

Sports in Malaysia - A General Overview

When asked about what needs to be done to encourage youths in this country to be involved in sports, ex-Olympian and International Sports Official, Datuk Dr Mani Jegathesan says it is absolutely crucial that we push for a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity, for all Malaysians, especially the youth.

“They are our future, life habits and skills are best inculcated in the formative years”, he adds. “A time-tested method for encouraging physical activity is the practice of sport. Sport brings not just the exercise component, but psychological and social benefits as well. Sport is fun, exciting and engaging, and sports can teach us many good values.”

It is no surprise that Dr Jegathesan’s view concurs that the schools and the community, in which the youth work and play, would be the best place to strongly advocate this by first making the programmes attractive and compelling to attract the young people. Instead of engaging themselves in some anti-social behaviours, their involvement in all kinds of sports will help develop a healthier generation of young Malaysians with a more confident, competitive and positive outlook in life.

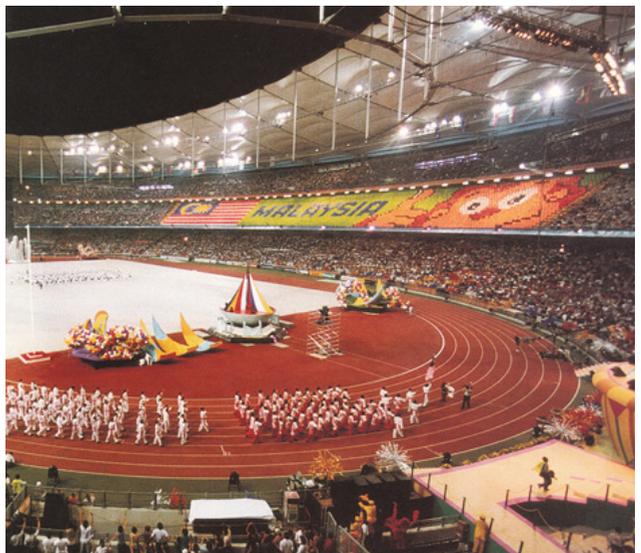
Hence, the recent decision by the Education Ministry to slash the annual allocation to the Malaysian Schools Sports Council (MSSM) from RM6 million to RM1.5 million is definitely a bane to the promotion of sports among the young people in the midst of rising anti-social behaviours. Where there used to be 24 sports, catering for the Under-12, Under-15 and Under-18, now a number of these sports have to be slashed to nearly half of the number of sports. A number of sports like handball, rugby, sailing, table tennis, cricket, softball, cross country, chess, bowling, squash and archery have been axed from the programme. Some of these are the sports such as squash, bowling and archery have put Malaysia on the world map, having produced current world squash champion Datuk Nicol David. Both Shalin Zulkifli (Bowling) and Cheng Chu Sian (Archery) had won the recurve individ-

ual gold at the recent SEA Games in Laos. Besides, when we talk about the 10 merit points allocated to students to gain entry into local universities, the students, who are active in the 11 sports axed by the MSSM, will be at a greater disadvantage.

In short, before we talk about going for Gold, we should be talking about investing in the development of young sportsmen and women, in the process help the young people at large develop good social and inter-personal soft skills, besides cultivating a healthy eating habit based on good knowledge of nutrition. All this has to begin at the school level, and we can never go wrong if both the government and the parents of these children put serious efforts to encourage their children to actively participate in sports.

Sports in Personality Development

Parents, who generally place more emphasis on academic excellence, should realize that their children’s involvement in sports is more than just the ability to play a game. Participation in the sports helps the young people to learn to be in control of various challenging situations and in the process develop a healthy and positive outlook in life. Some of them will eventually learn to be good leaders in their respective fields when they grow up.



Involvement in the sports also helps to boost up both physical and mental stamina in children. Studies have shown that participation in school sports is vital for the development of motor skills besides helping to release endorphins which helps decrease depression and increases energy. Because the young people are taught to accept defeat in life at a very young age, they eventually develop a stronger determination to succeed in their next attempt. They learn to push beyond their human limitations and trust in their ability to break world records.

They say, world champions are made, not born. This is where young people also learn that, in order to win, they will always have to play by the rules. As they advance in their sports as professional sportsmen and sportswomen, they know their rules by hard. The moment a rule is broken, there is a penalty, and in some cases, the athlete may be totally disqualified altogether. Even a year after they are eventually found guilty of foul play, their hard-earned championship title can be withdrawn indefinitely. The rules in a game are the same as the rules in real life which they can ill-afford to overlook.

It is this kind of holistic development of the personality of their children and their ability to meet challenges in life that is more important, which like race relations cannot be taught in the classrooms.



Sports in Social Benefits and Race Relations

In a multi-racial society like Malaysia, young people learn best to bond with each other and people of other races at an early age, when they are on the playground. It is a more effective way to inculcate race relations than having classroom lectures on race relations. When the late Mokhtar Dahari scored a goal, everyone cheered. When Nicol David won the World Squash Championship, her name was mentioned on everyone's lips. Other well-known names – the late Santokh Singh, Marina Chin, Lee Chong Wei, Misbun Sidek and the list goes on and on – have similarly made the nation proud of their individual achievements. Malaysians are proud of the advancements in sports made by their fellow citizens, regardless of race, religion or creed.

For this reason, the government should channel more funds to build good sport facilities for the schools, and focus on promoting participation of the young people in various types of sports as part of the extra-curricular activities. The spirit of comradeship in sports at the school level will eventually help to foster greater race relations in a multi-racial society like ours.

A talented young man of 17, Philippe Yang from Sri KL Private School, who had a chance to visit a few public schools in Australia, recently gave a moving speech to his fellow students about his observations how the schools in Australia are generally better equipped with good sports facilities compared to schools in Malaysia. At the conclusion of his speech, Yang urged the Ministry of Education to spend more on providing good sports facilities for the schools. "I believe", he said with convictions, "that Malaysians can do better at sports if they started early in life".

One other area which is very much neglected in the schools nationwide is a better understanding of nutrition, in particular, about the correct way of eating to achieve maximum performance in competitive sports.

Sports Nutrition

Close consultation with the nutritionist is important. Sadly, except for the sports schools, most urban schools do not even have nutritionists who are assigned to take care of the children's food consumption. As a result, the young people are ill-advised on their daily diet. Junk and fast food has become very popular in schools globally, including Malaysia. That has recently prompted the Taiwanese Government to consider introducing junk food tax to reduce obesity amongst the country's school-going children. Statistics show that 25-30% of children in that country are obese. In Malaysia, at least 27% of the 25 million people are obese. Our children are no better – and this is an alarming situation for a country with a young population. Analyst such as Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity president Dr Mohd Ismail Noor opined that efforts to ban fast-food advertisements will not make any impact on the way society eats. A good habit of eating the right diet and frequent exercise has to be cultivated and taught from young.

Perhaps, a proper diet, without the excesses of the fast food of modern days, is one possible reason why the country could produce great sportsmen and sportswomen in badminton, football and hockey in the hey days of these sports, at a time when Malaysia was emerging as a nation. Today's diet is a bane and probably a contributing factor for the lack of exercise and the determination to excel in sports. A proverb may be true after all: "You are what you eat!" To achieve peak performance in sports, the young athletes will have to follow guidelines that are particularly designed for their kind of activities.

A good nutrition plan also includes the proper timing in food consumption. Nutritionists will be able to advise the young athletes how to time their meals to their training, so that the energy peaks at the right time when it is most needed.

Meanwhile, apart from looking at the long term goal of developing the younger generation of Malaysians to become world-class athletes, the government also has to study how to further

improve the performance of our athletes in some international events, especially those that the country is taking great effort to bid for and host the events. Except for a handful of good athletes, the nation's performance in some of these international sport events for the past two decades is hardly enviable. Proper resources channelled into the training of our sportsmen and sportswomen will hopefully help to propel our athletes into greater heights of achievements. In some areas, there are apparently improvements being made, but more efforts need to be focused on turning the ashes into the glory of winning World Championships.

The six million Ringgit question: Will our involvement in the upcoming major sports events bring a greater fame or disgrace to the country? It is unfair to blame it on the sportsmen and sportswomen alone, as it is a question that also involves the sports administrators, the government, and the sports fans. Are we giving enough support, morally and financially, to help boost the performance of our sports community?

Thomas & Uber Cup 2010

Malaysia has won the bid to host the 2010 Thomas and Uber Cup Finals in May 2010, beating two others, China and Brazil, which also offered to play host to the two Team World Badminton Championships. This would be the 26th tournament of the Thomas Cup since its debut in 1948, and the 23rd edition of the Uber Cup since 1956.

In badminton, despite its late entry into the competition, China's emergence as a tough competitor is something to emulate. The 2008 Thomas Cup last contested in Jakarta, Indonesia from May 11 to May 18, 2008, saw Malaysia losing to China 2-3 in the semi-finals. Meanwhile, in the finals, China beat Korea 3-1 and won the championship title for the seventh time in the World Men's Team Championship. Malaysia has won the championship title for five times, the last

being in 1992 when Malaysia played host. The biggest challenge is for Malaysia to take on the world, and prove herself as capable to match China's performance by winning another world championship on home ground. In the Uber Cup, Malaysia has never won any championship titles; will our shuttlers be able to at least improve their performance, if not able to win the championship title? To date, only four nations namely China, Japan, USA and Indonesia have won the Uber Cup, and Malaysia is still a long way to go in boosting its all-women's team. Our team can make it, if they put their heart and soul to winning the Uber Cup championship for the first time.

To date, Indonesia still holds the record of being the most successful country in the Thomas Cup, having won the event 13 times while China dominated the Uber Cup with ten championships to their name. Whether Malaysia will once again win the much coveted Thomas Cup world championship is something that many are waiting to see since the event is held on its home ground, especially since it has some of the best shuttlers in the world. For example, Datuk Lee Chong Wei recently managed to clinch his sixth Malaysia Open Super Series title after beating Thailand's Ponsana Boonsak 21-13, 21-7 in 34 minutes in the final held at the Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil. He had earlier emerged champion in the Korean Open, and is considered World No. 1. His success is something to be celebrated.

The Champions of THOMAS CUP

Indonesia	13 times
China	7 times
Malaysia (incl. Malaya)	5 times

The Champions of UBER CUP

China	10 times
Japan	5 times
U.S.A	3 times
Indonesia	3 times

25th SEA Games 2009

The 26th SEA Games will be held in Bandung and Semarang, Indonesia in 2011. With one year ahead, Malaysia has to pump in a lot of efforts to regain its glorious moments, considering that its performance in the last SEA Games 2009 in Vientiane, Laos, was hardly enviable. Malaysia came in fourth position after Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. This was the lowest final position in 22 years. Compared to both Thailand and Vietnam, the number of medals collected was nearly half the number compared to Thailand. Thailand bagged 86 Gold, 83 Silver and 97 Bronze medals, whereas Malaysia accumulated 40 Gold, 40 Silver and 59 Bronze medals. Even Laos coming in the seventh placing won 33 Gold, 25 Silver and 52 Bronze medals, an achievement that far exceeds its own record of five Gold medals at the last SEA Games in Korat, Thailand in 2007.

Table 1: Number of medals collected by countries at 25th SEA GAMES 2009

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total Medal
Thailand	86	83	97	266
Vietnam	83	75	57	215
Indonesia	43	53	74	170
Malaysia	40	40	59	139
Philippines	38	35	51	124
Singapore	33	30	35	98
Laos	33	25	52	110
Myanmar	12	22	37	71
Cambodia	3	10	27	40
Brunei	1	1	8	10
Timor Leste	0	0	3	3

Source: www.laoseagames2009.com

Meanwhile, host country Laos surprised everyone by its performance in football in the region by reaching the semi-finals, before falling 3-1 to Malaysia.

In football, there was reason for celebration. This was the first time that Malaysia won the football Gold - dubbed the 'mother of all Gold medals' in both the men's and women's football, after Thailand had been winning the SEA Games crown in men's football for the last eight editions since 1993 while for the women, they were the defending champions. Malaysia managed to knock out Thailand from a place in semi-finals and regained its status as the SEA Games Football Champion, with a 1-0 win over Vietnam in the final. This raises the hope that Malaysian football

will be returned to its former glory. Will it still perform even better in the Bandung Games in 2011?

Other notable achievements in Laos Games include Roslinda Samsu, who became the new Games record holder for Pole Vault Final (Female) with 4.15 metres, compared to her 4.10 metres in the 23rd SEA Games in the Philippines in 2005. Meanwhile, Tan Song Hwa managed to achieve Hammer Throw Final (Female) and hit a new Games record with 56.41 metres after the old record of 53.35 metres was won during the 23rd SEA Games in the Philippines in 2005.

Asian Indoor Games and ASIAD

Malaysia came 15th in rank during the recent 3rd Asian Indoor Games 2009, which was held at the newly constructed Hanoi Indoor Athletics Palace. Two other ASEAN countries, Vietnam and Thailand, were amongst the top five countries, with Vietnam bagging 42 Gold medals, 30 Silver and 22 Bronze. Even Thailand's achievement was glamorous, compared to Malaysia's performance, with 3 Gold medals, 5 Silver and 8 Bronze.

With the 4th Asian Indoor Games being planned in 2013, it is hoped that more emphasis will be placed on producing athletes with greater excellence.

Table 2: Number of medals collected based on countries during the 4th Asian Indoor Games 2009

Rank	Country	G	S	B	Total
1	People's Republic of China	48	25	19	92
2	Vietnam	42	30	22	94
3	Kazakhstan	21	16	21	58
4	Thailand	19	17	34	70
5	Iran	17	15	13	45
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15	Malaysia	3	5	8	16

Taken from <http://www.vaigoc2009.com>

During the 15th ASIAD or Asian Games held in Doha, Qatar from December 1 to December 15, 2006, Malaysia came in the eighth position, with a total of 8 Gold, 17 Silver and 17 Bronze medals. The next Asian Games, to be held in Guangzhou, China from November 12, 2010 to November 27, 2010 will be another opportunity for Malaysian athletes to prove their worth. With 41 events making it the largest Asian Games ever held since

1951 when the Games made its debut in New Delhi. Malaysia will be sending its football team to compete in the Asian Games, after capturing the championship title in the Laos SEA Games and nearly decades in the doldrums. It is hoped that this new team will help bring back the glories during the days of Santokh Singh, Mokhtar Dahari, Soh Chin Aun and R. Arumugam, a truly multi-racial mix.

2010 Commonwealth Games

The 2010 Commonwealth Games from 3-14 October 2010 will see some 6,000 international athletes competing in 17 sports in New Delhi, India.

Malaysia is also forming its contingent to participate in various sports, including diving and swimming competitions, where three swimmers, Daniel Bego, Siow Yi Ting and Khoo Cai Lin, will be competing against some of the best swimmers from China, Japan and South Korea who are already of world class status, based on their results at the World Championships and Olympics. Laos SEA Games Double gold medalist, Yeoh Ken Nee will also be competing in the diving competition at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in October. He had earlier won a silver in the 1metre springboard during the last Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Cheng Chu Sian, Mohd Izzudin Abdul Rahim and Wan Khalmizam Wan Abdul Aziz have been selected to represent Malaysia as the national elite archery team. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Amateur Boxing Federation (MABF) said it is hopeful that its boxers will win medals in the New Delhi Commonwealth Games in October, after delivering two unexpected gold medals at the Laos SEA Games, when Mohd Farkhan Haron and Fairus Azwan Abdullah won the Middleweight (75kg) and Light Heavyweight (81kg) Competitions, respectively, in the Laos Games.

Former top rifle shooter, Mohd Emran Zakaria is also planning to make a comeback as a competitor in the Commonwealth Games after watching the lack of performance by the younger participants during the Laos SEA Games.

While a lot of preparations have gone in, the question is: will we see a quantum leap in Malaysia's overall performance in the major sports events, including the Olympic Games 2012 in London, after a poor show in the Beijing Summer Olympics 2008? Has sufficient efforts been put in to address our weaknesses and build on our existing strengths? This is where more emphasis has to be placed to improve the prestige of our local sportsmen and sportswomen besides promoting other major events that put the country on the world map, one of which is the Formula One, where Malaysia is still a new player.

Formula One

In March 2010, all eyes will be on Bahrain where the Formula One race will begin from March 12-14. This will feature among others the sensational comeback of seven-time world champion, Michael Schumacher who recently signed a deal for with Mercedes. Some 20 locations around the world have been identified, including the Malaysian Grand Prix which will be held on April 4. Malaysia will have two teams in this coming event.

Created by AirAsia's boss, Tony Fernandes, Malaysia's Team Lotus F1, represented by veteran Formula One driver Jarno Trulli, Finland's Heikki Kovalainen and Malaysian Fairuz Fauzy, will also be competing in the race. 35 years old Trulli was formerly racing with Toyota, and since 1997, has completed in 216 races, while Kovalainen, 28 made his debut in 2006 with Renault. Fairuz, 27 has driven in the GP2 series and A1 GP. However, in a recent announcement, Petronas said it was signing up with Mercedes for title sponsorship, after the withdrawal of BMW Sauber's team from F1. This, defended Petronas vice-president of corporate services, Ahmad Nizam Salleh, is decided upon after much deliberation and short-listing four teams -Williams, Sauber, Mercedes and Lotus. Ahmad Nizam explains that Petronas was looking beyond patriotism for its sponsorship to allow greater opportunities for business growth. Although Lotus 1 is a Malaysian team, Ahmad was quoted in The Star recently, saying, "we believe Mercedes are

the ideal partners. Besides their long and established history in motorsport, they have the platform to serve our long-term business plans to expand our lubricants business."

With the participation of Schumacher, the turnout at the Malaysian Grand Prix on Sunday 4 April 2010 is expected to swell to 100,000, compared to 60,000 last year.

Monsoon Cup

The current Monsoon Cup agreement, inked in 2005 between the State Government of Terengganu and the World Match Racing Tour (WMRT) for the prestigious sailing event, will end in 2012. The event, which works as a catalyst for the state's development, serves as the Malaysian leg for the international event, dubbed "The Formula One of Sailing", which was started in 2000 to unite the world's best match-race regattas under one banner. It has drawn tourists from around the world to the state especially during the monsoon season at the end of the year. More importantly, a total of 1.21 billion people around the world watched the live telecast of the Monsoon Cup over ESPN in 2006 alone, bringing attention to the state.

The racing tour comprises nine events in different locations around the world with the Monsoon Cup being the final leg.

Thirteen teams met in the waters off Terengganu from Dec 2 to Dec 6, 2009 to battle for the championship trophy. This event has generated as high as 1.2 billion viewers on ESPN Star Sports, Fox Australia, CNBC Australia and Pan Asia, Sky New Zealand, America One, Sports Max, Eurosport World, Fox Sports US and Travel Channel China live telecast every year.

Skipper Adam Mino prio, his Kiwi crew David Swete, Nick Blackman, Daniel Lean and Tom Powrie of the New Zealands Black Match Racing clinched the 2009 Monsoon Cup, after being crowned the 2009 ISAF Match Racing World Champions and beating three-time (in 1998, 2002 and 2008) Olympic gold medallist and ISAF World

Sailor, Ben Ainslie and Team Origin at the Ri-Yaz Heritage Marina Resort and Spa in Pulau Duyong. Yanmar Racing came in the third placing, while two-time winner of Monsoon Cup, Datuk Peter Gilmour came in fourth.

2009 MONSOON CUP RESULTS

1. Adam Minoprio (NZL) ETNZ/Black Match Racing
2. Ben Ainslie (GBR) Team Origin
3. Peter Gilmour (AUS) Yanmar Racing
4. Sebastien Col (FRA) French Match Racing Team All4One
5. Mathieu Richard (FRA) French Match Racing Team
6. Phil Robertson (NZL) Waka Racing
7. Torvar Mirsky (AUS) Mirsky Racing Team
8. Damien lehl (FRA) French Match Racing Team
9. Magnus Holmberg (SWE) Victory Challenge
10. Francesco Bruni (ITA) Team Azzurra
11. Ian Williams (GBR) Team Pindar
12. Hazwan Hazim Dermawan (MAS) Taring Pelangi Team

2009 WORLD MATCH RACING TOUR RESULTS

- Adam Minoprio - ETNZ Black Match Racing - 138 points
Torvar Mirsky - Mirsky Racing Team - 97 points
Ben Ainslie - Team Origin - 95 points
Peter Gilmour - Yanmar Racing - 89 points
Mathieu Richard - French Match Racing Team - 89 points
Ian Williams - Team Pindar - 75 points
Sebastien Col - French Match Racing Team All4One - 59 points
Damien lehl - French Match Racing Team - 54 points

The Creation of New Sports

Efforts have also been made to revive traditional sports and to introduce them to the world. With the help of the All Malaysia Traditional Games Heritage Association, traditional games (some of which went back as far as the 15th Century) have been made alive with a close working relationship between the association and various ministries. It has hosted some of the biggest events in Selangor, Penang and Kuala Lumpur since 2001.

The pressure exists when host countries also introduce and seek to popularise their traditional sports. Across the region, there is a growing interest in reviving traditional sports, and Malaysia

should not be lagging behind. Some of these traditional sports are common in the region, which can be included into the wide spectrum of existing competitions.

Some of the other sports are also becoming increasingly popular. In the equestrian sport, the Pahang Penn Endurance Challenge 2009, held at the RM2 million Pahang International Endurance Park in Sungai Baging, Cherating, covering 100 ha of training ground, saw a bigger turnout of spectators. In the event, Shahrudin Abdullah from the Team Blue Moon defeated defending champion, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Abidin, and emerged champion after completing the route in seven hours, 25 minutes and seven seconds. The event attracted a total of 130 riders from France, Germany, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Putting the Money Where the Mouth is

A total of RM2.2 billion was spent in the 8th Malaysia Plan, while under the 9th Malaysia Plan, a budget allocation of RM2.4 billion which represents an increase of mere 1.1% from the previous plan, was approved for the development of sports from 2006-10. This budget requires a great deal of proper management of funds to help achieve the nation's aspiration to produce more of its world-class sports people such as Malaysia's squash queen and world number one Nicol David, who recently sealed her fourth successive Women's World Open title after defeating host nation's favourite, Natalie Grinham.

Some of the major sports events such as the Monsoon Cup, whose current agreement ends in 2012, should be encouraged to go on because of their ability to attract tourists to this country and it works as a catalyst for the state's development, while others help to put Malaysia on world map when championship titles are won.

At a recent 12th World Sport for All Congress held in Kuala Lumpur, themed, "Sport for All – Sport for Life", where 505 participants from 96 countries came together to brainstorm ideas on how to increase the trend of physical inactivity, the

delegates arrived unanimously at some key conclusions:

- Focus on the importance of sport and physical activity as a key element of health policies.
- When formulating policies, take into account the public health, social and economic benefits of increased participation in sport and physical activity.
- Recognise the importance of community sport and physical activity.
- Consider Sport for All as an investment, not a cost or burden.

The results of the four-day congress were compiled into a declaration which underlined the importance of a partnership between the Olympic Movement and governments to act together to counter the global problems of decreasing physical activity and the increasing incidence of obesity.

At another conference, some 500 participants at the 2009 International Conference on Integration of Knowledge Intensive Multi-Agent Systems (KIMAS 2009) learnt that, although Malaysia has become the favourite destination for international sports events, it has yet to set up a designated department or unit in related government agencies to monitor the cash flow of our Ringgit or foreign currencies to see how it is contributing to our economy. This was a fact which could not be denied by the Prime Minister himself. Despite the fact that Malaysia has participated in the Olympics from as early as 1956 and sports marketing is easily worth US\$250 billion (RM875 billion) globally based on a report in Sports Business Journal, the sports and fitness industry in Malaysia is still considered as a “young and emerging sector”.

One of the speakers at the convention, Datuk Radha Krishnan, Managing Director of Universal Fitness Leisure (UFL) cited that the biennial Sukma Games has an allocation of RM30 to RM40 million for every chapter, yet the money generated from the event was not documented. Compared to New Zealand, with just 4.3 million people, the country had three per cent or 37,500

of the population involved in the sport industry, where about US\$75 billion (RM272 billion) is generated annually from the sector.

Whereas Malaysia has a dedicated Youth and Sports Ministry, National Sports Council and National Sports Institute, in the United States, the majority of the state sport bodies are run on a voluntarily basis, yet they are able to monitor six million school students and 22,000 high school students.

Moving Ahead

It goes without saying that industry players want to see the sports industry achieve the next quantum leap. Although the country has achieved sterling feats at the world stage by having world-beaters in more than one sport, with badminton, bowling, squash, cycling and archery basking in limelight, they say, there is still a lot that needs to be done. Much soul searching has to be done at all levels to see how we can train our sportsmen and women from young and bring the country to the next level of sports excellence to beat world records.

This is why the nation has to seriously look at the overall development of sports from the school level onwards, if we are determined to see our young people emerging as world class champions. It requires a lot of cooperation at all levels of society. The reality is that sports have not been given much emphasis in schools that prompted the President of the Olympic Council of Malaysia, Tan Sri Tunku Imran Tuanku Ja'afar to express his personal disappointment: “I hope Malaysians will put into practice what they have learnt from other successful nations. Unfortunately, Malaysia is lacking concrete examples, especially in schools where some children have only one hour of sport a week”. His resounding call to greater involvement of the children in sports is one area of concern that the government, teachers and parents have to immediately address. Without a doubt, they have to view sports as an investment, not a liability or a burden – and continue to encourage the young to participate in all sorts of games, apart from merely focusing on hosting major sports events in Malaysia.