

SPORT

GOLFERS SET SIGHTS ON SEA GAMES PODIUM

Recent results, competition for places give coach optimism about medal prospects

Kimberly Kwek
Sports Correspondent

After Singapore's golfers returned home empty-handed from the 2023 SEA Games in Cambodia, national coach Murray Smit is targeting a return to the podium for the players at the year-end Games in Thailand.

Except for the 2023 event, the Republic have won medals at every edition since the 2015 Games on home soil, where its golfers won medals in all four events.

The breakthrough for Singapore golf came in 2017, when Marc Ong, Gregory Foo, Joshua Shou and Joshua Ho clinched a historic men's team gold, before James Leow ended the 30-year wait for an individual title by winning the men's event in the Philippines two years later.

Smit said: "Based on history over the last decade, any time that we go to the SEA Games, we're looking to win medals, in the individual and team component as well.

"We'd love those to be gold medals, which has been achieved in the

past. If we can achieve medals on both sides, whether that be in the individual or team component, it would be a great showing from Team Singapore."

On Aug 26, the Singapore Golf Association (SGA) unveiled its national squad comprising 49 amateurs and 11 professionals at the Singapore Island Country Club.

The Singapore National Olympic Council had named a preliminary list of 11 golfers for the SEA Games earlier in August and the final line-up will be confirmed by Sept 11.

While the selections are pending, Smit is encouraged by the squad's depth and recent international results.

In the women's game, Inez Ng placed joint-fourth individually at the 2023 World Amateur Team Championships and also claimed the individual title and overall team championship with the University of North Carolina at the Cavalier Regional Preview in 2024.

Chen Xingtong also made history in July when she finished second at the US Girls' Junior Championship.



From left: Singapore golfers Troy Storm, Chen Xingtong and Brayden Lee, who have benefited from the guidance and opportunities in the national set-up, will be vying for tickets to December's SEA Games in Thailand. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAobao

There have been equally exciting developments for the men, with Hiroshi Tai becoming the first Singaporean to compete at the US Open (in 2024) and Masters (2025) after winning the National Collegiate Athletic Association title in 2024.

Brayden Lee has also had a year to remember as he captured the biggest win of his budding career at the Royal Junior in Japan in April.

Smit said: "What's actually excit-

ing this time around is we have some really nice competition for places, both on the men's and female side. So it's going to be a tough decision for the training development committee to decide who the most suitable players are for the SEA Games, but that's a good thing."

Among those vying for Games selection are national squad members Brayden, Xingtong and Troy Storm,

POSITIVE RIVALRY

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MURRAY SMIT, national coach, on the golfers' strong performances.

who said they have benefited from the guidance and opportunities in the national set-up.

The trio will also compete in October's World Amateur Team Championships in Singapore.

Making the SEA Games team is a target for Brayden, especially after hearing about assistant national coach Shou's experiences at the regional competition.

The Anglo-Chinese School (Inde-

pendent) student, 18, said: "If we could do that (win gold), that would be incredible and a really fun experience that we hopefully will be able to do."

Fellow ACS (I) student Troy, 16, who finished runner-up at the Hong Kong Junior Open Championship in August, added: "Hearing all the stories from ex-players, seeing the passion they have, especially playing in the SEA Games – that's something that really excited me, just having the nation on your back and doing the best to represent them."

Xingtong, 16, has dreamt of competing at the SEA Games since 2020, noting that she is more confident now that "I have what it takes to get a medal, but you definitely have to play well and stay calm because the girls are really strong".

Alongside nurturing young talent, the SGA also reiterated support for Singapore's professionals, with two-time Ladies European Tour winner and Olympian Shannon Tan among the 11 players in the professional squad.

With the support of Radar Tyres, each player in the squad will receive some funding to help them build high performance support teams. This can range from sports psychologists to strength and conditioning support, and coaches.

The national sports association also provides guidance and advice in areas like management agencies, support teams and which tournaments they should target.

The long-term goal is to have four golfers representing Singapore at the Olympics.

Smit said: "Just like how we want to grow the whole programme, we can do more and more to support our pros and help them reach their goals that will then hopefully inspire the young players coming through in the years ahead."

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Nanyang Girls' Goh Yanqi shielding the ball from Swiss Cottage's Wong Ying Fei during the C Division Girls' basketball final on Aug 26. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO



A five-point spell from small forward Sean Yuen helped calm St Joseph's Institution's nerves when Presbyterian High School staged a late comeback in the C Division Boys' basketball final at the Jurong East Sports Hall on Aug 26. They triumphed 57-47 for their first championship after being promoted from the second tier.

School Sports

SJI basketballers: From newbies to champs in 4 years

David Lee
Senior Sports Correspondent

Just four years after their basketball programme tipped off, St Joseph's Institution (SJI) were crowned C Division Boys' League 1 champions on Aug 26, after beating Presbyterian High School (PHS) 57-47 in the final at the Jurong East Sports Hall.

While unexpected, the progress was a fillip for SJI, who competed in the second tier of the National School Games' in 2024 and were promoted after finishing second.

SJI captain Jude Ng said: "We didn't expect this at the start of the season, but we have surpassed all expectations to become No. 1."

"We are extremely happy to be able to be part of this history-making experience. We managed to work as a team and execute what our coach told us to do, and it worked out."

SJI coach Koh Meng Koon thanked the players' parents for their support and credited the school for helping to prepare the younger players through external youth tournaments.

He added: "Today's win was down to our strong defence, which we have been working on. We also had good teamwork and confidence, which led to the players making eight three-point shots."

Despite having eight Secondary 1 and seven Secondary 2 boys on their 15-player roster, SJI stamped

their mark from the tip-off. Their fluid defence, coupled with their 38 per cent success rate from beyond the arc – more than double PHS' 16 per cent – proved crucial in the final.

The SJI players' fine shooting from the perimeter gave them a solid 50-29 lead after three quarters, while allowing them to weather a spirited PHS fightback in the final period.

A five-point spell from small forward Sean Yuen (13 points) also helped calm their nerves.

PHS captain Ryan Peh, who congratulated the champions while wiping away tears, said: "We trained a lot for the final... but we could have done better offensively and defensively."

"The fighting spirit in the last quarter was positive and we aim to come back stronger next year."

SJI's maiden basketball title was all the more special for forward Tan Sheng De, who completed a unique double after clinching the C Division Boys' football gold on Aug 13.

He said: "We bonded a lot and learnt a lot as a team. It feels really great to have the whole school behind us."

"Personally, I really can't choose which sport I prefer now, but I think the basketball win is bigger for SJI because it's our first League 1 title ever."

In the C Division Girls' final, Nanyang Girls' High School also relied on clinical shooting to trounce Swiss Cottage Secondary School

63-13 for their fifth title in a row.

Nanyang Girls' coach Eleanor Chen had set a goal for her players to make 6,000 baskets in the week leading up to the final, and it paid off as they made 46 per cent of their field-goal attempts, 20 per cent of their three-point shots, and 49 per cent of their free throws.

Notably, power forward Goh Yanqi's game-high 16 points trumped the opposing team's total tally.

Nanyang Girls' co-captain Lee Yun Shan said of the shooting challenge: "It could be free throws or any moves to the basket... and it really helped to improve our shot accuracy."

Co-captain Rebekah Sng added: "The key to today's win was also hard work, defence and energy."

"Everybody worked really hard for this moment, and the coaches and supporters really encouraged us, sometimes also buying food for us when training got tough and tiring."

Though Swiss Cottage suffered a heavy defeat, they were delighted to reach their first final since the basketball programme began in 2019. Their coach Ryan Koh also had only one month to work with the girls before the competition.

Swiss Cottage vice-captain Shen Yiting said: "We are disappointed to lose, but we also gave it our all to put up a fight, and we hope we can do better next year as we move on to the B Division."

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