

Thomas Cup: Why we were outplayed and outclassed
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Not many badminton purists - or those who have closely followed the developments of the Thomas Cup for a long time - would honestly have believed that Malaysia could beat China in last night's semi-finals in a tournament that symbolises world team badminton supremacy.

By the same token, not that many would have expected Malaysia to lose rather tamely, especially in the opening game.

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02Consider this. Malaysia's top singles player Lee Chong Wei is world's No 1. So, too, are the doubles pair of Koo Kien Keat-Tan Boon Heong.

But what the world saw last night was that there was something amiss with the World Badminton Federation (WBF) rankings - the Malaysians were completely outplayed and outclassed.

It would be an understatement to say that 10,000 fans who turned out in full force to give the home team a vociferous all-out support at Putra Stadium last night, left with a sense of deep disappointment, at yet another failed campaign.

Many were seen trooping out of the stadium even before China's second singles Chen Jin wrapped up the winning point against the ageing Wong Choong Hann, a veteran of an amazing seven Thomas Cup finals.

As one who has closely followed badminton - the nation's No 1 sport by virtue of us being a world power continuously for well over 50 years - I would say, last night's team performance exposed many things that could be summarised as that Malaysia are just not good enough to win the Thomas Cup this time around.

To begin with, we were perhaps, lulled into the the "complacency syndrome" just because Chong Wei has been dubbed the world No 1 player for quite sometime now. And so, too, the Kien Keat-Boon Heong combination.

malaysia china badminton olympic final li dan and lee chong wei match 180808 03But strictly speaking, Lin Dan is in a class of his own... and for the much heralded Chong Wei to only manage eight points in the second set must have made it, perhaps, the most lop-sided match in the current competition.

The fact that Lin Dan, surprisingly, is not ranked world No 1 has more to do with the Chinese star chasing more quality tournaments to compete in, as compared with Chong Wei who seemed to have opted for quantity to harness as many points to obtain such a ranking.

So, too, were China's pair of Cai Yun and Fu Haifeng, ranked at a lowly eighth, but proved to be just too good for our top doubles pair.

Serious lapses and weaknesses

Now, let us turn to our present batch of coaches. The question that begs asking is: Are they good enough to prepare our players for top-notch competitions?

In the case of football, a team's fortunes are closely linked with how far a coach can mould his players towards attaining victory and success, and the turnover of coaches is usually high.

And to use the football analogy, last night's semi-finals performance exposed serious lapses and weaknesses in Malaysia's firepower.

malaysia china badminton olympic final li dan and lee chong wei match 180808 01In badminton, one has to come up with different strategies to deal with a particular player. It is a folly to have similar strategies, irrespective who the opponents are, as that seemed to be Malaysia's strategy.

In the aftermath of last night's defeat, Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) president Nadzmi Mohd Salleh said there would not be any drastic changes to the coaching set-up.

This is indeed bad news for badminton fans who were hoping at least that Nadzmi would have given serious thought to having better quality coaching staff, instead of dismissing the idea outright.

Are the fans asking too much if they also demand that the time has come for a massive shake-up?

The most glaring weakness amidst fielding a relatively weak Thomas Cup squad was having veteran Choong Hann in the second singles slot.

In Choong Han, we had a player who also had very little to show for all his years on the world stage. For this Thomas Cup event, he lost all his matches.

But it was comforting to hear the player announcing after last night's whitewash that this was his last Thomas Cup outing.

There's much soul-searching to do for everyone at BAM, in the wake of such mediocre performances.

Nadzmi must go back to the drawing board. And, if the post-mortem were to show that drastic measures need to be taken to put our badminton back on the winning groove, then they ought to be done.

Even, if it means that heads must roll, and loss of face.

Eighteen years is a long time for a world badminton power to wait to win the Thomas Cup, without a light apparent at the end of the tunnel.

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