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Sporting Heroines: The 1990s

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The 1990s: Widening Horizons and the Shift towards Excellence

Introduction

The last decade of the second millennium has witnessed greater female participation in sport than ever before. More women have been competing in the Olympic Games and the opportunities for increasing the range of activities is better than ever before. At the time of the first female Singaporean Olympian, Tang Pui Wah (1952 - Helsinki), only 8% of all competitors at the Games were female. A gradual upward trend has been reported since then, and by 1996 the figures had risen to 34%. This trend has largely been replicated in Singapore but only recently has there been regular participation.

In Singapore, there was a down-turn in the fortunes of women in competitive sport during the 1980s. In swimming, the regional successes of the early years of independence came to an abrupt halt after the 1983 SEA Games. There were no gold medals at all in 1985, 1987, 1989, and 1991. Lost opportunities, particularly the Olympic boycott in 1980, which had denied athletes like Junie Sng and her contemporaries the chance to participate on the ultimate sporting stage provide one explanation. Another is that the economic recession in the mid-Eighties reduced the financial resources available and changed personal priorities. It can easily be assumed that this hiatus had a direct impact on the inspiration and commitment of potential athletes at the time. By 1986, it was deemed that no female athlete had attained a high enough level of achievement in any sport to justify the award of Sportswoman of the Year.

The state policy of Sports For All generated a greater awareness and a wider variety of sports for the population. For example, the rapid growth of squash and then ten-pin bowling, was to produce a number of the most famous and successful local female Singaporean athletes, notably Lim Seok Hui, Mah Li Lian, Adelene Wee, and Grace Young. But they were competing in non-Olympic sports, and ironically the general pattern of diversification may have drawn talented athletes away from the well-established activities that relied on a bigger talent pool to produce elite performers - an example might well be the case of track and field. For all the active encouragement of sport and recreation at the grass-roots level it became apparent that a re-evaluation of the status elite sport was necessary. The Advisory Council for Sport and Recreation produced a report in 1989 and the immediate consequence was a renewed drive towards excellence. The initiative manifested itself most clearly and cogently in the introduction of the SPEX 2000 plan of 1993.

This final article in the series of Sporting heroines focuses on some of the early beneficiaries of the SPEX 2000 programme. The six Olympians presented here began their involvement in sport before the Advisory Council Report. However, as pioneers of the movement to

enhance and re-define sports excellence, they were at the same time privileged and pressurised by the infusion of grants, incentives, and awards during the middle years of the decade. With an increasing amount of public money being directed towards the development of individual athletes, there were a number of issues that confronted sport. Perhaps the most significant was the heightened public interest in the performances and personalities of talented young athletes. Not necessarily a new issue, this trend thrust these young women vigorously into the media spotlight, whether they liked it or not.

The two Olympiads of the Nineties were the largest ever, with increasing opportunities for women to participate. The 25th Olympiad was held in the Catalonian capital of Barcelona in 1992. One hundred and seventy two countries were represented. The Barcelona Games introduced three young Singaporean athletes to the global stage. Joscelin Yeo and May Ooi extended the tradition of swimming as the strongest sport in Singapore, whilst Zarinah Abdullah was the first beneficiary of the introduction of badminton to the Olympic programme. Joscelin and Zarinah, who were to experience both positive and negative representation from the press during their sporting careers, would later become the first female Singaporeans to be double Olympians.

Joscelin Yeo

Joscelin was born in 1979 and pursued her education at the Methodist Girls' School, emulating her two predecessors from the 20th Olympiad in Munich, Pat Chan and Tay Chin Joo. Her two brothers, Leonard and Gerard, were active in the sports arena, but it was the exploits of Joscelin, the 'Shark', that caught the imagination of the sporting public so emphatically. Learning to swim competitively at the Tanglin Club from the age of seven, Joscelin's first successes were achieved in 1986, and characteristically, while she enjoyed the process of winning, she did not take lightly to losing. Single-minded and willing to take risks, she was dubbed Jaws-lin by her brother Leonard.

Joscelin developed her skills under the guidance of the late Kee Soon Bee, who described her as very easy to train and very disciplined. The future two-time Sportswoman of the Year was a member of the People's Association Youth Swimming Club in Toa Payoh and by 1993 she was not only the most visible and famous national swimmer since Junie Sng, but also the one under the most pressure – an almost natural consequence of expanding media exposure. At that time, publicity often caused embarrassment and discomfort. And as public expectations were always high and the press tended to focus on her aloofness as much as on her performances, she was thrown, somewhat unwillingly, into the public gaze.

In terms of performances, the Inter-Primary competition of 1991 marked the emergence of this phenomenal record-breaker. The Asia Pacific Age Group Championships provided the first international opportunities for Joscelin to make the headlines as a National Open record holder. Joscelin was the first Singaporean female to dip under 60 seconds for the 100 metres freestyle, and her first senior regional medal was a Bronze in the SEA games held in Manila in 1991. Joscelin was still only 12 years of age.

The days of one country dominating the sport of swimming were past by the time the Barcelona Olympics took place. The USA, the German Democratic Republic, and Australia

had each demonstrated dominance in the pool, but this time eighteen countries were to boast a medallist and the Chinese women claimed their first ever gold medals. Asian swimmers took five of the titles with the diminutive Kyoko Iwasaki of Japan, who won the 200 metres breaststroke, signalling clearly that physical size was not the significant factor in swimming that it might be in other sports. With her inclusion in the team for Barcelona in 1992, Joscelin was more than the heir apparent to Junie Sng, who sadly had never tasted the Olympic experience. Joscelin set new personal best times and age-group records almost at will. In four of the six events she had entered, Joscelin set a new national record and a personal best.

For many observers, Joscelin inspired the collective adoration of the Singaporean population during the SEA games of 1993, when she won nine gold medals. Joscelin's 200 metres Individual Medley time placed her 19th in the world and it helped to elevate her to the status of Sportswoman of the Year in 1993, a feat that she was to reproduce two years later. Her times in competition were well in line with the medal-winning horizon necessary for the Asian Games to be held in Hiroshima the following year. Voted Sports Girl of the year in 1994, Joscelin experienced the joys and frustrations of high level competition. She achieved one of her finest performances in winning the bronze in the 100 metres butterfly at the Asian Games. Her time of 1 min 1.62 seconds gave her a world ranking of 28th and represented an improvement of .55 of a second on her own best performance. The race itself was won by Liu Limin (China) in a time of 58.38 seconds, with Qu Yun, also of China, taking the silver in 58.70 seconds. However, at the Commonwealth Games held in Canada, her best was only good enough for fourth place.

In 1995, the SPEX TAP (Talent Assistance Programme) provided financial support for a move to Melbourne in Australia, where Joscelin could train under Bill Nelson (a successful coach at the Australian Institute of Sport) and pursue her education at Melbourne Girls' Grammar School. This move away from the dual pressures of academic study and being a sport celebrity in Singapore actually marked the beginning of a period of intense work and a mixed set of swimming performances.

Joscelin returned to compete in the SEA Games at Chiangmai later in 1995 and she rose majestically to the occasion. She took seven individual titles setting six new SEA games records. The only disappointments, and they were considerable to the team-oriented Joscelin, concerned the narrow defeats at the hands of the Thai team in the Freestyle and the Medley Relays.

What followed was an extended period of doubt and uncertainty for Joscelin and her admirers. Her performances in Atlanta Games in 1996 did not match up to expectations and her return to the SEA Games arena in Jakarta in 1997 must have undermined her spirits for a time as she was mentally off-colour and attempting to recover from illness and injury. No new records were set and in Australia there were changes on the horizon. In Atlanta, Joscelin was entered for five events but was unable to seriously challenge her personal best times. At the regional biennial event, three gold medals provided some consolation for a campaign blighted by distractions. Back in Australia, Joscelin had moved to the Royal

Melbourne Institute of Technology for her studies, but she was left without the key input of her coach Bill Nelson, who left the Vicentre for a new post.

Resilience and commitment were the foremost qualities demonstrated during this turbulent period. Away from the limelight, Joscelin found new enthusiasm for swimming partly as a result of spiritual growth and guidance, and partly as a result of a significant and fortuitous move to the University of California at Berkeley in August 1998. She struck up a close partnership with a new coach Mike Walker, who encouraged her to become more of a student of her own sport. Focusing on the maximisation of personal abilities and the enjoyment of dedication, Joscelin returned to her record setting ways

The resurgence in her fortunes was most dramatically demonstrated in the SEA Games held in Brunei in August 1999. With swimmers from Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia as her leading rivals, Joscelin was able to overcome the recurrence of an elbow injury, winning six individual titles each in a new games record time. The 'Comeback Kid' renewed hopes amongst members of the sporting culture that the best was yet to come.

SEA Games Performances in Individual Events

	SEA Manila 1991	<i>Barcelona</i> 1992	SEA Singapore 1993	SEA Chiangm ai 1995	<i>Atlanta</i> 1996	SEA Jakarta 1997	SEA Brunei 1999
50 m Free	27.59 _B	27.36	26.93 ^G	26.73 ^G		27.27 ^G	26.23 ^G
100 m Free		58.93	57.58 ^G	57.27 ^G	58.87	57.89 ^G	56.05 ^G
200 m Free		2:07.09	2:06.03 ^G	2:04.01 ^G	2:08.10		
400 m Free		4:29.76		4:23.05 ^G			4:28.59 _B
100 m Breast	1:14.36 _S		1:12.04 ^G	1:11.37 ^G	1:14.90	1:14.67 _B	1:11.36 ^G
200 m Breast	2:43.80		2:23.87 ^G				
100 m Fly		1:03.82	1:02.22 ^G	1:01.59 ^G	1:02.71	1:03.80	1:00.44 ^G
200 m IM	2:25.62	2:25.32	2:17.48 ^G	2:17.87 ^G	2:21.76	2:19.23 ^G	2:17.17 ^G
400 m IM			4:58.95 _S				4:51.87 ^G

May Ooi

May Ooi was two years older than Joscelin when she became an Olympian. Her first formal swimming meet was when she was 9 years old. But she had little idea of her level of competitiveness until the age of 11 or 12, when she became aware of the importance of rivalry between swimmers.

May achieved early success and was able to travel to compete, and to meet people. She built up confidence, and learned self-discipline through swimming, She did not particularly like school and had no time for homework. She admits to being a 'sore loser' when she was young.

Her first major regional successes were bronze medals in the 1989 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur in the 200 metres Individual Medley and in the 200 meters Breaststroke. She broke her ankle when she was 13 years old and could not swim for months on end. When she returned to the pool, she was depressed and cried a lot but she pulled through with the type of determination that creates champions. She drew inspiration from her own ability to transcend injury. In the SEA Games held in Manila in 1991, she achieved a bronze in 100 metres Butterfly.

In the Barcelona Games of July 1992, May competed in seven events, successfully setting an under 17 record in the 400 metres Individual Medley World 26th after 200 metres Individual Medley in 2:18.32. Although not as successful as Joscelin at these Games, May was signalling that she had the ability to reach elite level with the South-east Asian region.

At the age of 16, her sparkling performances at the Singapore SEA Games 1993 were overshadowed by Joscelin's dominance. However, two gold medals were won by May in individual events. The 200 metres butterfly time of 2:18.45 was a new SEA Games Record as was the 400 metres Individual Medley winning time of 4:58.24. May won silvers in the 400 metres freestyle behind Ravee Intporn-Udom of Thailand, in the 100 metres butterfly behind Joscelin, and in the 200 metres Individual Medley behind Joscelin. There was also a bronze medal in the 800 metres freestyle.

With assistance from the Sports Excellence 2000 programme, May was able to combine study and swimming in the USA in 1994. She had to adjust to the different attitudes and priorities associated with the American style of swimming. Her new team-mates tended to be more talkative and more active in their approach, but at the same time very serious about training and competition. May's interpretation of this was that the Americans adopted a different way of handling stress. Externalising emotions and giving loud mutual support to team-mates, typical of this approach represented a refreshing alternative to the one she had become accustomed to previously. In Singapore, she felt people were 'just pushing everything inward'.

May happily took off the semester off to train for the SEA Games in 1995. However, she experienced a decline in performance. There were no individual medals and only the consolation of team silvers in the relays. Focusing on academic study as well as swimming, May continued to vie for a place in the Singapore team. In Jakarta in 1997, May won a bronze in the 200m metres Individual Medley, and finished 4th in the 100 metres breaststroke. Unfortunately, she was unable to satisfy the selection criteria for the Brunei Games in 1999.

Zarinah Abdullah

Zarinah was born in 1971. She started to play badminton in the Mount Vernon Secondary School team in 1983 and she later moved to Outram Institute. Her father was always a dominant force in her commitment to badminton. She trained under Wong Shoon Keat whilst in the squad in 1987. She represented the Combined Schools team that visited Jakarta. Zarinah won a bronze medal in the team event at the SEA Games held in Kuala Lumpur in 1989. After that period she trained with Yeo Ah Seng and in 1990 took the momentous decision to devote herself to badminton.

At the age of 19, Zarinah became one of the first professional sportswomen from Singapore. She spent an extended period of training in Bimantara (Indonesia) with some of the Chinese coaches, who had contributed to Indonesia's rapidly growing global reputation. Zarinah joined the World Grand Prix circuit and succeeded in gaining the World Cup and World Grand Prix invitations reserved for the top 12 players. She achieved one of her best early results by reaching the semi-final at the Konica Cup in 1992 held in Singapore.

Badminton was introduced officially at the Barcelona Olympiad. Badminton had been a demonstration sport as far back as 1972 in Munich and an exhibition sport in Seoul in 1988. The competition, held in the Pavello de la Mar Bella, was to be dominated by the Indonesians and the Koreans. The Ladies singles was to be won by Susi Susanti. Zarinah, who was 21 years old during 1992, played two matches in the competition. In the first round she defeated Wioletta Wilk of Poland by the convincing score of 11-5, 11-3. However, in the next round, she lost a one-sided game to Mizui Hisako, 5-11, 4-11.

She defeated Pernille Nedergard Swedish number 2 in 1993 in Japan Open, she was a semi-finalist at the Malaysian Open in 1993 (Kuching), After losing badly to Bang Soo Hyun, she recorded one of her best performances when she defeated Sweden's 4th ranked Christine Magnusson 11-5, 11-4 in 21 minutes at the stadium Negara during the World Grand Prix in 1993 and among her most memorable achievements was the victory over Lim Xiaoqing, the world number three, in 1994 Taiwan Open.

In 1996, the national team for Atlanta did not initially include the name of Zarinah Abdullah. However, Zarinah was later included as a result of an appeal by the Singapore Badminton Association. As the 25th ranked player in the world she qualified for the Games. Sadly, she lost in second round of Olympics to Britain's Kelly Morgan, who at the time was relatively unknown.

Her quarter final exit in Commonwealth Games in 1998 only served to increase doubts about her mental strength. This lapse and an apparent inability to consolidate her working relationship with the association and the officials led to a decrease in international representation, although she did play mixed doubles with Zhao Jianhua in 1998.

Tracey Tan

Born in July 1976, Tracey is the daughter of international sailor Tony Tan, who won the Coach of the Year award in 1993. Her only sister, Lorraine, who is older by three years, was also a sailor. Tracey started sailing in an Optimist at the age of 6 years and moved on to a Topper about three years later. She was and remains a member of the Changi Sailing Club. Tracey was a pupil of CHIJ Our Lady of Good Counsel in Serangoon Gardens, She was on the brink of sailing internationally at the age of twelve until her school principal suggested it would be more appropriate to focus on PSLE exams. The young sailor moved to St Joseph's Convent and, virtually simultaneously in her sailing career to the Laser class boat. This was one of a number of changes of boat that would occur during the next five or six years. By 1991, Tracey was competing in the 420 class in Enoshimo in Japan. Her talent brought her to national honours with selection to the Singapore team for the 1991 SEA Games in Manila. However, this time marked a period of unease and discomfort, largely due to the demands of preparation and personal relations.

Tracey went through a brief period of inactivity, but with the SEA Games in Singapore beckoning, she re-emerged to defeat all her local rivals and, most satisfying to her, to defeat the boys in local competitions as well. Under the guidance of a British coach, Paul Karokosevic, Tracey breezed through the trials that were held before the Games and ultimately won every race to capture the Gold medal by the most decisive margin imaginable.

In 1994, Tracey Tan was voted the Sportswoman of the Year. This was a result of her stunning third-place performance in the World Laser Championships, which were held in Japan. Switching to the International 470 class, Tracey was teamed with Pamela Goh in preparation for the SEA Games in Chiangmai in 1995. She was also expected to undertake the challenge of the Europe class boat.

With the following year an Olympic year, Tracey decide to turn to full-time training. She visited New Zealand, Australia, Europe, and the USA. This period allowed her to gain six months experience in the Europe class boat, the one she would race in Savannah, Georgia. The trip took its toll however. Tracey felt burned-out and the immediate preparation for the Olympics was less than satisfactory. Weather conditions were often adverse and the time dragged badly. There were problems with the boats that were supplied for the races. In addition, approval for the use of additional fittings was long and drawn out. Boredom and fatigue were exacerbated by the threat of Atlantic hurricane warnings, which closed down the competition site.

Tracey ultimately achieved her desire of competing at the Olympic level but her recollection of the occasion hints at slight dejection and distinct dissatisfaction. She was placed 27th out of 28, and suffered the same disappointments that were to afflict her teammates. The gold was won by the Danish competitor Kristine Roug.

The lack of experience of extreme conditions and the disruption caused by hitches in preparation did not dampen her competitive spirit. In 1998, she competed in the Asian

Games in Thailand. Tracey won a Bronze medal in the Europe class and returned as part of a successful Singaporean team.

Today, Tracey Tan is a qualified instructor at the National Sailing Centre, where she helps to direct young trainee instructors. Although retired from competition, there remains the possibility that she will return to don national colours sometime in the near future.

Jing Jun Hong

Jing Jun Hong is Singapore's most illustrious table tennis star. She came originally from Jiangsu Province in China and became a Singapore citizen in April 1994. Jun Hong is married to Loy Soo Han, who is also an exponent of the game. Table Tennis is one of the Core sports in Singapore's development programme.

As a competitor in China, Jun Hong was at one time ranked the number three player. Her main exploits for the Singaporean team began when she was runner-up in 12th Commonwealth Championships 1995 in Hong Kong losing to Chai Po Wa (HK) world number three. Jun Hong was the spearhead in an enthralling tussle for the third place in the team event. With Tan Paey Fern Jun Hong also won a silver medal in women's doubles.

Elsewhere in the region Jun Hong successfully defended her title at the Vietnam Golden Racket International Table Tennis tournament in Ho Chi Min City in the build-up to the SEA Games. In Chiangmai, Jun Hong led the way to predictable successes in the individual and pairs events. She dominated the single's event and teamed-up with Sen Yew Fai to win the mixed doubles. In the double's, the Commonwealth pairing won a silver medal, although they would have been disappointed to lose to the Indonesian pair of Pratiwi and Mulatshi. An obscure ruling by the organisers prevented Jun Hong from competing in the team event. Jun Hong was well rewarded financially when she won the biggest paycheck at the post-Games SNOC/F&N Coca Cola/Singapore Pools celebration. For her contributions to national sport, Jun Hong received an SNOC Merit Award

Jun Hong's preparation for the 1996 Olympics included a training spell in England. In Atlanta itself, Jun Hong achieved 16th place to finish one place below her world ranking. She was drawn against world number two Qiao Hong and unfortunately did not advance to the quarter-finals stage. Nevertheless, it was one of the best performances ever by a female Singaporean. As a result of this performance and an 8th place achieved in the Women's World Cup, Jing Jun Hong was awarded the Sportswoman of the Year trophy for 1996.

In 1997, Table Tennis in Singapore recorded its finest ever results. In the 13th Commonwealth Championships, staged in Glasgow, Singapore won the Women's Team event with Jun Hong taking the individual gold and the doubles gold with Li Jiawei. She was voted Sportswoman of the Year in 1997 as a result of these victories and the singles title won in Jakarta at the 19th SEA Games. Jing Jun Hong's most recent achievements have included a team gold medal and two doubles titles at the 20th SEA Games in Brunei. Her singles crown was passed to Li Jia Wei.

Yvonne Danson

Yvonne Danson was born in London, England in 1959. She developed a strong sense of adventure, which brought her initially to South East Asia in 1986. The holiday experience stimulated further curiosity about the region and she subsequently gained employment in Brunei during the late 1980s. In search of a more invigorating environment, Yvonne moved to Singapore and to a teaching job at Dover Court in 1990, where she remained for five years.

During this early period, she decided to run in the MacRitchie area. Amongst others, she met up with one of the most inspirational runners at that time, Helen Gilbey, an expatriate lecturer from the School of Physical Education. Much to her own surprise, Yvonne embarked on a competitive career at the age of 31. She won the Mobil Marathon in 1991 and followed that success with a victory in the Singapore Marathon the next year. On the basis of these staggering results, Yvonne was nominated for the marathons at Long Beach, California and in Beijing. It was at this stage, that Yvonne was identified as possessing remarkable talent by a visiting runner from the UK. Unused to the humidity, the visitor had been unable to keep up with Yvonne during her run around MacRitchie reservoir. Upon her return to the UK, the visitor related her story concerning the slightly built sojourning Englishwoman in Singapore. The news reached the ears of the England selectors, who promptly monitored Yvonne's progress, supplied her with a training programme, and immediately selected her for the Commonwealth games held in Victoria, Canada.

Yvonne married local runner Tan Choon Ghee in 1993, and together they embarked on a six-month training regime that would transport Yvonne to the sporting headlines in British Columbia. Yvonne, who remembers fondly the total experience of the Commonwealth Games, won the bronze medal running a time of 2 hours: 30minutes and 56 seconds. There were 17 runners in the event, with Yvonne, a resident of Singapore, racing under the colours of England. She managed to stay with the pack after the first 5 kilometre mark, surprised but happy that the pace had not been faster. By the half way stage Yvonne was feeling well in control of her pace, and with a growing sense of excitement continued tracking the leaders determined just to finish. In the mean time the other English runners had dropped off the pace and it was left for Yvonne to carry the mantle. Perhaps fortunately, Yvonne was unaware that she had consolidated third place during the final stage. It was only the urging calls of the spectators that signalled she was in a medal position and that the leaders were slowing down slightly. Yvonne took the bronze finishing about one minute behind the winner.

Yvonne became a citizen of Singapore in 1995. There were high hopes for Yvonne at a regional level of competition. The SEA Games in Chiangmai represented the first major opportunity for Yvonne to bring success to Singapore. With high expectations after the Commonwealth Games, Yvonne needed to train with the men, but was so intense that she suffered from overtraining. The pursuit of medals led to the misguided decision to enter the three long distance events in Chiangmai. A more realistic assessment later adjusted the objectives to the 10000 metres and the marathon. Even then the races were too closely spaced for comfort. Yvonne happily admits that she hates 'track racing' and clearly her inexperience worked against her once the race began. She fell at one stage but fought back

to win a bronze in the 10,000 metres. Next came the ultimate road test. A dramatic and costly miscalculation at the end of a race, which she had been leading, resulted in a premature finish and the subsequent loss of first place. The consolatory silver medal in the Marathon run, even then run in record time, was personally bitterly disappointing. Sadly her efforts were considered a failure by some observers.

In 1996 Yvonne was selected to represent her adopted country at the Olympic Games. She went to Europe to train. In Atlanta she finished 38th out of 86 runners, clocking 2 hours 39 minutes and 18 seconds. The memory of Atlanta remains very sweet for Yvonne, who is still somewhat astounded that her rapid rise in long distance running circles could have brought her to unknown heights.

If the Olympics represent the pinnacle of participation in sport, then the SEA Games have provided the depths of despair, at least for Yvonne. The Jakarta Games in 1997 was a major disappointment, with Yvonne collapsing before the race. Months of hard training may have come to nought and Yvonne returning to Singapore empty-handed, but her spirit remains optimistic and there is the possibility that after a period semi-retirement she may re-emerge to emulate other senior marathon stars.

A view into the new millennium

There is much about which to speculate as the new millennium approaches. Women's sport in Singapore apparently offers one of the best opportunities for national success in the sporting arena. National Service is not a barrier to women and recent statistics suggest that marriage and child rearing are life events that can easily wait for many Singaporeans. This means that there is effectively more time to develop potential talent. However, for this to be the case, sport must become a more viable career alternative for women.

Swimming will continue to provide opportunities to nurture Olympians. Amazingly it appears that Joscelin Yeo is yet to reach her peak, and therefore the Sydney Games represent an important stage in setting the pattern for the new millennium. Christel Bouvron and Nicolette Teo have shown the potential to follow in Joscelin's wake. It is hoped that they develop and improve sufficiently to justify selection to the next Games. The sight of a national swimming team at Sydney, rather than just individual representatives would serve to inspire a whole new generation of swimmers.

The regional trend towards sports schools, which combine sport and study, will clearly figure increasingly as an option for the development of talent. The recent media coverage of the selection of 'imported' athletes signals an additional issue that will confront administrators and officials. Table tennis has clearly benefited from the infusion of foreign athletes and this sport appears to offer Singapore some of its best opportunities to garner international success.

Yachting and Badminton have been identified as being in the vanguard of attempts to achieve more medals. They both have explicit targets to aim for during the coming years. The new National Sailing Centre is in the process developing its training programmes, and with young champions like Joan Huang and Tracey Tan, it is possible that Singaporean women have a better chance of Olympic success than their male counterparts. However, more female coaches, administrators, and officials are needed to promote these types of initiatives successfully.

There have been sixteen female Olympians in Singapore during the 44-year span from 1952 to 1996. Each has been a sterling example to her contemporaries and her successors. Their stories, just in outline in this series of articles, represent a rich and varied documentary of the progress of women in sport in Singapore. At times tortuous, at times exhilarating, the path to the Olympics for these women has been far from easy. For them and for their male contemporaries sport appears to exist as little more than an abstraction, marginalised in relation to the mainstream of life in Singapore. One of the goals of the new millennium must surely be to acknowledge the inherent value of sporting achievement and to re-ignite a respect for Olympians as perhaps the ultimate role models in a competitive society.