

SPORT

St Joseph's Institution captain Kieran Tan lifting the National School Games A Division boys' football trophy with his teammates after they beat Nanyang Junior College 2-1 in extra time in the final at Jalan Besar Stadium on May 22. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO



Enhanced Games set for 2026 Vegas launch

LAS VEGAS - The Enhanced Games have set their inaugural competition for May 2026 in Las Vegas, with swimming, athletics and weightlifting on the agenda for athletes using substances banned in official competition to the consternation of anti-doping bodies.

Basking in Las Vegas' neon glow at the launch, founder Aron D'Souza on May 21 urged athletes to take a gamble on the novel competition that he believes can transform sports science, but critics deride as a freak show.

Organisers touted what they believe to be their biggest success story so far: Kristian Gkolomeev, a Greek swimmer who never made the podium in four Olympics but surpassed one of his sport's great achievements under the Enhanced Games programme.

Gkolomeev swam two hundredths of a second faster than the 50m freestyle official world record that has stood for more than 15 years, clocking 20.89 in February with an inline full-body open water suit that falls outside World Aquatics standards.

"I'm kind of like the driver in the car, but I need the team behind me," Gkolomeev, who finished fifth in the event at the Paris Games, said ahead of the Las Vegas event.

Enhanced Games have held the 31-year-old up as an example of what can be possible under their regime, while declining to disclose which "performance enhancements" he used, citing medical confidentiality.

"He should be retired but, in fact, he's swimming faster than any human being has ever done so. Why? Because he used technology and science to enhance his performance," said D'Souza.

"Once the world realises that, I think everyone is going to want it. Every middle-aged guy who once played competitive sport and is now suffering from back pain is going to say, 'What is he on and how do I get it?'"

The Enhanced Games operate under the principle that banning performance-enhancing drugs in major competition does not protect athletes but rather stifles their performance.

"Our project is a lot like Formula One because the research that happens to make Formula One cars drive faster eventually percolates out onto the road," the Australian entrepreneur told Reuters.

Participants could earn prize money totalling up to US\$500,000 (S\$645,800) per event, plus bonuses for surpassing a world-record mark.

For swimming, the 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle, 50m butterfly and 100m butterfly are on the agenda. Athletics has the 100m sprint along with the 110m and 100m hurdles, while weightlifting will feature the snatch, and clean and jerk.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) staunchly opposes the project, warning athletes that they risk bans and their health.

The International Federation of Sports Medicine said the project could lead to exploitation of young athletes.

"Thinking that because you do medical checks on the spot is going to give you a good idea of the health risks of abuse of doping substances, again, is medical and scientific nonsense," said Wada science director Olivier Rabin.

"It's like the Roman circus, you know, you sacrifice the lives of people purely for entertainment. What's the value of this? I don't think any responsible society should move in that direction."

The Enhanced Games are set for Las Vegas from May 21 to 24. REUTERS

School sports

SJI ERASE 2024 PAIN TO BE A DIV CHAMPS

Last year's loss in final spurs football team to maiden title with extra-time winner

Melvyn Teoh

A session on how to bounce back from setbacks proved to be an ideal tonic for St Joseph's Institution (SJI) ahead of the National School Games A Division boys' football final on May 22.

With their 2-1 loss to Victoria Junior College (VJC) in the 2024 final still fresh in the memory, they wanted to be mentally well prepared in the title-decider against Nanyang Junior College at Jalan Besar Stadium.

SJI, who took the lead through midfielder Darius Lim in the 18th minute, were pegged back just six minutes later as Nanyang equalised through winger Atheeq Mahbub and took the game to extra time.

But if they panicked, they did not show it as SJI kept their nerves to

win 2-1, with centre-back Hugo Gauthier scoring the winner with six minutes left in extra time to lift their first title.

SJI's football co-teacher-in-charge Syaifudin Ahmad admitted that the 2024 final loss was "always at the back of the mind".

He said: "It was a wonderful end to what was a very long and arduous National School Games season. "Most importantly, the boys bounced back from last year's final loss... Today's game, we really had to fight very hard. It went all the way to extra time. At the end of the day, it's how much they wanted to win. And thankfully, the outcome was in our favour."

Hugo, 18, whose father is French and mother Singaporean, said: "Last year was very disappointing, especially because we had such good momentum. (In extra time) I

knew that we had to do something to score, otherwise it would have gone to penalties. And when the ball came to me, it was at the perfect height, I snuck behind the defender and headed the ball in.

"My mind went blank and I couldn't believe my eyes, but I couldn't contain my excitement and I had so much energy that I just decided to take my shirt off.

"It definitely is a full circle and I think we owe it to everyone."

Applying early pressure, SJI set up camp in the Nanyang half for the opening 15 minutes.

And it paid off in the 18th minute after a long ball from Hugo resulted in a mistake from Nanyang defender Dwayne Goh, allowing Darius to fire past goalkeeper Khrist Chua.

But Nanyang responded just six minutes later, against the run of play. A cross from right-back Ang Kiat Han caused a mix-up inside the box and Brandon Ng's shot fell into the path of Atheeq, who slotted the ball into the bottom corner. SJI nearly restored their lead four

SEIZING THE INITIATIVE

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HUGO GAUTHIER, St Joseph's Institution centre-back, who headed home the match-winning goal.

minutes later when Lim Kai Sheun found himself in acres of space in the Nanyang box. But the midfielder skewed his shot wide with only Khrist to beat.

Several saves from Khrist after the restart kept the scores level as neither side could find a breakthrough and the game went into

extra time.

The Nanyang players looked spent as the game wore on, with several players collapsing due to cramp. With six minutes to go in extra time, Hugo delivered the sucker punch, rising highest at the back post to head home captain Kieran Tan's corner, sending the SJI supporters into raptures.

Kieran, who has two appearances for BG Tampines Rovers in the Singapore Premier League this season, said: "When they equalised, to be honest, I was a bit stressed, because they had all the momentum, and I thought we may have lost the final (again)."

Nanyang teacher-in-charge Geoffrey Swee praised Kieran's "well-taken corner", adding: "There was a lot of talk before the game that we are the underdogs. What we really want was for both teams to play their best, so that they can push each other to reach their maximum potential. Unfortunately, maybe towards the end, there was a bit of loss in concentration and a well-taken corner by the opponents, and that's how we lost."

Nanyang captain Darius Khoo, 17, shared his sentiments, adding: "We came into the game as everyone said, as underdogs, but today we showed why we deserve to be here. "Some people had doubted us, but we fought to the end and I couldn't be more proud of how the team played today."

Meanwhile, VJC overcame Raffles Institution 1-0 to claim third spot at the Jurong East Stadium on May 20.

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RI edge out rivals VJC in intense hockey final

Samuel Tan

With the score finely poised at 2-2, both Raffles Institution (RI) and defending champions Victoria Junior College (VJC) knew only too well that there was little margin for error.

The National School Games A Division boys' hockey title hung in the balance and any mistake in the May 22 final at Sengkang Hockey Stadium, no matter how small, would be punished.

With 10 minutes remaining in the final quarter, the balance was tilted in favour of RI, who were awarded a penalty after a foul inside the shooting circle. Facing off against goalkeeper Jovan Teo in the VJC net, RI's Jaydon Poh stepped up and stroked the ball home to make it 3-2. It proved to be the winning goal, as RI reclaimed the title they lost to the same opponents in 2024.

Speaking after the game, Jaydon said penalties were something he had been working on tirelessly.

"Usually during breaks (in training), I would just put the ball at the penalty spot and practise a few strokes against the keeper. I think such training paid off. (Today) I scored a crucial goal," said the 17-year-old.

He added: "In the second half,



VJC was on the ball more. They had more chances. So to score that goal really calmed the pressure down."

The penalty was given against the run of play, much to the frustration of those in the VJC dugout, who thought the decision was a controversial one.

"Our player got the ball first, very clearly. Then his momentum went into the defender and they clashed, but we have to respect the umpire's decision," said VJC coach Nordin Manaff.

Despite the contentious circumstances, he was glad to be a part of a highly entertaining game after missing last year's final as he was overseas with the national women's indoor hockey team.

"I have not seen this kind of intensity in 10 years. Both teams played very well. I thought our players played better in the second half, just that we couldn't get the goal," said the 58-year-old.

RI opened the scoring just four minutes into the game when Noor

Adli Raimi stretched to stroke the ball into the goal and give his team an early lead.

"I thought it was a far effort, back stick. But then I suddenly heard everyone scream and that's when I realised I scored, and I was over the moon after that," said Adli, 18.

RI were pegged back when VJC's Pradeeban Krishnamoorthi latched onto a deflected through-ball and smashed the ball beyond goalkeeper Sarthak Basak for the equaliser. But RI regained their

Raffles Institution's Jaydon Poh (near left) in action against Victoria Junior College in the A Div boys' hockey final at Sengkang Hockey Stadium on May 22. RI won 3-2, with the 17-year-old getting the winner from the penalty spot. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

lead before half-time, with Ajay Shanmugam lashing the ball into the net following a penalty corner in the 22nd minute.

VJC restored parity with a goal from a penalty corner of their own. Their relentless second-half pressure was rewarded as Maheswar Chandramohan made it 2-2 before Jaydon's penalty nudged RI into the lead for the third and final time.

"I'm very proud of the team. Everyone gave their all. We fought for the past two years together, some of us for the past six, really," said RI vice-captain Raynard Lim, 18.

"Most of the time, they (VJC) end up being our toughest opponents and we face our toughest difficulties against (them). We always somehow inevitably meet, so winning this one really made us proud," he added, acknowledging the fierce rivalry between the two schools in this competition.

VJC captain Joven Woon shared the same sentiments. "It's always back and forth. They win one year, we win one year," said the 18-year-old.

"They were hungry to win following their defeat last year, and I think they were the better team today. (But) I'm proud of my team for pushing so hard to try and get a result that we wanted."

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