

# Friendship more than a game for Singapore and Filipino students

BY JEANETTE WANG

FILIPINO schoolboy Nicolo Gonzalez found himself red-faced in front of a group of St Nicholas Girls' School students yesterday – and it was not because he was shy.

Nicolo, 14, had accidentally swiped red paint on his face after trying out *rangoli* – the traditional Indian art of painting with materials like dyed rice – for the first time.

“I’ve not come across such a painting style before,” said the first-time visitor to Singapore. “I wiped my face, forgetting that I had paint on my hand.”

Nicolo is among 20 boys aged 13 to 17 from Manila’s La Salle Green Hills school on a week-long visit to Singapore under the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) Twinning Programme.

His experience is just one of many cross-cultural exchanges that will take place between Singapore and the world’s other 204 National Olympic Councils (NOC) from now to next year’s inaugural 2010 YOG here. Under the Friends@YOG Twinning Programme, a Singapore school will be matched with an NOC with the

goal of building international friendships and embracing the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect.

There are plans for the schools to also host athletes of their adopted countries during the Aug 14-Aug 26 YOG.

To date, 112 local schools have been paired with schools from 45 NOCs since the programme began last December.

La Salle Green Hills is the first “twinning” school to visit the Republic.

The boys paid for their own flights here and are boarding at St Joseph’s Institution, an affiliated school.

Said St Nicholas’ principal Chan Wan Siong: “This kick-starts a long-term relationship between the schools. It allows us to share a little bit of ourselves and also learn their culture, experience and skills, which will certainly benefit our girls.”

At the school’s Ang Mo Kio campus yesterday, a class of 35 Secondary 2 girls gave the visitors a taste of Singapore.

They spent about an hour interacting through *rangoli* and lantern-making, and traditional games. They also savoured local food like mee siam, red bean soup, samosa and some Malay kueh. Girls from St Nicholas’ Dance Society taught the boys a dance that incorporates steps from Chi-



St Nicholas Girls' students teaching their visitors from the Philippines a dance yesterday, as part of a cross-cultural exchange. A group of boys from Manila's La Salle Green Hills school are the first to visit Singapore under the YOG Twinning Programme. PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

nese, Malay and Indian dance.

“I’ve found out that Singapore is a place for fun, where you can meet great people and enjoy yourself,” said La Salle’s Adam Gerson Eleccion, 13.

St Nicholas teacher Sharon Low said research on the Philippines – from its art

and food, to its economy and education – has been incorporated into the girls’ project work for the past month.

The people back in the Philippines, too, will benefit from this visit here, said Prof Benjamin Espiritu, a De La Salle University professor and the Olympic Acade-

my of Philippines’ co-chairman.

“Truth be told, the YOG is not really well known to the public in the Philippines,” he said. “But, these children and teachers will help broadcast the Games there when they go back home.”

[jwang@sph.com.sg](mailto:jwang@sph.com.sg)