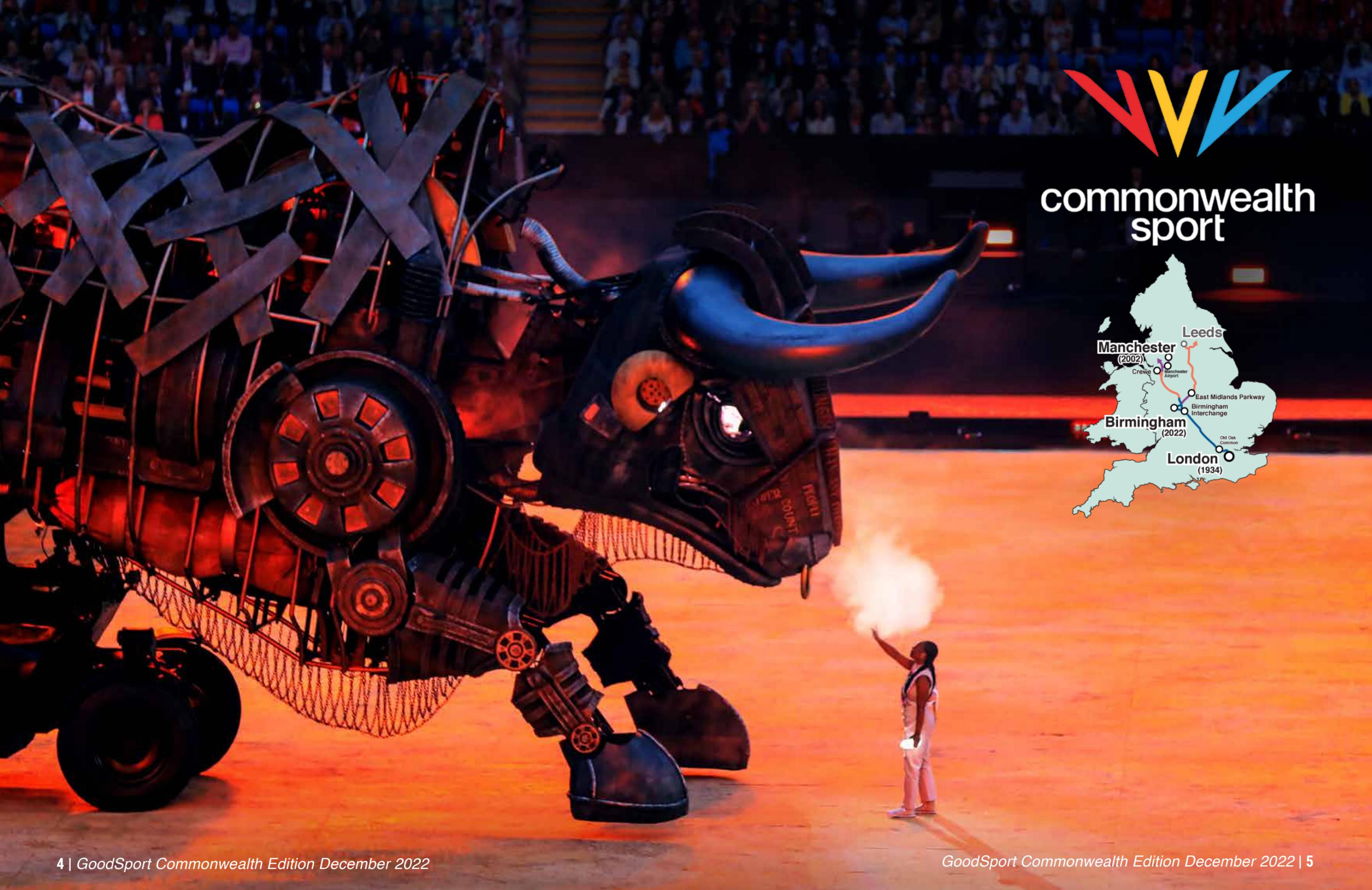
#### DESIGN & LAYOUT

Strategic Alliance (Pvt) Ltd.

#### PRINTERS

Quality Printers

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commonwealth  
sport



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## FROM HAMLET TO VELVET – THE NETHMI STORY

While running about the schoolyard of Welpalla Sangarathana Maha Vidyalaya -- a tiny hamlet in the environs the big city of Kurunegala, young Nethmi wouldn't even in the wildest dreams come to the conclusion of being the most known person in the province or may the entire island. Yet, destiny comes with secretive culminations and this tale is one.

Nethmi Ahinsa Fernando became Sri Lanka's youngest ever Commonwealth Games medalist and the first medalist in Wrestling when she beat Australia's Irene Symeonidis in the Bronze medal match in the Women's Freestyle 57kg category at the Birmingham 2022 games. She is also a NOC SL-Crysbro scholarship holder.

To be brutally honest Nethmi is still a grade 12 student of Welpalla Sangarathana MV. When it came to the call of her bout against Australia's Irene Symeonidis according Nethmi herself she saw that the majority of the gathering did not give her even a semblance of a chance. Yet, she accomplished a technically perfect 10-0 to take home the bronze and added her name in the list of sports immortals. The bout that lasted only 1 minute and 51 seconds.





Fernando received a walk over in her quarter-final match against Emiliene Essombe Tiako of Cameroon, before losing 10-00 to Anshu Malik of India who ended up as the runner-up. Malik lost vastly experienced Odunayo Folasade Adekuoroye of Nigeria 3-7 to make it three in-a-row in this same event. In 2014 she defeated Indian Sehrawat Lalita in the final of the women's freestyle 53 kg category to win her first Commonwealth game gold medal. In 2018, Adekuoroye participated in the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia, winning her second Commonwealth gold medal defeating Pooja Dhanda of India and Adekuoroye won her third straight gold defeating India's Anshu Malik in the final.

This is an idol that Nethmi could emulate.

She explained her day of destiny in this manner, "I was elated when I won the bronze. Yet, there was also a hint of irony when I failed to wear the gold medal. Nonetheless I am proud of myself. I did it while still a teenager and also I brought the very first Wrestling medal for my country.



"I took to the sport of Wrestling in 2018. I entered a bout in the 53kg class for my school at the invitation of friend of mine who was already in the game. In the same year I progressed up to the National School Games, but, at that point I lost.

"That loss shaped my career in the sport. I then trained for another whole year and since 2019, I have not lost a single game in Sri Lanka. I had a few glitches in bout against Malik, but I learned where I went wrong against my Indian opponent and took the Bronze finishing the 8-minute bout in less than two minutes". Prior to that I remember my contest in Russia in the World Junior Championship I bagged the 8th place. I feel it was my entry into real international competition. I finished there taking the 8th place".

My next goal is the 2024 Olympics and I am aiming to qualify there. To do that I have obtained over 30 points and intend doing that if I am given the opportunity".





## HOW MANY EGGS WOULD YOU INVEST IN YUPUN'S 2024 OLYMPIC BASKET?

There always would be after thoughts and after comments on Yupun Abeykoon's achievement at the 2022 Birmingham Games. There was always this argument that the first seven fastest sprinters barring one in the Commonwealth recognition were engaged in projects elsewhere. Only one in the same ilk in gold medalist Ferdinand Omanyala from Kenya who finished the race in 10.02 seconds and South Africa's Akani Simbine – an outsider who finished in 10:13 seconds, a fraction faster than Yupun (10:14secs), were on the track on that day.

The men's 100m race at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games was held on the new spick and span athletics track at the Alexander Stadium in front of a packed-out crowd who roared on the finalists.

Yet, we must remember Yupun becomes the first Sri Lankan athlete to win a bronze medal in the 100m

event at the Commonwealth Games. The other reason being this bronze is the first major athletic medal for Sri Lanka in 24 years. Arguably in the Asian region, it is only very seldom that one produces a short distance runner of the major international medal calibre. They generally belong to the areas of South Africa to the USA, including Europe and the West Indies. In addition, Yupun is the first Sri Lankan in the history of the Commonwealth Games to qualify for the finals of the 100m men's event. The Sri Lankan sprinter ran a time of 10.06 seconds to qualify for the semi-finals of the men's 100m race.

In the process, he managed to finish with an all-time fastest timing in the Commonwealth Games history for 100m Heats. The previous fastest time in heats was by Glenroy Gilbert of Canada who did it in 10.10 seconds in the 1994 Victoria Games.

Just after completing his medal winning effort, Abeykoon marked on Facebook -- “Have no words to explain the feeling that I have right now.” “I did it! I made myself proud and I made everyone who has been there for me proud! Thank you very much to all of you for being there through every moment of this race.”

“This is just the start of more big things to come in the future. I’m going to keep working hard,” he said.

This achievement proves one startling matter-of-fact. In Sri Lanka sports, talent is there waiting to be harnessed. But, with the prevailing ground realities of Sri Lanka, it is realistically not possible for the Lankan athletes to move beyond a certain point and Yupun is a glaring example of this fact.

Yupun was born in Negombo and pursued his primary education at the Pannala National School. He also pursued his interest in track and field events while studying at the Pannala National School.

He built his love for this job, emulating Lankan’s greatest short distance sprinter – Olympic Silver medalist Susanthika Jayasinghe who achieved that feat in the year 2000. It was in the year 2004 that Yupun delved into the same track in his school in Pannala before moving on to Joseph Vaz College, Wennappuwa at the age of 16. In his quest to pursue his ultimate goal, Yupun joined the ranks in the Sri Lanka Army, but he always remembered that his father was once employed in Italy and he made his haven there.

In January 2021, he renewed his own personal and national Sri Lanka 60m indoor record with a timing of 6.59 seconds at the Italian indoor championship. He surpassed his own national indoor record of 6.78 seconds which he achieved in 2017. On 13 May 2021, he renewed his own personal as well as the national record for men’s 100m event by clocking at 10.15 seconds which he set during the Meeting di Savona Championship in Italy. In the same month (on 21 May 2021), he bettered his own personal record in the men’s 100m event by clocking at 10.09 seconds which he achieved in the 100m final at the Anhalt 2021 competition which was held in Dessau, Germany. In June 2021, he skipped the World Athletic Continental Madrid Meet in Spain despite it being one of the Olympic qualifying competitions.

Behind his international success, it has been coach and Olympian Claudio Licciardello, who gave him much needed support to come to this level. Yet the most significant in his career is -- the 27-year-old Sri Lankan Olympic sprinter Yupun Abeykoon clocking a time of 9.96 seconds at the Resisprint International Meet in Switzerland, to become the first man from the region to break the 10-second barrier.





#### Also ran

At the games there were three other track athletes who marked their presence. They were Kalinga Kumarage men's 400m, Gayanthika Abeyratne women's 800m and 1500m and women's 3000m steeplechase runner.

Kumarage ended up in the 4th place in the first heat and the 7th in the semi-final. Abeyratne finished 5th and 7th respectively in her two events in the heats and did not advance from that point onwards. As for Nilanthi Ratnayake, it was an automatic final, but finished 7th with a timing of 10:00.34.





## PALITHA'S CONQUEST OF HIS SILVER LINING IN BIRMINGHAM

They say every cloud has a silver lining; Palitha Bandara turned into a silver in reality. On the momentous day of 3rd August 2022, Palitha Bandara Halgahawela became the first Sri Lankan to win a Para Sports medal for Sri Lanka in Commonwealth Games history.

He achieved this feat in his maiden appearance at a Commonwealth Games at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games in the Men's F42-44/61-64 Discus Throw event when he clinched the Silver Medal clearing a distance of 44.20m garnering 944 points.

Hailing from humble beginnings from the hill countryside of Matale, Sri Lanka, Bandara who joined the Sri Lanka Army National Guard (SLNG) was in his cloud of sports reigning in Volleyball. Little did he know it all will go raining down in 2013 when his knee suffered from a fatal injury; his knee broke from the joint during said sport training! However, his knee could be gathered back together by a metal plate but his life could not be pulled back together to the norm. Fortunately though, Bandara's fighting spirit was not conquered.



"In the beginning, there was a lot of discomfort. I was in a lot of mental pain after becoming disabled after spending a lifetime as a 'normal' person". It was to get rid of that pain that I actually turned to Para-sports".

2015 dawned and enter Bandara to the Para-sports arena. After discovering that he quickly adapted the feel of the sport, Bandara pursued a career in the Para field, especially in Shot Put and Discus Throw. He came in to the spotlight at 2018 Army Para Games when he was pronounced the "Best Para-Athlete of the Competition", when he set 2 meet records in Shot Put and Discus Throw events while also claiming the Silver Medal in the Javelin Throw event. Bandara commented about his achievement in the Men's Shot Put event at the 2018 Asian Para Games, "Winning this silver medal was my first international win as a Para athlete." He in turn won the Bronze Medal in Men's shot put event at the 2021 Fazza World Para-athletic Championship in Dubai.

Thereon Bandara made his debut at the Summer Paralympics after qualifying to the 2020 Summer Paralympics – Men's Shot Put event at the World Para Grand Prix by clearing a distance of 13.42m.

"I had a big dream to go for a Commonwealth medal. There is great humble pride about it."

As Shot Put was not a part of the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Palitha took the path of Discus Throw under the wing of national coach, Prabath Perera, which in turn came to be the road to make his dream come true at 30 years of age.

Commenting on his long term plan hereon, Bandara said, "The goal is the 2024 Paralympic Games. The hope is to bring glory to mother Sri Lanka with some sort of a medal".



Speaking of Isuru's long standing career in weightlifting, he said, "I actually got involved in sports when I was just a schoolboy. I started my school education at Gettuwana Maha Vidyalaya and that is where I was introduced to the world of weightlifting by the master-in-charge. I joined Sir Kothalawala Maha Vidyalaya to sit the GCE Advanced Level examinations and I participated in my first international competition through that school; the 2013 Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships where I was placed 4th in the Men's Youth 50kg category.



## THE LONE PRINCE OF WEIGHTLIFTING

Though Weightlifting was a sport with multiple medal prospects, everyone but one failed to deliver. Staying true to his namesake of "Kumara", Dilanka Isuru Kumara was the knight of shining armour who came to the rescue of Lankan Weightlifting at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

He brought joy to the hopeful hearts of all Sri Lankans winning the first medal for Sri Lanka just 2 days after the official commencement of the Games. Kumara clinched the bronze medal in the men's 55kg weight class, lifting a total weight of 225kg, in the men's weightlifting event.

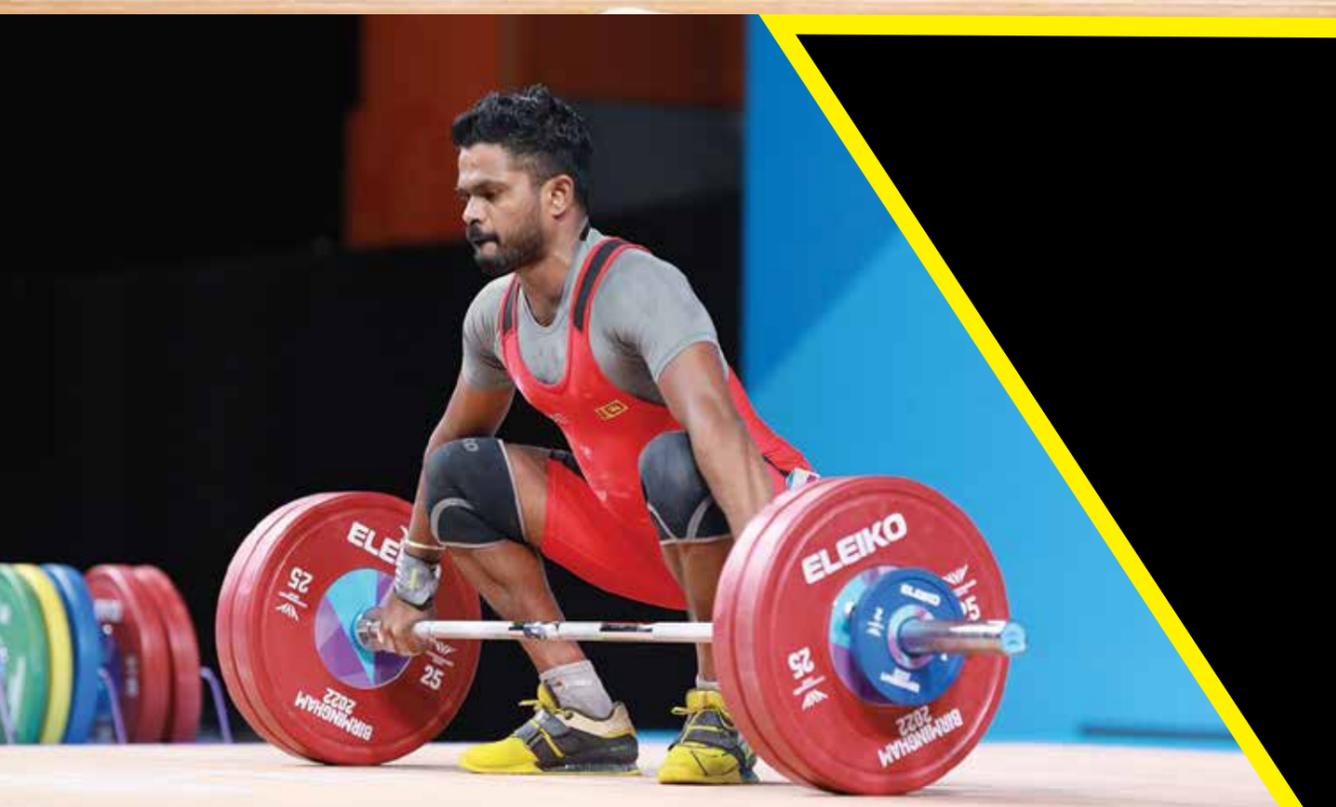
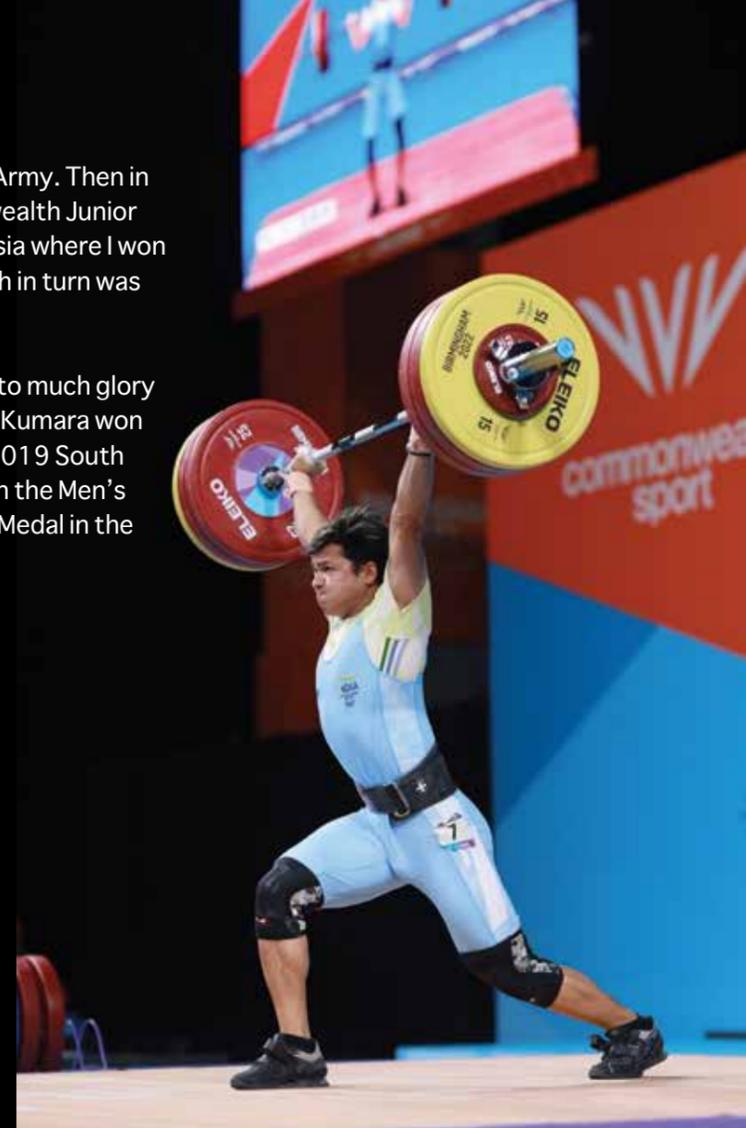
Commenting on this noteworthy occasion, Kumara commented, "So very happy regarding the fact that I was able to win Sri Lanka's first medal at the Games as a wave start to the 2022 Commonwealth Games. I believe that Sri Lankan athletes were able to get a good start from it."





“At the end of my school life, I joined the Sri Lanka Army. Then in 2016, I had the opportunity to go to the Commonwealth Junior Weightlifting Championships held in Penang, Malaysia where I won the Gold medal in the Men’s 56kg weight class which in turn was my first ever international medal”.

Fueled by his flaming grit, Isuru Kumara proceeded to much glory to Sri Lanka in numerous occasions; to name a few, Kumara won the Gold medal in the men’s 55kg category at the 2019 South Asian Games and in 2021, he won the Silver Medal in the Men’s 55kg Clean & Jerk category and the overall Bronze Medal in the Men’s 55kg weight class.



Mapping the future plan of Kumara, “The 2022 World Weightlifting Championships will be held in December this year. My biggest hope for now is to participate and clinch a medal, especially since no Sri Lankan has won a medal in the World Weightlifting Championships so far. After that, the hope is to represent the country in the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris and bring some sort of a victory to mother Sri Lanka.”

# LANKAN WOMEN CRICKETERS CRASH-LAND IN EDGBASTON



Hosted in Malaysia the week-long qualifiers saw five teams competing for the lone empty spot of the cricket tournament at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. It was all down to the wire, as both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh remained unbeaten, till the last match of the qualifying event.

However, it was Sri Lanka who turned out to be better between the two as they defeated the World Cup qualified Bangladesh by 22 runs at the Kinrara Academy Oval.

Sri Lankan captain Chamari Athapaththu was named as the player of the series.

At the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, the women's T-20 cricket pool consisted of Chamari Athapaththu (Captain), Nilakshi de Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Sachini Gonapinuwala, Achini Kulasuriya, Ama Kanchana, Sugandika Kumari, Hasini Perera, Udeshika Prabodhani, Inoka Ranaweera, Oshadi Ranasinghe, Anushka Sanjeevani, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Prasadani Weerakkody and Imesha Witharana.

However, the real thing in Birmingham was a non-starter losing all three games in the group – they lost to England by five wickets, lost to New Zealand by 45 runs and then crashed to South Africa by ten, even to remain at the bottom of the group.

The Lankan play-maker and captain Chamari Athapaththu failed to live up to expectations and the only saving grace were the batting of Nilakshi de Silva, who scored 25 and 36 against England and New Zealand respectively, and the bowling of slow orthodox spinner Inoka Ranaweera who bagged 6 for 59 in her allotted eight overs in the first two games played by them.

In their first game on July 30th in Edgbaston against hosts England, the English women won the game by five wickets. Sri Lanka Women won the toss and elected to bat. Player of the match was Hayley Jensen of New Zealand.





Chief Scores: Sri Lanka Women 106 for 9 in (20 overs) (Nilakshi de Silva 25; Sophie Ecclestone 3 for 25) England 109 for 5 (17.1 overs) (Alice Capsey 44; Inoka Ranaweera 3 for 29). Player of the match was Alice Capsey of England.

On August 2nd, Sri Lanka women played their second game also at the same venue and were put to field by the New Zealand women cricketers. Once again the Lankan lasses lost the game by a margin of 45 runs.





Chief Scores: New Zealand women 147 for 7 (20 overs) (Suzie Bates 34; Inoka Ranaweera 3/30) Sri Lanka women 102/8 (20 overs) (Nilakshi de Silva 36; Hayley Jensen 3/5).

On August 4th the Lankan women played their final game against South Africa. After being put in to bat they lost the game by a huge margin of ten wickets.

Chief Scores: Sri Lanka Women 46 (17.1 overs) (Chamari Athapaththu 15, Nadine de Klerk 3/7) South Africa 47/0 (6.1 overs) (Tazmin Brits 21 not out).



## THE LANKANS STUCK IN THE SAME CHORD FOR TOO LONG

Traditions and the pursuance of the game of rugby is more than a century old. The first rugby football international was played on 27 March, 1871 between Scotland and England in Edinburgh. The first party to introduce Rugby to Sri Lanka was Kingswood College in Kandy, with the first club, Colombo Football Club, being established on 28 June 1879. Significantly the difference between the beginning of international rugby and the tradition of rugby in Sri Lanka, is less than decades old. Moreover, Sri Lanka is the oldest rugby playing nation in Asia.

With roots so deep, we should be traditionally a recognised and accepted rugby brand in the world, but sadly the game has not evolved to expectations in spite of the century long exposure.

During the 2022 Commonwealth Games, where Rugby is almost a way of life in the majority of the scrimmage, Sri Lanka ended up only two slots above the bottom. The fate of the women's segment was even worse. Yet, for the



Commonwealth Games proper both men's and women's squads qualified to take part, with the women's team making its debut.

There were some skillful players in the melee. For instance, Buddhima Kudachchige with four tries in the tournament, was listed as one of the top scorers of the 2022 Commonwealth Games, while it was only a difference missing two vital conversions that kept Sri Lanka behind Jamaica in the final count. It seems the Sri Lankan rugby sevens have glued to position No. 13 at the Commonwealth Games, as out of the seven occasions that Sri Lanka has taken part in this competition, they have taken over the 13th position while ending up at the 14th place twice.

Coming to the main competition, Sri Lanka were pitted against giants New Zealand, Samoa, England. As expected, the Lankans lost all three matches scoring 24 points against the 103 scored by the oppositions.

Moving to play in the league for the bottom slots, Sri Lanka took on Jamaica, Uganda and Zambia.

The game against Uganda was rather one sided with the score coming against Sri Lanka at 38 points to 18 points. Sri Lanka registered their solitary win of the tournament when they beat Zambia 27 - 14 with Nigel Ratwatte, Dansha Chandradas, Buddhima Kudachchige and Ashan Ratwatte being responsible for the tries, while Mithun Hapugoda and the Ratwatte brothers Ashan and Nigel, converting three of the tries scored.



In the vital match against Jamaica, the Lankans scored tit-for-tat tries but fell short by two missed conversions which they would rue forever.

It's interesting to unfold the run of play in this vital game. Jamaica opened the scoring early with a try by Mason Coton-Brown which was converted by Lucas Roy-Smith. 7-0.

Then, the combination of Nigel Ratwatte (try) and Mithun Hapugoda (conversion) brought the scores level at 7 all.

An unconverted try by Ashley Smith put the Jamaicans ahead at 12-7, but in the same vicinity Nigel Ratwatte missed a penalty which became vital in the long run.

Adding to the Lankan woes the Lankans failed to move ahead once again when a try by Ravindu Hettiarachchi also was unconverted by Mithun Hapugoda. Scores 12 all.

At half time, scores were level at 12 points each.

Jamaica forged ahead once again through the second try scored by Mason Coton-Brown, which was by the third Lucas Smith conversion as the winners led at 19-12.

The Lankans bounced back into the game into contention, with a try by Buddhima Nanayakkara Kudachchige and converted by Nigel Ratwatte to put the scores level at 19 all. Yet, the duo of Oshane Edie (try) and Lucas Roy-Smith put Jamaica ahead at 26-19.

Finally, a last ditch try by Mithun Hapugoda put the game almost on par, but once again Nigel Ratwatte missed the conversion and the Lankans were left to fight for another day. The game ended at 26-24 in favour of the Jamaicans.

The women's sevens team comprised of Anusha Attanayaka, Kumari Dilrukshi, Jeewanthi Gunawardhana, Sandika Hemakumari, Dilini Kanchana, Charani Liyanage, Shanika Madumali, Kanchana Mahendran, Dulani Pallikkondage, Ayesha Perera, Nipuni Rasanjali, Anushika Samaraweera and Umayangana Thatsarani.

The Lankans were pitted against New Zealand, Canada and England. In the league round the three teams scored an unanswered 191 to nil. In the Classification semi-final, Scotland beat Sri Lanka 58-0. Then in the game for the seventh place, South Africa beat Sri Lanka 52 - 0.



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## A STRING OF BROKEN DREAMS

Boxing in Sri Lanka has a rich tradition. So much so it is this sport that brought forth the first ever Commonwealth medal and a gold at that courtesy the late Barney Henricus at Sydney Games in 1938 in the Featherweight 57kgs category.

Then in 1950 at the Auckland Games it was double success with K. Edwin winning his flyweight bout and Albert Perera winning the Bantamweight class and both ended up as Silver medallists.

Legendary Alex Obeyesekere won the third 1950 Auckland medal by bringing home the Welterweight class Bronze medal.

Ironically only 68 years hence boxing were able emulate their medal habits in the Commonwealth Games ring. However, this also came with triple success at the Gold Coast Games in Australia in 2018.

On this occasion, Anusha Kodithuwakku was selected to represent Sri Lanka at the 2018 Commonwealth Games which was also her maiden Commonwealth Games appearance at the age of 39.

She started the tournament well qualifying to face her arch-rival Mery Kom of India which she won her Bronze effort comfortably at 5-0 and became the first ever Sri Lankan women boxer to reach the semi-final stage of Commonwealth Boxing.



Besides Kodithuwakku, Thiwanka Ranasinghe in the men's 49kg category and Vidanalage Bandara in the men's 52kg category also did well to end up with Bronze medals.

With this infuse of adrenalin there was speculation that the game is on the rise, but, the 2022 Birmingham Games once again saw the game falling short of its desired mark. In the lineup there were five male and three women boxers, but they came up with only marginal successes, but not medal performances.

Among the men were Vidanalage Bandara in the 51kg category, Rukmal Prasanna in the 54kg category, Jeewantha Nisshanka in 57kg category, Sanjeewa Bandara in the 63.5kg category and Niklas Vittalis in the 71kg category.

In the women's category fighting were Nadeeka Pushpakumari in the 48kg category, Keshani Hansika in the 50kg category and Sajeewani Cooray in the 57kg category.

Vidanalage Bandara who straight fought in round of 16 lost his bout to Kieran MacDonald of England 0-5. Rukmal Prasanna who also started from round 16, took on Shaffi Hassan of Kenya won his fight at 3-2. However, Prasanna lost his quarter-final bout to Abraham Mensa of Ghana 1-3 and lost his dream of a medal.



Jeewantha Nisshanka after receiving a bye in the round of 32 took on Keevin Alicock of Guyana 0-5. Then in the 63.5kg category Sanjeewa Bandara lost his round of 32 bout to Joseph Tyers 0-5.

In the last men's fight Niklas Vittalis in the 71kg fight lost to Ah Tong of Samoa 0-5 in the round of 16 after receiving in the bye in the round of 32.

Notably all three women boxers fought in medal bouts. Nadeeka Pushpakumari who entered direct to the semi-final bout against Lethabo Modukanele of Botswana lost at 0-4 while Keshani Hansika who received a bye in the first round lost to Carley McNaul of Northern Ireland 0-5.

Sanjeewani Cooray defeated Mehreen of Pakistan at 5-0 in the first round, but her fight against South Africa's Phiwokule Mnguni for the bronze was stopped by the referee to end a medal dream in boxing for the Lankans.



## MAKING LIMITED IMPACT

Beach Volleyball in Sri Lanka came into the limelight in 2019, when both men's and women's teams came home armed with gold medals, creating some ripples in the sporting arena. Sri Lanka qualified for both the men's and women's tournaments in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. This was achieved after both teams did remarkably well in the Asian Qualifiers, which were held in Negombo, Sri Lanka. This was the first time Sri Lanka will be competing in the women's event.

Once again, even the Beach Volleyball teams played well to move up to the quarter-final stage before bowing out. The Lankan men's team comprised Malintha Yapa and Ashen Rashmika while the women's team consisted of Deepika Bandara and Chathurika Weerasinghe.

In the men's competition, initially the Lankan team lost to Daniel Dearing and Sam Schachter of Canada at 13-21 and 12-21 and lost the next tie against Sainey Jawo and Mbye Jaarra of Gambia at 14-21, 21-19 and 15-9. However, the Lankan pair won their game against Clair Hodge and Shawn Seabrooks of Saint Kitts and Nevis in straight sets at 21-11 and 21-11.

Malintha Yapa and Ashen Rashmika then lost the quarter-final bout against Paul Burnett and Chris McHugh of Australia at 21-16, 16-21 and 9-15 to get eliminated.



Emulating the men's team, the women's Volleyball team also bowed at the quarter-final. In their first outing, they lost to Mariafe Artacho del Solar and Taliqua Clancy of Australia at 10-21 and 12-21. They lost their second game against the Cypriot pair of Zoi Konstanpoulou and Erika Nystorm at 8-21, 10-21. Deepika Bandara and Chathurika Weerasinghe moved into the quarter-final with the aid of a walk-over against Trinidad and Tobago. Their elation was short lived as they lost the vital quarter-final bout to Melissa Humana-Paredes and Sarah Powers of Canada, at 9-21, 11-21, to end their chapter on the beach.





## LEARNING CURVE FOR THE LANKANS IN BIRMINGHAM

Though 3x3 basketball is a growing entity in the South Asian region and Sri Lanka has proven some skills within that realm, the Birmingham experience became a new experience. The 3x3 men's and women's categories, by virtue of its status as the top Commonwealth Asian nation in the respective FIBA 3x3 Federation Rankings (1 November 2021), Sri Lanka qualified for both tournaments.

The two squads comprised – (Men) Simron Yoganathan, Janith Chathuranga, Supun Rukshan, Arnold Thevakumar.

Women's squad: Nihari Perera, Chalani Perera, Fathima Morseth and Rashmi Perera.





The Men's team played three matches and lost all. In their opening match, Sri Lanka took on Scotland. The result went in favour of Scotland at 16-9. For Sri Lanka, Simron Yoganathan accumulated 5 points, while for Scotland, the highest scorer was Malcolm who finished with 8 points.

Sri Lanka lost its second game to Kenya in a close game of 18-21. For Sri Lanka, it was Simron Yoganathan who once again shone with 13 points whole, while Juma (9) scored for Kenya.

Ironically, the last game against Canada was another one sided affair which ended in favour of the winner at 21-8. Yet again, it was Simron Yoganathan, their star performer, with six points. As for Canada, their highest scorer was Gill, who made 8 points.

The women's matches also ended in vain. The Lankan women lost to Kenya, Scotland and Australia. In their opening match, Kenya made 21 against the eight scored by Sri Lanka. Scores: Nihari Perera and Rushmi Perera 3 points each; Indasi Okot scored 8 for Kenya.

In their second outing, Scotland beat the Lankan women at 5 - 21. For Sri Lanka, Rushmi Perera scored 3 points while Leonard scored 8 for Scotland.

In the final game, the mighty Australian made short work of the Lankan skills and beat them at 21 points to 2 points, scored by Morseth. For Australia, Whittle scored 8 points.



# MEDALS TABLE

1938	1950	1994	1998	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022
<b>1</b> Barney Henricus 1938 Sydney Boxing	<b>1</b> Duncan White 1950 Auckland Athletics	<b>1</b> Pushpamali Ramanayake Malini Wickramasinghe 1994 Victoria Shooting	<b>1</b> Sriyani Kulawansa 1998 Kuala Lumpur Athletics	<b>1</b> Chinthana Vidanage 2006 Melbourne Weightlifting	<b>1</b> Chinthana Vidanage 2010 Delhi Weightlifting	<b>1</b> Sudesh Peiris 2014 Glasgow Weightlifting	<b>1</b> Indika Dissanayake 2018 Gold Coast Weightlifting	<b>1</b> Palitha Bandara 2022 Birmingham Athletics
	<b>2</b> K.Edwin 1950 Auckland Boxing	<b>2</b> Dodangoda Chandrasiri Lakshman Rajasinghe 1994 Victoria Shooting	<b>1</b> Sugath Thilakarathne 1998 Kuala Lumpur Athletics		<b>1</b> Sudesh Peiris 2010 Delhi Weightlifting		<b>5</b> Chathuranga Lakmal 2018 Gold Coast Weightlifting	<b>3</b> Dilanka Isuru Kumara 2022 Birmingham Weightlifting
	<b>1</b> Albert Perera 1950 Auckland Boxing	<b>1</b> Malini Wickramasinghe 1994 Victoria Shooting					<b>1</b> Dinusha Gomes 2018 Gold Coast Weightlifting	<b>1</b> Yupun Abeykoon 2022 Birmingham Athletics
	<b>1</b> Alex Obeysekere 1950 Auckland Boxing						<b>1</b> Anusha Kodithuwakku 2018 Gold Coast Boxing	<b>1</b> Nethmi Poruthotage 2022 Birmingham Wrestling
							<b>1</b> Thiwanka Ranasinghe 2018 Gold Coast Boxing	
							<b>1</b> Vidanalage Bandara 2018 Gold Coast Boxing	





# LOST IN THE WILDERNESS

The Squash foursome at the 2022 Commonwealth Games took part in all stipulated segments of the game dished out, but, failed reach beyond round of 32.

Ravindu Laksiri, Shameel Wakeel, Chanithma Sinlay, and Yeheni Kuruppu comprised the men's and women's team respectively.

In the men's singles both Ravindu Laksiri and Shameel Wakeel did well to get through the round of 64 but crashed at the round of 32.

Ravindu Laksiri initially beat Shomari Wiltshire of Guyana 3-1, but lost to Greg Lobban Scotland 0-3. Wakeel in his turn beat Shawn Simpson of Barbados 3-2 but was no match against the skills of Saurav Ghosal of India as the latter beat Wakeel with ease at 3-0.

In the women's singles Chanithma Sinlay received a bye in her round of 64, but lost to Nicole Bunyan of Canada 0-3.



Yeheni Kuruppu in her group of 64 tie beat Ashley Khalil of Guyana 3-2, but lost to Georgina Kennedy of England 0-3 in the round of 32 game.

In the men's doubles Laksiri and Wakeel combined win the round of 64 game against Shomari Wiltshire and Jason-Ray Khalil of Guyana at 2-0, but lost to the Australian pair of Rhys Dowling and Cameron Pilley 0-2.

In the women's doubles Chanithma Sinlay, and Yeheni Kuruppu lost to the Indian power house of Sunayna Kuruvilla and Amhat Singh 0-2 opening round of 32 game. Then in the mixed doubles Wakeel and Sinlay lost to another packed pair of Faizal Zafar and Nazir Iqbal 0-2.

The mixed pair of Laksiri and Kuruppu tried hard against the Indian duo of Joshna Chinappa and Harinder Pal Sandhu but went down at 2 games to 1 in the round of 32.





# GRUELING SEVEN MINUTES OF GOOD INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

Term it as a shattered dream – we may not be exaggerating. Since the Rio Olympics in 2016 and a wildcard put to good use Judoka Chamara Dharmawardena just broke ice and became an athlete worthy of his recognition.

In fact, the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka backed him even during the thick and thin of the Covid setbacks and all what they asked him to live up to his true potential. He got training facilities mostly in Slovenia and Kosovo.

Pinnacle of his career came in the Nepal South Asian Games in 2019 where he pocketed gold medal in a final bout which finished barely before it even began. All ended in a flash, Dharmawardena had beaten Dangol Sanjit of Nepal in grand style.

In 2014 Commonwealth Games he made his maiden appearance at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. He competed in the men’s 73kg event and reached round of 16 before being eliminated by Jake Bensted of Australia.

He represented Sri Lanka at the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics marking his debut Olympic appearance and competed in the men’s 73 kg event, in which he was eliminated in the third round by Lasha Shavdatuashvili. Prior to that Chamara proved his grit by beating Benjamin Waterhouse of American Samoa. Also in 2016 he won the Silver in the 73kg class in Guwahati, India. He also competed in the men’s 73kg event at the 2017 World Judo Championships and also competed in the men’s 73kg event at the 2019 World Judo Championships.

He made his Asian Games debut during the 2018 Asian Games at the Jakarta-Palembang in Indonesia. Then he qualified for the 2020 Summer Olympics through an invitation from the Tripartite Commission.

Nonetheless the Chamara dream of a Commonwealth Games medal was not shattered in the very first round when he beat Tirelo Lekoko of Botswana. However, the second round game against Faye Njie of Gambia went in favour of the Gambian ending the Chamara episode in the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games.

Chamara commenting on his performance said that “I am disappointed that I failed to bring home a Bronze medal. The game



against the Botswanan I pulled it off after fighting in the extra time after blank full time. However, Faye Njie of Gambia is ranked 35 in the world. I held on to the challenge for 3½ minutes against him but he managed to pull it off because of a technical fault of mine. Faye went on to win the Silver Medal.

Then in the quarter-final game prior to the bronze, I was pitted against Joshua Green of Northern Ireland, and he had the better of me. But, that day to my mind I had around seven minutes of high quality international Judo, but, I am disappointed that I could not make it to the bronze round.”

The others -- Priyankara Wimukthi 60kg, Rajith Pushpakumara 81kg, and Chamila Marappulige (women’s 48kg) and Hiruni Vithana (Women’s +78kg) did not move beyond first round.



# SRI LANKA STAYS AFLOAT IN THE WATER ARENA

The Lankan Aquatics team participated in the Diving and Swimming events at the Birmingham Games.

In the Diving segment, a one man squad - Dulanjan Fernando represented Sri Lanka in the 1m and 3m springboard events, marking his debut at the Commonwealth Games. Fernando, managed to qualify to the finals in the 1m Springboard event with 188.15 points in the preliminary round; beating the previous record from Sahan Peiris at the 2018 Gold Coast games with 181.25 points. However, he failed to advance in the 3m Springboard event. In the final event, he ended up 11th with 232.50 points.

Sri Lanka entered two swimmers, one per gender, to the swimming category; Akalanka Peiris in the 50m Backstroke and Butterfly events and Ganga Senevirathne in the 100m and 200m Backstroke events.



Akalanka Peiris in his 2nd appearance at a Commonwealth Games, established National Records in both his events; 26.15s in the 50m Backstroke event and 24.89s in the 50m Butterfly event, ranking 21st and 22nd in the preliminary rounds respectively. Unfortunately, the National Records were not enough for him to advance to the final rounds.

Subsequently, Ganga Senevirathne marked her debut appearance at the Commonwealth Games. Senevirathne was placed 20th with a timing of 1:06.17 in the 100m backstroke event, marking a personal best in the event. However, in the preliminary round of the 200m Backstroke event, she swam a 2:26.63, placing her 08th. Though she missed her own personal best by 0.17 seconds, she was selected as a reserve for the final round by this timing.

Overall, Team Sri Lanka bested numerous Personal and National records, but did not quite make the cut in the International standards.





## THE SHUTTLERS MARK THEIR PRESENCE

In the team event, the Lankan team did moderately well to reach the knockout stage but, ironically, they were pitted against the ultimate Gold medallists Malaysia in that tie. Malaysia in that tie lost 3-0. Nonetheless the Lankan players proved that they were competitive.

Badminton Sri Lanka named a team of eight athletes (four of each gender). Sri Lanka qualified for the team event after being one of the top 14 nations in the BWF Ranking as of February 1, 2022. From the final team announcement, they dropped two women, meaning the final team size was six (four men and two women) and the venue for all matches were the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The Lankan team read – (Men) Dumindu Abeywickrama, Sachin Dias, Buwaneka, Goonethilleka Niluka Karunaratne; (Women) Thilini Hendahewa and Suhasni Vidanage.

The games down on the cards were Singles men and women, Doubles – men and women and Mixed Doubles. This was the fifteenth staging of badminton at the Commonwealth Games since its inclusion in 1966, and the second staging within England. Teams taking part in this competition were hosts England, India, Malaysia, Canada, Singapore, Scotland, Australia, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, South Africa, the Maldives, Uganda, Jamaica, Barbados, Zambia and Pakistan.





In the individual event Sri Lanka performed well

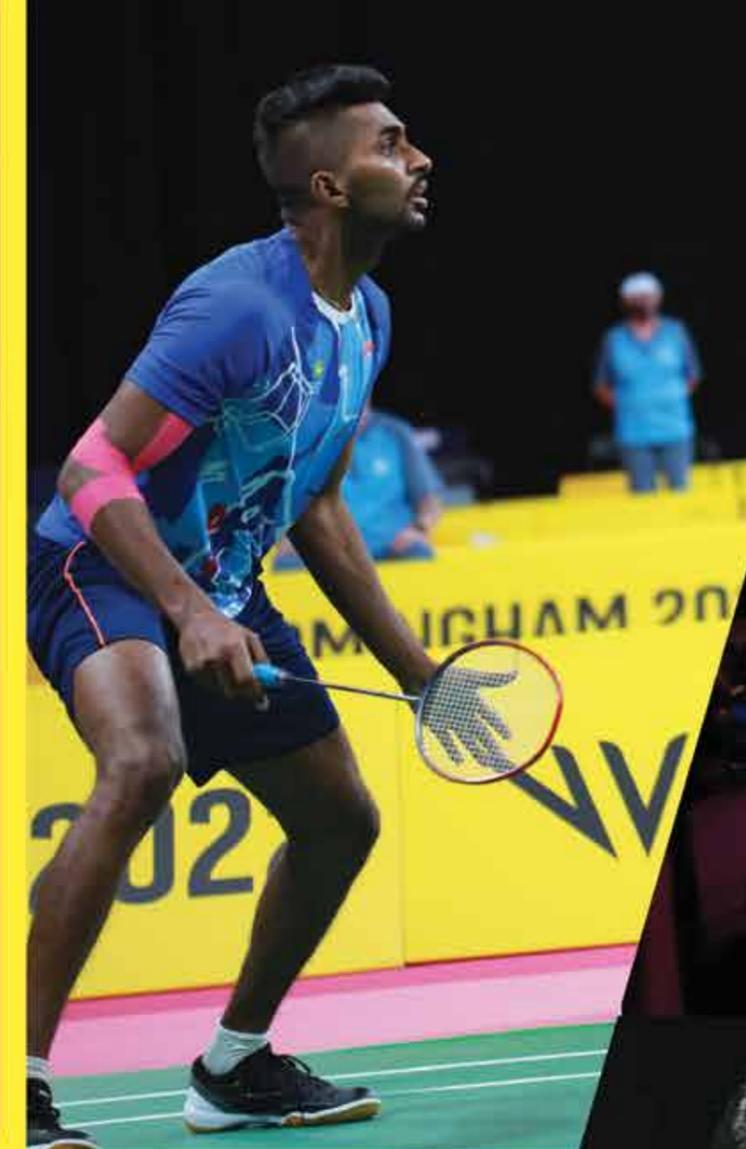
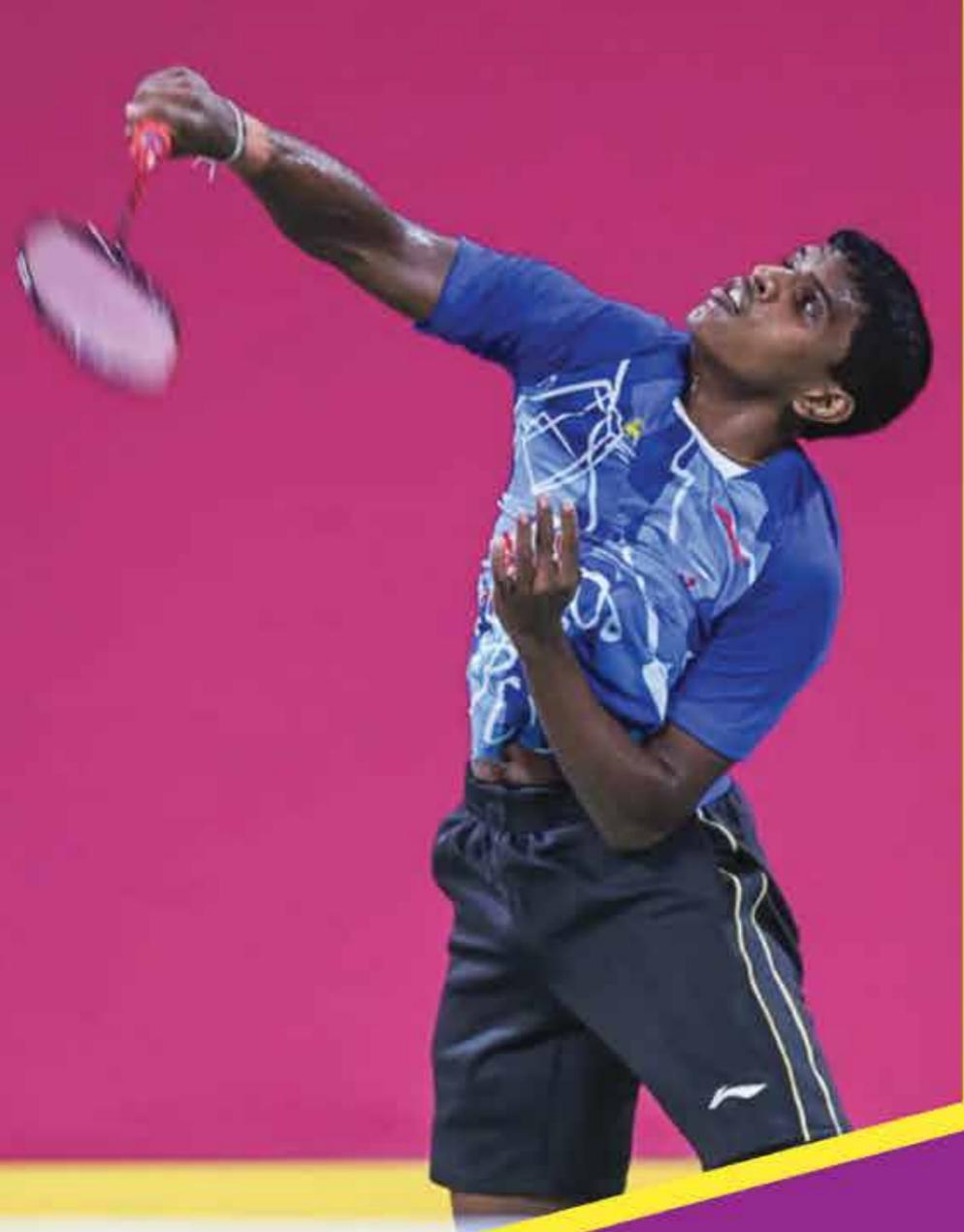
In the men's singles Dumindu Abeywickrema beat his opponent from Mauritius – Atish Lubah 21-7, 20-22 and 21-11. Beat Samuel Cassar of Malta 2-0 (21-11 and 21-20). But, lost to Srikanth Kidambi of India 2-0 (9-21 and 12-21).

In the Round of 64 Niluka Karunaratne beat Friday Attama of Uganda 2-0 (21-6 and 21-6); in the round of 32 he beat Shae Martin 2-0 (21-6 and 21-5) and lost to Jason Teh of Singapore 0-2 (13-21 and 11-21) in the round of 16.

In the women singles Suhasni Vidanage received a bye in the round of 64 and lost in the round of 32 to Freya Patel-Redfern 0-2 (11-21 and 14-21).

In the men's doubles Sachin Dias and Buwaneka Goonatilleke won their round 32 tie beating Kennie Maarten and Shae Martin of Barbados 2-0 (21-12, 21-9), Beat Ahmed Nibal and Ajfan Rasheed of the Maldives in the round of 16 at 2-0 (21-12, 21-8). In the quarterfinal tie the duo lost their game against Chan Peng Soon and Tan Kiang Meng of Malaysia 0-2 (16-21, 12-21).





The mixed doubles pair of Sachin Dias and Thilini Hendahewa the duo once again reached the quarter-final stage before crashing out. Once receiving a bye in the round of 64, the Lankan mixed pair took on Canada's Alexander Lindeman and Josephine Wu and beat them 2-0 (21-11, 21-18). They won the round 32 bout too.

There they beat Robert Summers and Johanita Scholtz of South Africa 2-0 (21-18, 21-8). However, they lost their quarter-final tie against the skills of Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith 0-2 (12-21, 19-21).

In the team event Sri Lanka was in the group of India, Australia and

Pakistan. The Lankans ended up second after losing to only India and had a hard time in stopping the marauding Malaysians who finally ended up as the gold winners beating India to the silver.

In the runner up Sri Lanka beat Australia 3-2, Pakistan 4-1, lost to India 5-0 and lost the quarter-final against Malaysia 3-0.





# LANKAN GYMNASTS ON A TIGHTROPE

Gymnastics at the 2022 Commonwealth Games was divided mainly into 2 parts; Artistic and Rhythmic. Comprising 3 men and 5 women, Sri Lanka's Gymnastics team participated in both the categories.

Artistic Gymnastics started off the sporting event and a team of seven athletes; three men and four women, participated in this category.

Ruchira Fernando, Malin Fernando and Hansa Kumarasinghe participated in the Men's Team Final & Individual Qualification event, but then followed an unfortunate string of mishaps; Malin Fernando contracted the Covid-19 Virus resulting in him not even starting the event and Hansa Kumarasinghe was blown by an injury resulting in him not finishing all apparatus in the event. Correspondingly, the team was placed in a total rank of 10th. The Women's team which participated for the Team Final consisted of Kaushini Gamage, Amaya Kalukottage, Kumudi Abeyratne and Milka Gehani, first Sri Lankan Gymnast across all disciplines to qualify for Olympics. Alas, they too were unsuccessful in impressing and ended up ranking 08th out of 09 countries.





On the individual part, Ruchira Fernando of the team participated in the All-round Individual Finals, and was ranked 16th. Moreover, Milka Gehani could not start the Vault and Floor Apparatus of her All Round Individual Event due to sustaining an injury.

Sri Lanka was represented in the Rhythmic Gymnastics arena by a one woman army, namely, Anna-Marie Ondatjee. In this 2nd appearance of hers at a Commonwealth Games, she competed in the Women's Individual Qualification and was ranked 22nd, with a total score of 90.550. In her pre-previous appearance, she finished in the 11th position out of 16 athletes.

1	IND	RIKAYAK Pranam
2	SR	ELPITRA BADA
3	SOP	YAP Emma
4	SOP	KATHIANI
5	TTO	HEWMA
6	SR	ABETRA
7	SAR	FINCE

1	RODRIGUEZ Carlin
2	SACHURINA Tatiana
3	SARIS Pernan
4	RICHARDS Penelope
5	DONNELLY Tara

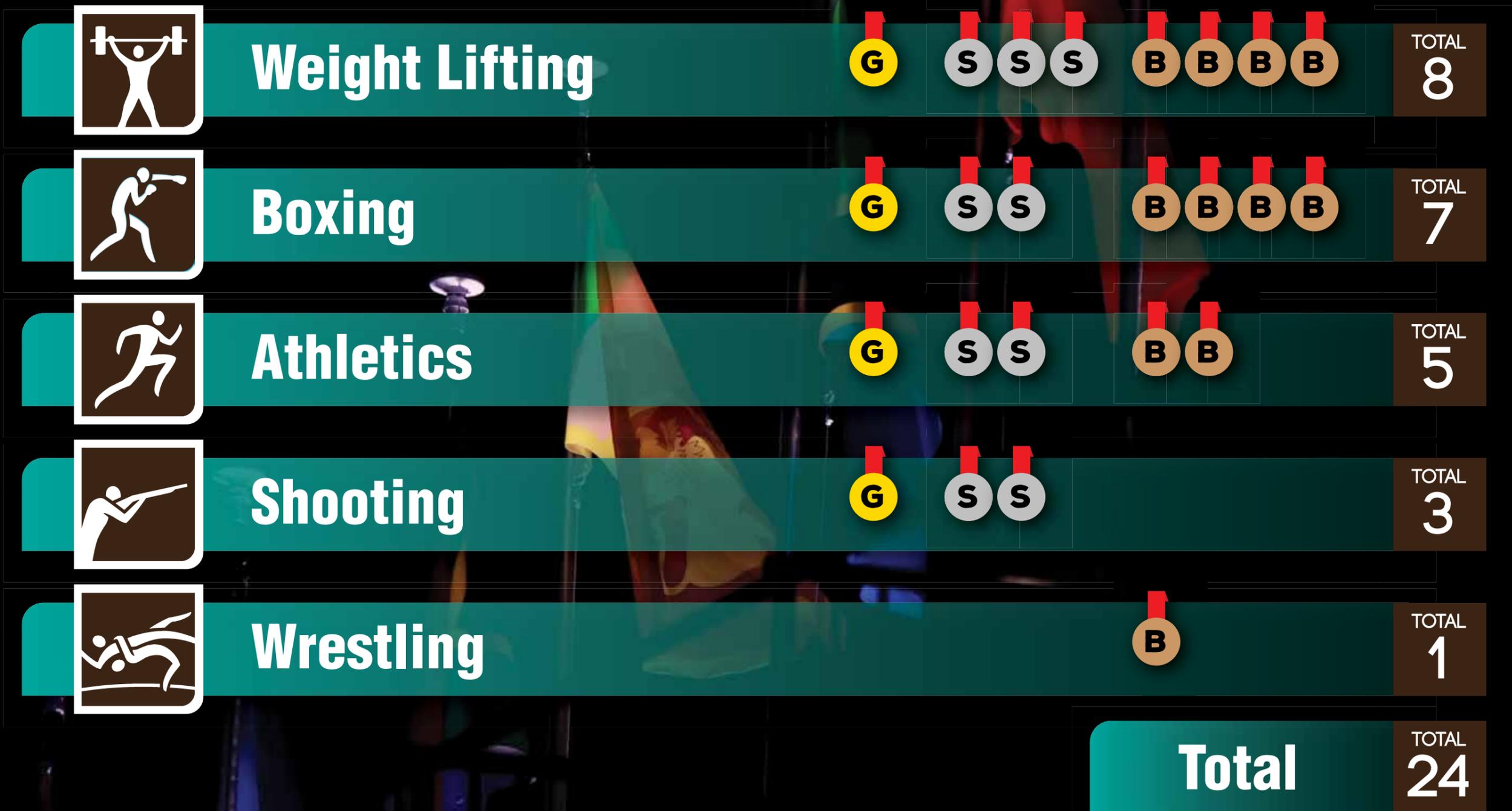


# COMMONWEALTH 2022 MEDAL TALLY

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
 Australia	67	57	54	178
 England	57	66	53	176
 Canada	26	32	34	92
 India	22	16	23	61
 New Zealand	20	12	17	49
 Scotland	13	11	27	51
 Nigeria	12	9	14	35
 Wales	8	6	14	26
 South Africa	7	9	11	27
 Malaysia	7	8	8	23
 Northern Ireland	7	7	4	18
 Jamaica	6	6	3	15
 Kenya	6	5	10	21
 Singapore	4	4	4	12
 Trinidad and Tobago	3	2	1	6
 Uganda	3	0	2	5
 Cyprus	2	3	6	11
 Pakistan	2	3	3	8
 Samoa	1	4	0	5
 Barbados	1	1	1	3
 Cameroon	1	1	1	3
 Zambia	1	1	1	3

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
 Grenada	1	1	0	2
 The Bahamas	1	1	0	2
 Bermuda	1	0	1	2
 British Virgin Island	1	0	0	1
 Mauritius	0	3	2	5
 Ghana	0	2	3	5
 Fiji	0	2	2	4
 Mozambique	0	2	1	3
 Sri Lanka	0	1	3	4
 Tanzania	0	1	2	3
 Botswana	0	1	1	2
 Guernsey	0	1	1	2
 Dominica	0	1	0	1
 Papua New Guinea	0	1	0	1
 Saint Lucia	0	1	0	1
 The Gambia	0	1	0	1
 Namibia	0	0	4	4
 Malta	0	0	1	1
 Nauru	0	0	1	1
 Niue	0	0	1	1
 Vanuatu	0	0	1	1

# OVERALL MEDAL TALLY IN COMMONWEALTH GAMES HISTORY FOR SRI LANKA



- Gold

- Silver

- Bronze



# 2022

## Commonwealth Games: the highlights

### Executive summary

In July and August 2022, Birmingham hosted the 22nd Commonwealth Games, the largest multi-sport event to be held in England in 10 years, featuring thousands of world-class athletes and over 1.5 million spectators. Home to more than 180 nationalities, Birmingham 2022 has been a home Games for every nation. From the moment the iconic 'Raging Bull' stormed into the Alexander Stadium on opening night, to the final notes from the legendary Ozzy Osborne as the curtain fell, these incredible Games have captured the imagination of the city, region and audiences across the globe.

Birmingham 2022 proved to be a spectacular sporting showcase. 877 medals were awarded, 96 Commonwealth Games records and 4 world records were broken and there were fantastic successes for all the Home Nations. There was more para sport than ever before at a Commonwealth Games, more medals events for women than men for the first time ever at a major multi-sport event and basketball 3x3, wheelchair basketball 3x3 and women's T20 cricket appeared at the Commonwealth Games for the very first time.

Hosts Team England sent the most diverse and inclusive English sporting team to compete at Birmingham 2022 and were rewarded with a record 176 medals, including 57 golds, representing the most medals ever won by England at a Commonwealth Games. Events took place in 15 venues across Birmingham, the West Midlands and London. Spanning 19 different sports, the Games entertained more than 1.5 million ticketed spectators.

There were 9 free Festival Sites in Birmingham, including Neighbourhood Festivals hosted at 7 different sites across the city during the 11 days of competition. 10 other towns or cities hosted additional Festival Sites across the West Midlands and London.

Athletes from each of the UK's Home Nations and the Crown Dependencies were central in delivering a successful and inclusive Games that made our whole nation proud and helped to unite us in celebration. Northern Ireland enjoyed its most successful Commonwealth Games ever; Scotland won more medals than at any Games other than Glasgow 2014; and para athletes led the way for Wales by contributing to half the team's gold medals. Guernsey won its first medals at the Commonwealth Games for 28 years and its first-ever medal in athletics, while athletes from Jersey and the Isle of Man made their islands proud with their performances.





Birmingham 2022 has delivered some important Commonwealth Games firsts:

Delivery in a record 4.5 years rather than the usual 7 years, with over half of the total delivery time in extraordinary circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sold more tickets for this Games than any previously held in the UK, with 1.5 million ticketed fans. The biggest integrated para sport programme in Commonwealth Games history. More women's than men's medal events – a first in major, multi-sport event history. Bold ambition to deliver the most sustainable Commonwealth Games yet. The creation and provision of the first Relaxed Festival Site to be more accessible and inclusive for all.

Commonwealth Games sporting debuts for basketball 3x3, wheelchair basketball 3x3 and cricket T20, the T20 being a women's-only event.

The first ever Commonwealth Games with a Social Value Charter, which took into account the wider economic, social and environmental effects of delivering the Games, ensuring that inclusivity and human rights were at the forefront of Games delivery.

The sporting programme was just the beginning. The legacy these Games will leave for the city and the region will last for years to come.

Birmingham 2022 was never just about two weeks of sport: it was designed as the Games for Everyone, with every community able to access the events, opportunities and benefits the Games provided.

The people of Birmingham and the West Midlands gave an exceptional welcome to the Games, including the fans who gathered to see the 'Raging Bull' in Centenary Square; the thousands who lined the streets for the marathon and road

cycling; and the brilliant scenes of celebration seen at the Festival Sites across the region.

With half of the people in the UK saying they watched, followed online, or took part in a Birmingham 2022 event, the Games brought the national spotlight to the region:

6 in 10 people from Birmingham and the surrounding area agreed the Games will have improved perceptions of the city, with less than 1 in 10 saying it won't.

Almost 8 in 10 people in the UK agreed the Games gave people the opportunity to celebrate, with two-thirds saying events like these make them feel proud of the UK.

The significant core public investment in the Games of £778 million has accelerated investment and regeneration in Birmingham, the West Midlands and beyond. These infrastructure improvements include:

Alexander Stadium: transforming the existing stadium for the Games and communities.

Sandwell Aquatics Centre: a brand new, world-class facility for elite and community swimming and diving.

Amplifying ongoing investments in Perry Barr: including the refurbishment of the train station, wider transport improvements and the creation of up to 5,000 new homes supported by over £150 million investment by the UK government.

This public investment has also helped to unlock over £85 million additional funding from a range of public and third sector bodies, including a £35 million investment from Sport England to deliver a physical activity legacy.



Equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion was the golden thread that weaved throughout the delivery of the Games with a clear vision of an inclusive Games, accessible to anyone who wished to enjoy it, whether by taking part or watching.

This included:

Unique cultural experiences as part of the 6-month Birmingham 2022 Festival, expressing and reflecting the unique people and places of the West Midlands. Free-to-access Festival Sites across the city, hosting live performances, entertainment and special events, with major sites at Victoria Square and Smithfield drawing in huge crowds to the city centre.

The Commonwealth Collective, which created 14,000 volunteer opportunities, brought life to the Games, the city, and the region in their orange Balti uniforms.

The Birmingham Games have been part of a landmark year of celebration for the UK and the Commonwealth. In June, The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations saw people and communities from across the UK, Commonwealth and beyond, come together to celebrate this historic milestone, marking Her Majesty The Queen's 70 years of service. Coventry's year in the spotlight as UK City of Culture 2021 saw events continue to May 2022. (The Queen of England passed away on 8 September 2022 and King Charles III took over the reins)

Further cultural events are continuing throughout the year through UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, the centenary of the BBC, and the 75th anniversary of the Edinburgh Festivals. 2022 is a unique opportunity to shine a light on all that is great about our nation, demonstrating the UK's fantastic diverse culture, creativity, and shared heritage.

This document outlines some of the immediate benefits and special moments of the Games. More information on the full legacy programme can be found in the Birmingham 2022: Our Legacy plan.

The Birmingham 2022 Games experience

Ticket headlines

More than 1.5 million tickets were sold for the Games, marking the most tickets ever sold for a Commonwealth Games in the UK and exceeding the 1.21 million tickets sold for the 2018 Gold Coast Games.

Alexander Stadium had 323,000 ticketed spectators and Edgbaston had 173,000 (a record for any women-only cricket tournament).

With the 'Games for Everyone' vision in mind, Games organisers prioritised making tickets as accessible as possible, with over 1 million tickets available at £22 or less, and a median ticket price of no more than £25. Concessionary tickets were available for all sports and both ceremonies from £8, and made up a minimum of 10% of tickets available.



700,000 tickets sold to West Midlands postcodes, with the first opportunity to buy tickets reserved for West Midlands residents

5,000 tickets provided to children and young people in care in Birmingham

206,000 tickets bought for under-16s

2,000 tickets provided to Generation 22 (Gen22) legacy programme participants aged 16-24

5,000 tickets given to children in the West Midlands, distributed through the regional Active Partnerships

Every ticket included local public transport for ticket holders on the day of the event to encourage behaviour change to more sustainable, active travel and provide a safe, convenient and sustainable way for people to travel to Games venues. Those purchasing tickets were also able to make a donation to the 2 official charities of the Games: The Commonwealth Sport Foundation and United by 2022 Legacy Charity.

The ticketing programme was complemented by 5 events with free viewing access: cycling road race; cycling time trial; marathon; mountain biking and triathlon.

### Making Commonwealth sporting history

The sporting competition covered 19 sports across 280 medal events, including 44 medal events across 8 para sports: the biggest para sport programme in the history of the Commonwealth Games. For the first time at any major multi-sporting event, there were more women's medal events (136 events) than men's (134 events).

4,822 athletes (2,550 male and 2,272 female) competed in the Games. This included 311 para athletes competing in athletics, cycling, lawn bowls, powerlifting, table tennis, basketball, triathlon and swimming.

### The programme included:

- 11 days of swimming and diving
- 8 days of cricket
- 8 days of gymnastics
- 7 days of athletics, including the marathon

Games-first appearances for women's cricket, basketball 3x3 and wheelchair basketball 3x3

Over the course of the Games, competitors set: 4 world records, 96 Commonwealth Games records and Australia topped the medal table with 67 golds, 57 silvers and 54 bronzes.

For the host nation it was a great Games. Team England sent over 400 athletes and ended the Games with a record 176 medals, including 57 golds. The total represents England's best ever Games, surpassing the 174 medals won at Glasgow 2014. Emily Campbell and Jack Laugher were the Opening Ceremony flag bearers and went on to win gold, with gymnast Jake Jarman having the honour at the Closing Ceremony following his haul of 4 golds. Athletes aged 17 to 74 won medals for England, encapsulating how sport can inspire every age group.

### The David Dixon Award

The David Dixon Award for the outstanding athlete of the Games was given to Feng Tianwei, in recognition of her outstanding performance and demonstration of fair play and teamwork. The table tennis player from Singapore won three gold medals in Birmingham, bringing her total tally to 13 medals over the past 4 Games.

### Meeting Perry

The official mascot for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games was Perry. Perry is a friendly, kind and cheeky bull, an animal with which Birmingham has been synonymous for centuries. He was named after the Perry Barr area of Birmingham, the home of the Alexander Stadium.

Perry was inspired by the design of ten-year-old Emma Lou from Bolton, winner of a national design competition that took place during summer of 2020, with rainbow coloured hexagons representing the coming together of the Commonwealth in equal partnership with the diverse communities of Birmingham and the West Midlands at the Games in 2022.

### Improving health and wellbeing

Building on the power and momentum of the Games, the Games partners have striven to inspire and enable people to improve and sustain their levels of physical activity and increase their mental health awareness, with a particular focus on the most inactive and underrepresented groups.

### Venue legacy

The Games will leave a lasting physical legacy for the people of Birmingham and the West Midlands. The Games has brought a brand-new aquatics centre to Sandwell, leaving a state-of-the-art community leisure facility for use by local people from spring 2023. The Alexander Stadium has been transformed into a world-class athletics venue, designed with a permanent capacity of 18,000 post-Games.

In addition, investment into Cannock Chase has created a brand new, world-class mountain biking trail ('Perry's Trail') that will be available for the public to use long after the Games has finished, alongside an innovative bike play facility focused on young families and children.

These venues have been built and improved with accessibility in mind so they can be enjoyed by all, and they will provide commu-

### Physical activity & well being legacy

Nearly half (43%) of spectators surveyed by the Organising Committee have suggested they will increase their activity levels as a result of the Games. This rises to 71% for those under 25.

£35 million has been invested by Sport England, £2 million by the Department for Transport through Transport for West Midlands



nity and elite sports facilities post-Games. The improvements will help support the West Midlands and UK to secure more major events in the years to come.

£1 million by Birmingham City Council to support people to be active and engage with the Games.

Investment has focused on removing barriers and supporting people who don't think physical activity is for them.

### Bringing people together

One of Birmingham's fantastic assets is its diversity. The city is home to over 180 different nationalities, with many residents of the West Midlands born in a non-UK Commonwealth country. It is the youngest city in Europe, mirroring the youth of the Commonwealth overall. Birmingham 2022 championed this diversity and used the Games to bring people together for an international celebration of sport, culture and business.

Birmingham City Council invested £6 million in the Commonwealth Games Community Fund, including £2 million in the 'Celebrating Communities' scheme to ensure all 69 council wards could embrace and mark the Games, increase local level engagement and celebrate Birmingham's local diverse history and linkages to the Commonwealth. Events included street parties, picnics and community celebrations.

As part of this, and to ensure that these projects could be accessible to all, Birmingham City Council worked with over 425 organisations to plan and deliver these projects to ensure they were representative of the communities they are aimed at. Through this programme, 493 projects have been commissioned across the city.





### Engaging young people

The Organising Committee has delivered 'Bring the Power', a youth engagement and learning programme which has helped inspire a generation of young people. Birmingham City Council invested £500,000 into the programme for delivery within the city.

Beyond Birmingham, 'Bring the Power' has also launched a national campaign, providing schools across England with an opportunity to be inspired and feel connected to the Games through a wide range of resources including lesson plans, Games-themed assemblies, workshops and more.

Highlights of the 'Bring the Power' School Festival programme: 563 schools across England participated, engaging over 171,000 students

1300 schools engaged across Birmingham, with an additional 82 Perry Assemblies delivered across the city. 6,700 students in Birmingham and the West Midlands took part in Birmingham 2022-inspired engagement days, combining creative arts and sport-related physical activities. Over 500 workshops were delivered in schools and community youth club settings. £28,000 in Common Ground Grants was awarded to 28 secondary schools to support youth voice and leadership. 182 children participated in the launch of the national programme, including Team England athletes and Ministers from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education.

Internationally, Commonwealth Connections (a jointly-funded project between the Organising Committee and the British Council) has allowed young people across the Commonwealth to learn from each other using sports, arts and culture. As part of this programme, 60 schools in the West Midlands have been twinned with schools across the Commonwealth, using art and sports to build relationships and learn together about shared Commonwealth values.

### Ceremonies

The Opening and Closing Ceremonies book ended the Games in spectacular fashion. Local music heroes Duran Duran and Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi wowed a packed Alexander Stadium on Opening Ceremony night, which celebrated Birmingham's industrial heritage and multicultural traditions.

The ceremony also included a Red Arrows fly-past and an appearance from the 10-metre high mechanised bull, in a section of the ceremony which focused on the plight of female chain-makers in the early 20th century. The bull will be staying in Centenary Square until September 2022 to coincide with the end of the cultural festival, and Games partners are looking to find it a longer-term home.



The Games were formally closed on 8 August 2022 during a show-stopping Closing Ceremony at the Alexander Stadium, with an all-star cast of the region's music artists including Beverley Knight, Goldie, UB40 and Panjabi MC. The medley of unforgettable performances reflected the West Midlands' unique musical heritage and told the story of Birmingham's embrace of generations of Commonwealth citizens. The evening was topped off by a surprise performance by Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne, reunited with guitarist Tony Iommi, drummer Tommy Clufetos and bassist Adam Wakeman.

Both ceremonies provided a unique opportunity to showcase the best of the UK on a global stage, and celebrated the vibrant cultural diversity of Birmingham and the West Midlands with our friends across the Commonwealth.

### Pride House

A Pride House is a venue welcoming LGBTIQ+ fans, athletes, and allies during large-scale international sporting events. Pride Houses are places to view the competitions, experience the event with others, learn about LGBTIQ+ sport and LGBTIQ+ discrimination in sport, and build a relationship with mainstream sport.

Birmingham's Pride House was a Games-time hub for the Commonwealth Sport Pride Network, which positively championed and enabled LGBTIQ+ inclusion at the Commonwealth Games and across the Commonwealth Sport Movement.



### Community engagement

The Commonwealth Games is known as the 'friendly Games', bringing people together from across the Commonwealth regardless of their cultural background, disability, gender or socio-economic background. There was an extensive community programme which aimed to connect communities to the Games through meaningful engagement and participation, including: 34 Community Hubs delivered in Birmingham and the West Midlands. 125 Community Roadshows and events delivered in Birmingham and the West Midlands engaging with 183,000 people. 18 Community Engagement Forums, engaging stakeholders from across the West Midlands and promoting opportunities for involvement and participation across the Organising Committee and Games partnership.



#### The Birmingham 2022 Festival (cultural programme)

Alongside the Games, a vibrant 6-month cultural festival has highlighted the city and region's rich cultural heritage and diversity.

An additional £12 million of funding was awarded from a number of organisations, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and Spirit of 2012, alongside Birmingham City Council.

The Birmingham 2022 Festival has equality, inclusion and accessibility at its core; celebrating common ground, expressing and reflecting the unique people and places of the West Midlands.

The Critical Mass participation project enabled 245 disabled and non-disabled young people from across the West Midlands to co-create a series of major dance performances, and take centre stage at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

107 Creative City projects took place across Birmingham, flooding open spaces in the city with art, co-created with local communities. This was the first time that community-based arts and cultural projects have been delivered as part of a Games cultural festival.



The Festival launched on 28 February 2022, and included a live performance from internationally renowned Birmingham band UB40. The opening event, Wondrous Stories, attracted a live audience of over 21,500 people over 4 days, including 7 free performances. The Festival will continue to run until the end of September 2022.



#### The Queen's Baton Relay

The 16th official Queen's Baton Relay was the prelude to the Birmingham 2022 Games. Over a period of 294 days, the Baton covered nearly 90,000 miles and visited the 72 Commonwealth nations and territories taking part in the Games, representing a third of the world's population.

Over the 269 days of its international leg, the Baton travelled through Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, South America, the Caribbean, and North America, returning to the UK for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee weekend. It then travelled to the Falkland Islands, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and the 4 UK Home Nations.

All of the Queen's Baton Relay activity was centred around the following themes: Common Ground - celebrating Commonwealth Communities and the links to the Commonwealth. Journeys That Matter - making better communities/spaces/ways of living for tomorrow and championing sustainability. Untold Stories - showcasing people, projects and places that have an inspiring untold story. Digital Innovation - celebrating innovation, engineering and technology. Youth - keeping young people at the heart of the celebrations. Sporting Excellence - from grassroots to elite athletes.

Due to international COVID-19 restrictions, this was the first Queen's Baton Relay where the Baton travelled without a team accompanying it. Instead, all nations worked together, passing the Baton from neighbour to neighbour. The Baton spent 2-3 days in most countries, with extended stays in countries showcasing the Business and Tourism Programme (BATP).

The Baton has travelled by numerous means of transport including: foot, bicycle, motorbike, car, electric bus, sailboat, tugboat, canoe, sailing dinghy, rowing scull, seaplane, zipline, horse, and life-sized puppet elephant.

In February 2022, the Baton was carried by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge during Dubai Expo; marking the first time the Queen's Baton Relay has ever travelled outside the Commonwealth, promoting Commonwealth values in new parts of the world.

The Baton visited the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and toured the Home Nations. Highlights included: The Queen's Baton spent 4 days in Scotland, visiting areas of natural beauty, Loch Ness and the Isle of Arran as well as visiting schools in Edinburgh, giving students the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the Baton.

In Northern Ireland the Baton visited a selection of care and support centres, such as a programme aiming to bring isolated older men together to develop their skills in a range of arts-based activities, and a facility supporting dementia patients. The Baton also visited a number of outdoor sporting venues, with Baton-bearers taking part in open-water swimming and kayaking.

The Baton arrived in Wales on a lifeboat before spending 5 days celebrating sport, communities and sustainability on a journey from North to South Wales. The Baton was present at a climate change debate in Aberystwyth and went to a number of schools and sports centres across the country, encouraging the next generation of Welsh athletes.

The Baton spent 14 days travelling through England from 4 July. It then spent the final 11 days of its journey around the West Midlands.

On its tour of England the Baton visited 180 cities, towns and villages in 110 local authorities, including all West Midlands local authorities.

There were 7,500 Baton bearers for the international relay and 2,022 publicly nominated Baton bearers in England.

Thousands of people lined the streets to support them and participated in the celebratory events organised by local authorities as part of the relay.

Across England, the Queen's Baton Relay provided some unique moments such as arriving into the South West by zip line at the Eden Project, parachuting into the West Midlands and visiting schools and communities across the nation. The Baton visited every region in England.



## The Queen's message for the 2022 Commonwealth Games

The Baton concluded its epic journey at the Games Opening Ceremony, where His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales delivered the Queen's message: [the Games] remind us of our connection with one another, wherever we may be in the world, as part of the Commonwealth family of nations...

Tonight, in the words of the founder of the Games, we embark once again on a novel adventure here in Birmingham, a pioneering city which has drawn in and embraced so many throughout its history. It is a city symbolic of the rich diversity and unity of the Commonwealth, and one which now welcomes you all in friendship.

## Being a catalyst for change

The £778 million investment into Birmingham and the West Midlands to stage the 2022 Commonwealth Games was designed to catalyse long-term positive changes for the city and region. In particular, the Games will drive changes across a broad spectrum of economic and social benefits to Birmingham, the West Midlands and the wider UK.

## Sustainability

The Games' ambition was to deliver the most sustainable Commonwealth Games yet. Birmingham 2022 committed to measure its carbon footprint and take a reduction-first approach, focussing on key emission hotspots, for example encouraging spectators to use public transport by including it within every ticket. Where emissions couldn't be eliminated, steps were taken that aimed to, over time, offset the entire carbon footprint of the Games.

This is a first for any Commonwealth Games and is being supported through the planting of a 2,022 acre Legacy Forest in the Midlands region, in partnership with the Games' Nature and Carbon Neutral supporter, Severn Trent Water.

Sustainability initiatives included: Minimising waste by reusing and repurposing existing facilities and venues, hiring over buying where possible. Significantly reducing the use



of single-use plastic, including Severn Trent providing free water bars at Games venues to refill water bottles. Working closely with uniform suppliers to ensure that the use of plastic was reduced, with waste minimised through smart folding, packaging and sizing technology.

72 tennis court-sized Tiny Forests have been planted by Severn Trent in urban areas across the West Midlands, in addition to the 2,022 acres of Legacy Forest that will be planted. Each Tiny Forest is named after a national flower or animal to represent each of the 72 Commonwealth nations and territories.

The Canals & Rivers Trust have cleared 22 miles of canals of rubbish and plastics, under the banner of the 'United by 2022' community programme. The Organising Committee used 252 fully electric vehicles as part of its fleet during the Games.

Supporting active travel at Games-time, including provision of 2 free 30-minute cycle hire rides each day, and dedicated secure cycle parking provision at every venue.

Alongside the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Organising Committee, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has provided funding to offer Carbon Literacy Training for Games volunteers and West Midlands residents. This is a course designed to continue the carbon-neutral legacy of the Games, helping people understand the climate emergency and actions they can take to reduce their own carbon footprint.

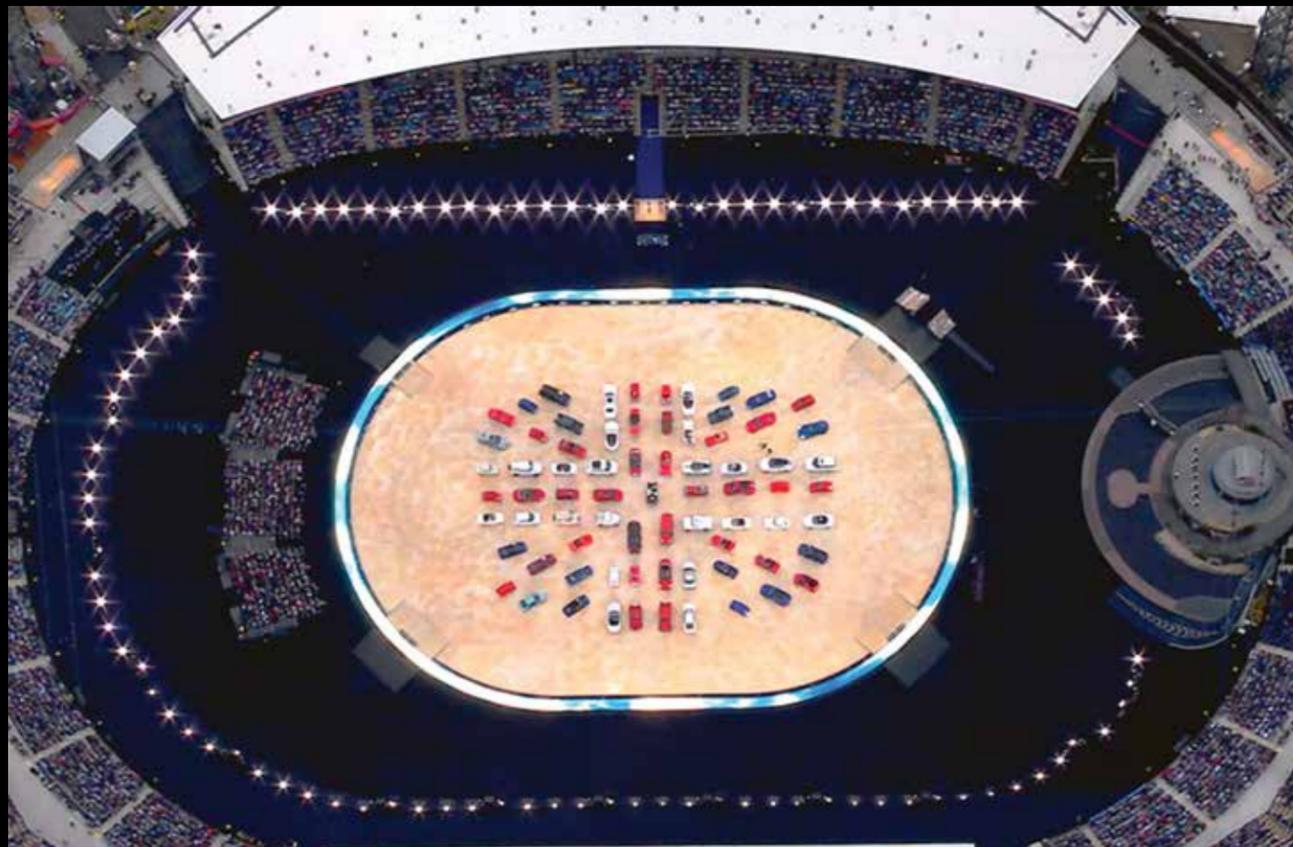
## Transport

With spectators travelling from around the globe, and millions of people arriving in the region, the Commonwealth Games have been one of the biggest-ever demands on the West Midlands' transport network.

Hosting the Commonwealth Games has accelerated the development of public transport infrastructure improvements that will benefit the city and wider region. This included the development of new Sprint rapid bus routes and improvements to Perry Barr, University, Coventry and Leamington Spa railway stations. The Games has also been the catalyst for initiating highway redevelopments to benefit the city, including the A34 at Perry Barr.

During the Games, the carbon impact of the different transport mode choices was included in the Commonwealth Games journey planner, aiming to inform and encourage users to choose lower carbon options. Transport for West Midlands plans to adopt this concept to support journey planning in the longer term as post-Games legacy. Keeping the second-largest city in the UK moving was a key success of the Games. Birmingham welcomed over 2 million people through New Street Station. 2,938 spectator shuttle Cycle Hire scheme were made during the Games, an increase of 131% relative to the 3 months prior to the Games. Over 7,500 personal bikes used cycle parking facilities at Games venues.





## Helping the region grow and succeed

Hosting the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will provide a huge boost to the economies of Birmingham, the West Midlands and the wider UK, and is laying the foundations for wider economic recovery from the pandemic.

More than 5 million people came to the city centre during the two-week period beginning 25 July 2022 - a 200% increase on the same period in 2021 - bringing huge benefits to the local economy.

## Job creation

40,000 jobs and skills opportunities were created by the Games, benefitting West Midlands residents.

The Jobs and Skills Academy invested £5 million to train unemployed residents to take advantage of roles in the Games. Through the Jobs and Skills Academy, over 7,500 people were trained in the key Games-related occupations of security, stewarding, hospitality, logistics and cleaning. This was essential for the Games and is also helping to build the workforce talent pool for the region.

In addition, the West Midlands Combined Authority was successful in securing a £5.2 million project 'Find Your Future' commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions, designed to support over 3,500 local people into employment and training both pre and post-Games. The project is part-funded by the European Social Fund.

A further £812,000 was awarded to the West Midlands Combined Authority through the National Lottery Community Fund, to help 1,000 young people connect to Commonwealth

Games opportunities until December 2022. The Jobs and Skills Academy also invested £1 million to train employees in higher-level skills.

## Volunteers

14,000 volunteers were trained to support the delivery of the Games, with 500 of these posts ringfenced for young people aged 14-17. The Games offered around 250,000 hours of training and 1 million volunteering hours. These volunteers were proud champions of Birmingham, the West Midlands and the UK; 63% came from the West Midlands, 61% were female and 21% self-reported as being from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Over 750 young people have also been recruited, as part of the Gen22 youth social action programme, to volunteer within their local community. This programme provides an opportunity for young people (aged 16-24) to gain skills and work experience, and who might otherwise struggle to access Games-related opportunities.

The legacy of these volunteers will carry on, as Games organisers continue momentum from the Games through a matching platform to link volunteers to volunteering opportunities across the region, initially funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and supported by Spirit of 2012.

## Putting us on the map

With a global audience, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games has given the city, the West Midlands region and the UK an unrivalled platform to showcase their best assets, raising the profile of the region and our country and shining a light on all the opportunities they have to offer across the Commonwealth.

## Business and Tourism Programme (BATP) and UK House

Launched in July 2021, the Business and Tourism Programme (BATP) leveraged the profile generated by the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games to boost the global reputations of Birmingham, the West Midlands and the UK as leading destinations for tourism, trade and investment.

The programme was developed by a partnership of regional, national and international organisations, all aiming to maximise the long-term economic benefits of the Commonwealth Games.

The UK government has invested £21.3 million into the BATP.

An additional £2.6 million of funding was provided by the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The programme is being delivered in partnership by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the West Midlands Combined Authority, the West Midlands Growth Company, the Department for International Trade, and Visit Britain.

The BATP is creating opportunities to connect with Commonwealth nations, territories and key global markets, re-establish a more resilient and sustainable tourism sector in the West Midlands, and contribute to the recovery of UK tourism more widely following COVID-19.

The Business and Tourism Programme to date: BATP activity has helped secure 23 investment decisions. The BATP has successfully attracted 10 meetings, conferences and sporting events. The BATP marketing campaigns and media activity reached an estimated audience of over 700 million across 18 countries. Supporting the tourism sector, the programme funded training for front-line tourism staff. In addition, 5.9 million used the digital platform for visitor information. Over 2,500 unique UK or overseas businesses have been engaged as part of work to stimulate trade and investment deals, a number of which are already in the pipeline.

Part of the business promotion activity included the delivery of UK House during Games-time, including the Commonwealth Business Forum, which was opened by the Prime Minister and Chancellor. UK House showcased and celebrated the UK as a leading, innovative nation with a dynamic, investor-friendly business landscape.

The UK House programme featured 8 days of events with more than 90 sessions, panels, clinics and workshops focussed on education, data-driven healthcare, sports economy, creative and digital technologies, food and drink, future mobility, tourism and legacy. The 5 key markets were India, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and Canada.

## Broadcast

BBC Sport's coverage of Birmingham 2022 was streamed a record-breaking 57.1 million times. This was over 6 times the number of streams seen in previous years, with a total of 9 million for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and 8.2m for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. 28.6 million people watched this year's Games on BBC TV at home. The highest peak was 6.6 million viewers ahead of the men and women's 100m backstroke and breaststroke finals on day 3. 5.1 million people watched the result of the women's 4x400m relay final, the final

athletics event of the Games. The men's 200m final had 4.2 million viewers. The BBC Sport website had 14.3 million visits for the latest news and analysis, with highlights being viewed online 10.7 million times.

The Opening Ceremony was broadcast live to 134 countries around the world. 5.2 million viewers watched the Opening Ceremony on TV sets at home and 4.8 million people tuned into the Closing Ceremony.

Ensuring legacy continues

## Legacy

From the outset, legacy was central to Birmingham 2022 and is reflected in the 5 mission pillars of the Games and its vision to be the 'Games for Everyone'.

75 projects from across Birmingham, the West Midlands and the nation have joined the Games' 'United By Birmingham 2022' community programme, demonstrating that their projects align with and champion the values of the Games' mission pillars.

With the Closing Ceremony now behind us, Games partners remain committed to ensuring the benefits of the Games are felt throughout Birmingham, the West Midlands, and the UK, for years to come. The United By 2022 Legacy Charity's aim is to maintain the momentum started by the Games and, with partners, support the Birmingham 2022 legacy going forward.

The Commonwealth Sport Foundation and United By 2022 Legacy Charity were the official charities of the Games, and worked with Sport Relief as Official Charity Partner to raise money to maximise the legacy impacts of the Games.

More information can be found in the Games' publication Birmingham 2022: Our Legacy.

## Evaluation

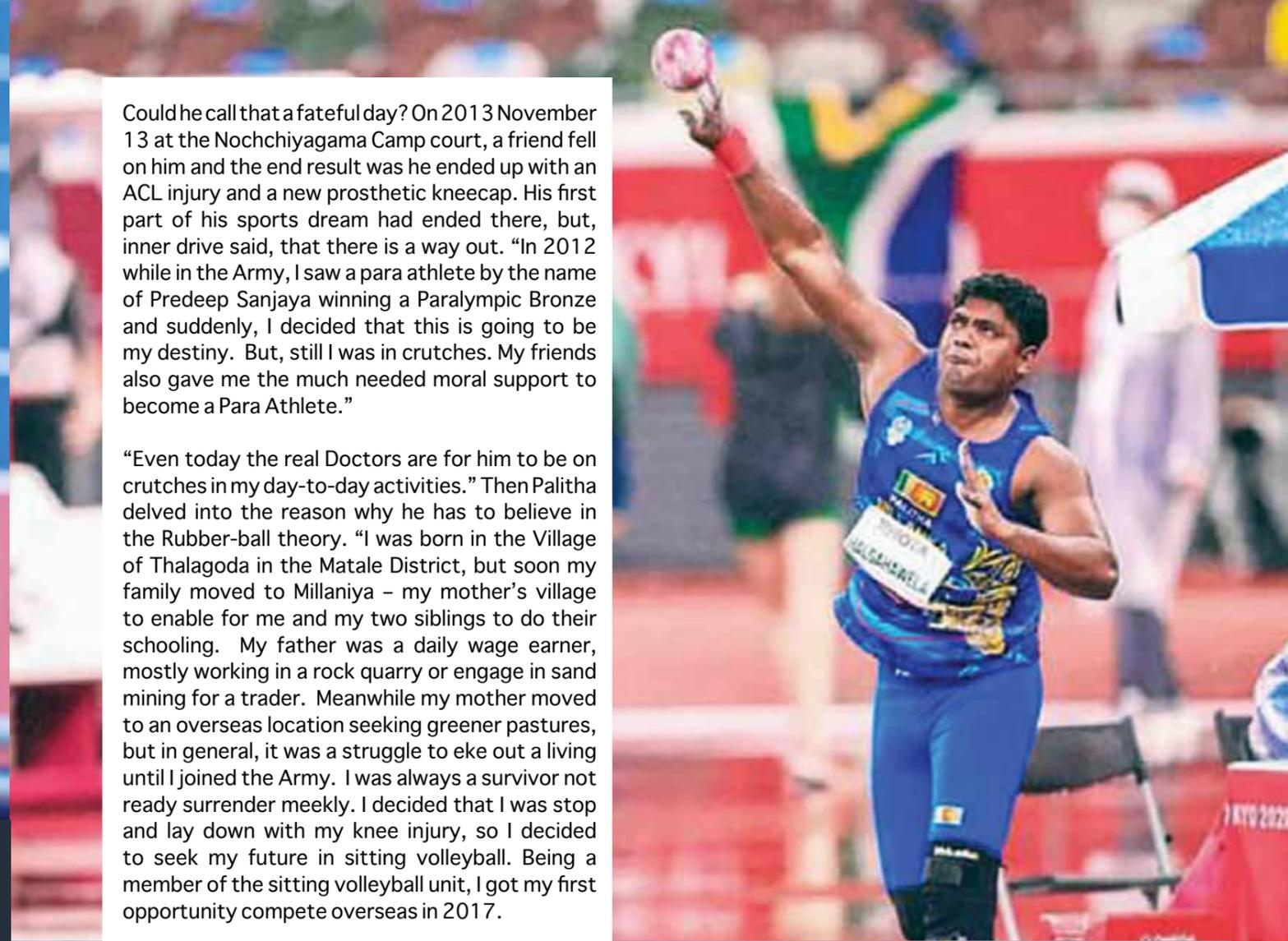
An independent evaluation is being undertaken into the economic, social and environmental impact of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

An evaluation report focussing on Games delivery will be published later in 2022, and another report capturing the post-Games legacy impacts will be published in late 2023.

Courtesy UK Govt.







Could he call that a fateful day? On 2013 November 13 at the Nochchiyagama Camp court, a friend fell on him and the end result was he ended up with an ACL injury and a new prosthetic kneecap. His first part of his sports dream had ended there, but, inner drive said, that there is a way out. "In 2012 while in the Army, I saw a para athlete by the name of Predeep Sanjaya winning a Paralympic Bronze and suddenly, I decided that this is going to be my destiny. But, still I was in crutches. My friends also gave me the much needed moral support to become a Para Athlete."

"Even today the real Doctors are for him to be on crutches in my day-to-day activities." Then Palitha delved into the reason why he has to believe in the Rubber-ball theory. "I was born in the Village of Thalagoda in the Matale District, but soon my family moved to Millaniya - my mother's village to enable for me and my two siblings to do their schooling. My father was a daily wage earner, mostly working in a rock quarry or engage in sand mining for a trader. Meanwhile my mother moved to an overseas location seeking greener pastures, but in general, it was a struggle to eke out a living until I joined the Army. I was always a survivor not ready surrender meekly. I decided that I was stop and lay down with my knee injury, so I decided to seek my future in sitting volleyball. Being a member of the sitting volleyball unit, I got my first opportunity compete overseas in 2017.

# THE INNER STORY OF A STORY OF GRIT AND SILVER



young Palitha Bandara was crazy to watch the 1996 Cricket World Cup in action, but at the Millaniya Village where he did his studies, there was no such facility or anyway avenue to have access one, so he sadly resigned to that fate. Then, when celebrity

athletes in the calibre of Susanthika Jayasinghe and Damayanthi Darsha performed, he cut their pictures and pasted in his scrapbook, or even pasted them in his wall. Yet, for him to have the real taste of sport, he had to finish his obligations with the Sri Lanka Army and the see the light

at the end of the tunnel after the 30-year war.

There, he learned the finer points of playing Volleyball and soon was a member of the Army National Guard Regimental Volleyball pool, and for him being selected from around 17,000 soldiers, was a huge achievement.





“Even during that period I was engaged in shot put and discus throw, but it was only a hobby at that time. Then under C.T. Anurakumara, I delved into serious training in these two sports in Nochchiyagama. However, after around two and a half months I was moved back to the Kurunegala camp. Then even without a proper coach I continued with my training via-YouTube.

“Suddenly at that juncture, the National Paralympic Committee invited me to move to Colombo promising coaching assistance and help said that there is long road ahead of you in Paralympics. In 2018 in preparation to the Asian Paralympic Championships I was put under Pradeep Nishantha and won the Silver in the shot put with a distance of 13.21m.

“In 2019, I took part in the World Paralympic Games in Dubai and in that effort I was placed 8th.

In 2020, I had the opportunity of teaming up with Prabhath Dhanushka Perera as coach and in February 2021 I took part in the shot put at the Grand Prix in Dubai and I won the third place there with a distance of 13.41 metres. With that I qualified for the Paralympic Games and I ended up at the 5th place.”

Soon after he and his coach were told that they had to prepare for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, but, ironically they had to change sport to Men’s F42-44/61-64 discus throw because the shot put was not there in the list. “I was told that I had to prepare to take part in the Discus Throw. At the same time, the National Olympic Committee afforded me the opportunity of taking part in the Commonwealth GAPS programme, where they give special training to Para-athletes prior to the games. As I was among the first five performers at the Paralympics, I got this opportunity. There, I was put under

a high performance coach from New Zealand. From him, I learned a lot to polish up my discus throw and up to date, I work with him through video.



“Changing from the put shot to serious discus throw itself was a huge challenge. I was committed to the shot put throw for almost four years prior to that. I only had about seven months to become a fully-fledged discus thrower. On top of that, they gave me a target of clearing 40m. Then in April 2022 at a GAPS competition – this was by another para athletic championship in Britain, I cleared 40.20 metres and qualified to take part at the games proper.

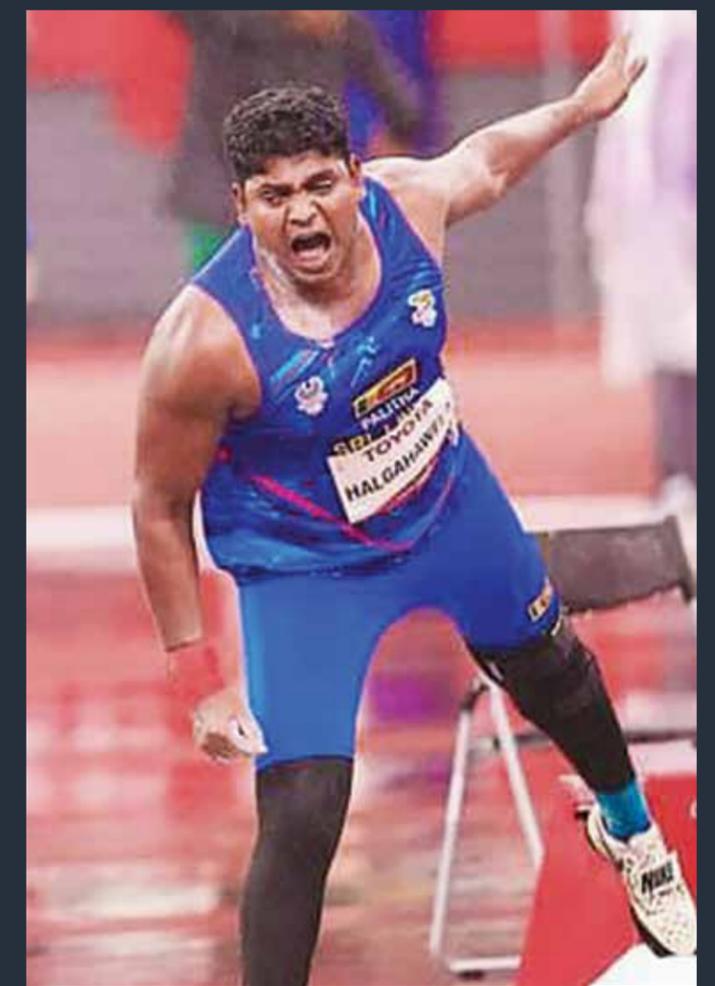
“Then through the GAPS programme, I underwent further training in Birmingham and this was before the start of the real programme got under way. It was on June 17, 2022 and I had time to prepare as my event was to take place on August 3, 2022. As a result, I had sufficient time to acclimatize myself to the Birmingham conditions.”



Palitha said the climate was always in the region of 16 to 17 degrees. Then he and his coach Prabhath decided as his event was going to be held around 8.45 in the evening, to do most of our training during that time. Then when the real date of the competition arrived, I was ready for the climatic aspect of it.

“However the day of the real thing - the atmosphere was almost electric. The din was almost deafening. In spite of standing so close to each other, I could not hear what my coach was telling me. Luckily, it was not so cold for us that day, but, my other Asiatic competitors were feeling the cold. Maybe because Yupun moved there from Italy, he also could stand up to the situation there, and I was sharing the stadium the same day. At the same time, I could feel - when some other competitors were receiving huge cheering I had none. But, that did not matter at all.

“I had not seen such crowd before; it was awe-inspiring. I was really frightened when I took my first throw. For the first time, I engaged in an international competition of this magnitude. Yet, in the back of my mind, I wanted to prove my worth.



“By my side, there were two Indian and two British competitors, but, I knew that they were feeling the cold more than me and I was more comfortable than them at that moment. In fact, they were getting cramps because of the cold. Then after the third throw, I had that inner feeling that I was in line of a medal of some nature. I reached my peak during the third and fourth throws, yet, I did not know that I really had won a medal at that time.

“Then, on the other side, Yupun had got his Bronze Medal and I rushed to congratulate the 100m runner for his achievement. Upon my return, I did my sixth throw, but there I had touched the line. But, it was in my fifth attempt that I made the difference and sealed the fate. I had cleared a distance of 44.20m to clinch the silver medal, which had also happened to be my new personal best. I did it for my country and I am really happy that I was a part of the country’s celebrations.”







# STRONG POSSIBILITY OF CRICKET AT THE OLYMPICS IN 2028 – LANKANS; LET’S GET OUR GEAR READY

At a time when the game of cricket is topical as any other sport on a global scale the popularity of the sport in the subcontinent is awe-inspiring. At the same time not even the home of the sport – the United Kingdom, could boast of a coverage of full members as the Indian sub-continent – namely India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. In pure numbers of followers, it is colossal.

Out of this our concentration is focused on Sri Lanka which has the least acreage of land and least population who have made it their home and that counts to roughly 22 million.

Nonetheless the game is very healthy in this tiny island nation and they were also the winners of the ICC World Cup in 1996 and the runners up on many occasions and the winners of the ICC T-20 Championships in 2014 and runners-up on two more occasions. At the same time, they are also the recipients of the Asian Games Gold medal in 2014 taking the field under Lahiru Thirimanne. It is significant that both those accolades came in the same year played by almost two different teams – the ICC team at full strength and the Asian Games with only a few true international cricketers.

Now there are serious thoughts of the game of cricket making a comeback to the Olympic arena after a 128-year break. If it comes back it will be at the 2028 Los Angeles Games. According to ESPN Cricinfo, the development comes a day after the International Cricket Committee (ICC) was formally invited by both the LA28 and IOC to submit a presentation in order to make their case considered.

However, a final decision is expected to be announced ahead of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in Mumbai sometime in mid-2023.

Cricket has only once been played at the Olympics, back in 1900 in Paris, with Great Britain and hosts France the only participants.

Cricket’s road to its Olympic debut was eventful. Originally slated to be included in the inaugural modern Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens, it was scrapped due to a lack of participants. Four years later it made its debut in Paris but that too was eventful.

It was planned that Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium would all enter cricket teams into the tournament. Unfortunately, both the Netherlands and Belgium withdrew from the cricket after their bid to co-host the Olympics was turned down.

Consequently, the match between Great Britain and France was cricket’s first and, as it currently stands, last match.

The participants may not have even realised it was a part of the Olympics, with the match played under the banner of the Exposition Universelle of 1900 – a world fair in Paris – at the time. It wasn’t until 1912 that the clash was given official Olympic event status.

Neither team fielded a national side, with Great Britain calling upon the services of the Devon and Somerset Wanderers club, who were touring France at the time. France were represented by an ‘All Paris’ team, whose 12-man group was largely made up of British ex-pats.

After the 1900 game, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, president of the Olympic Committee, later wrote, “cricket has practically no appeal for those who are not British.” The sport was never again played at the Olympics.

More than a century later, cricket has over 2 billion fans, of which 92% are in South Asia. The sport makes over \$8 billion a year, with the Indian Premier League — a private league for cricket teams in India — alone making at least \$6 billion yearly.



Several high-profile cricketers, including Sourav Ganguly and Kumar Sangakkara, have clamored for cricket to be included in the Olympics for years, to no avail. But the tides finally may be changing. Today, owing to the sport's global popularity and shortened game format, experts think cricket could return to the Olympics.

In the event of cricket making a return to the Olympic world would the game be played at the same scale, pomp and pageantry as the real World Cup. Ironically the reason being some sports like Football which is by far the richest and the most popular game on earth does not glitter as much at Olympic Level. The reason being the scale of monetary benefits that the individual player derives as a professional and their allegiance to their respective to their clubs and then their respective country's playing XI.



Even at the just concluded Commonwealth Games there were almost eight top short distance runners who opted to skip the Birmingham event in preference to the ongoing Grand Prix commitments. Maybe if the full list of eligible 100metres runners were available at that event, the end result also may have been different.

Coming back to Sri Lanka Cricket it should be a part of this grand plan. Henceforth there are six more years of sizing up the challenge and trying to add another Trophy in our already impressive larder. Maybe when it comes up to the lineup of commitments the SLC should try to voice their opinion on a window for the Olympic Games while they draw up their next international itinerary. At the same time, they also must try to come out with the best possible outfit so that they do not return empty handed.

Like we mentioned before we do have the two big plums – the ICC World CUP and the ICC T-20 World Championship in our showcase. Those are achievements that the Lankans are proud about and keep our talent coming out to the field of sport. Just imagine if we could also accomplish the feat of being the recipients of the Olympic Gold.

# THROUGH THE EYES OF A LEGEND



Harshana Godamanne is a household name when it comes to Sri Lankan Tennis. Shining through his school career becoming the school's Tennis Captain to becoming a recipient of the Royal College Crown, he continued to bring glory to his country at events such as South Asian Games and also became the first ever Sri Lankan junior to win an ITF Junior ranking tournament on foreign soil. However, his speciality was Davis Cup; Godamanne has played in an overall of 58 ties grabbing 78 wins throughout his career and in 2018 became the recipient of the Davis Cup Commitment Award presented by the International Tennis Federation. Earlier this year after a 20 year long illustrious career with 20 Davis Cup appearances, he bid farewell to the Davis Cup court.

Here, we at GoodSport had a discussion with him to speak about sport in his perception.

We started off – “Let’s start from the beginning. Though it’s widely spoken about already, could you summarise your journey from when you first started playing Tennis to becoming an International Tennis player?”

Godamanne responded, “I started playing tennis when I was four years old at home with my brother Chamika. He is the one who put a racket on my hand. From there he found a coach for me early on. I started with Sylvester Francis before I was taller than the net. Sylvester has been a very important



person in my tennis career and life. We had so much success together winning all junior national events and even winning multiple open national titles. However, my goal was to play professionally and I knew I had to leave Sri Lanka and Sylvester was very supportive of it. Luckily we went to an academy in Thailand and met a coach from Switzerland, Dominik Utzinger. I liked him from the get go as he was honest and realistic about the path of being a professional. He taught me a lot. I had the skills but I had to learn about myself and also about how to handle other players. Dominik was our Davis Cup coach for many years and we did have so much success as a team. It was a long journey but I would do it all over again.”

Continuing, we inquired, “Your life story has inspired many. If you could advise youngsters on one quality you’ve followed throughout, what would it be?”

“Perseverance. Keep fighting and keep learning. Good things will happen”, was his answer.

We moved on to asking, - “After 20 years, you bid farewell to the Davis Cup court this year and you were also the recipient of the Davis Cup Commitment Award presented by the International Tennis Federation. Could you speak a bit of your most memorable moments in the Davis Cup?”

He reminisced, “Davis Cup has been a huge part of my life. Since tennis is an individual sport, I have really enjoyed playing the Davis Cup as a team. I had the privilege to have over 20 team mates in my career and I can’t be happier. The Davis Cup has always motivated me. Playing for Sri Lanka has always been an honour. I get motivated, driven and emotional at the same time as it means a lot to me. I have carried the pressure with me every match I played and I truly believe that the pressure is a privilege. There are endless memories in the Davis Cup. One of the most memorable is when I received the Davis Cup Commitment Award. It is not something I was working towards. It came as a surprise, and it was very special.”



“My most memorable Davis cup tie was against New Zealand when I had my biggest win against an ATP 225 player and almost beating another player who was ATP 298 the same weekend. I had my best win and also one of the toughest losses in my Davis Cup career. That weekend taught me a lot of lessons which I am very proud of. I take every loss as a lesson I can learn from. Another memorable few years was when we had a 5 year run in group II. I had many gruelling matches to keep the flag flying high. It was a great time and we had a great team to get the job done.”

“Overall, what would you consider as the highest standpoint throughout your journey in Tennis?”, we queried.

He answered, “All the big matches I was able to play in front of the home crowd. It took time for me to build the trust of the people to come watch my matches. But as time went by many people showed up and for me it’s an incredible feeling and I take a lot of pride in playing at home.”

We moved on to asking about his coaching career – “You aren’t just a Tennis player but a Tennis Coach. What was your shift like from being a Tennis player to a Tennis Coach?”

“The shift from being a player to a coach has been an ease. Playing professionally and playing all my life has taught me about the game of Tennis and also many like skills off the court. In my opinion, my role as a tennis coach is not to just teach tennis, but also teach life skills. I try my best to relate life situations into tennis situations. I believe tennis is a unique sport where coaches cannot help you during your matches. You must be independent in making decisions. I really enjoy the coaching aspect of it as I know I cannot deliver a specific message the same way to everyone. This is exciting for me. Finding ways to get my message across to different players in different ways of fun.”

“You were named as the Coach of the Year by the Little East Conference earlier this year. While congratulating you, what are the biggest challenges you’ve had to overcome as a coach?”



“I believe Communication is the biggest challenge I had as a coach. I have worked with many coaches where I realise some of them have a lot of knowledge but are not good at communicating. Tennis is a complicated game itself. My challenge has always been to simplify it and help them understand better.”

We continued by asking, “As a coach, you travel a lot and spend a lot of time on court. So as a father, how do you manage time with work?”

Godamanne’s response was - “It has been very challenging but I prioritise fatherhood over tennis now. I want to be a father that is there to do the daily routines with my son.”

“Moving on to the sport in general, we asked him “How do you think Tennis as a sport stands out among other sports in the world and in Sri Lanka?”

“Tennis is a unique sport. And it is also a lifelong sport. Tennis teaches you a lot of life skills as it is all dependent on you. It has taught a lot about how to deal with life situations. There are so many skills you have to master before having any success. On top of all the skills, we have 3 different surfaces. We play indoors and outdoors. We have to get used to the different

weather conditions, altitudes and many more. At the end of the day, the mental part of the game plays a huge role. Since you have to be good at adapting to all the different aspects of the game and find a way to win.”

“How can being in a sport/s compose and/or alter your life than a life with no sports?”

“A sport teaches you a lot. I recommend everyone to play some type of sport at any level. It really helps in many ways that you can think of. You have to experience it to know the benefits of it.”

“As a player and a coach, what’s your opinion on the current level of Tennis in Sri Lanka and in what areas do you think Tennis in Sri Lanka has to improve to go forward as a sport?”

“Overall, I believe that we as a subcontinent aren’t physically built strong. So, more focus should be on the fitness aspect of the game. I believe we have a lot of talent and potential but the physical aspect does let many of the players down. Stronger they become physically, they will be confident, will think more clearly, will make better decisions, and will have good results.”



We asked, “The younger generation, especially in Sri Lanka, are hesitant to remain in sports with the idea that there’s no future in sport (as a living). You’ve lived your life through many roles in sports. What’s the scope for careers in Tennis and/or sports in general?”

“There are many avenues you can take through the sport. You can be a coach, administrator, player manager, officiating and many more. But again, it’s up to you to pick what suits you. But if you achieve a higher level, doors will open up. I am where I am today because of the level I managed to play at, many opportunities opened up for me.”, he replied.

We wrapped up our discussion by asking, “Finally, you’ve achieved so much throughout your life, so what are your future goals now?”

“I am passionate about player development. I will keep working to help players get to a level beyond what I was capable of. And I strongly believe I can do that. Like anything else, it doesn’t come easy. I have to work hard”, he concluded.



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