

Ever the sportsman and leader of men

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The late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak's legacy to the nation, apart from development projects, diplomatic progress and other milestones, also included major contributions to sports. RANDHIR SINGH looks at some of his achievements

"VERY few know Tun Abdul Razak's contribution to sports because he lived in the shadow of Tunku Abdul Rahman. By the time he took over it was short-lived," remarked University of Malaya's Professor Emeritus Datuk Khoo Kay Kim.

Like first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, Razak was a passionate lover of sports. He played a pivotal role in Malaysian sports. He was the president of the Olympic Council of Malaysia from 1959 until his death in 1976.

He also headed the Malaysian Hockey Federation from 1957 to 1976.

In hockey, Razak provided leadership, pushing the sport to world level. In 1975, Malaysia finished fourth in the third World Cup held in Kuala Lumpur.

Razak left the day-to-day running of the association to Raja Azlan Shah (now Sultan Azlan Shah) and the late Datuk Dr Aziz Durairatnam.

Razak's contribution to hockey has not gone unnoticed. The country's first AstroTurf Stadium in Jalan Duta, Kuala Lumpur, is named after him and the Malaysian Hockey Federation has an annual Razak Cup interstate hockey tournament.

Razak was also instrumental in forming the Malaysian hockey team in Britain while studying law in 1947 and was its captain.

"That made the difference," commented Datuk Ho Koh Chye, who coached the celebrated 1975 World Cup hockey team. "Tunku and Razak knew what sports was because they were involved in it."

Razak also encouraged his cabinet colleagues to hold posts in sports as-

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sociations. Tun Ghafar Baba, Datuk Harun Idris, Tan Sri Mohamed Khir Johari, Tun Ghazali Shafie, Tan Sri Khaw Kai Boh, Tun Tan Siew Sin, Tan Sri Michael Chen, Tan Sri Hamzah Abu Samah and Tan Sri Senu Abdul Rahman were names synonymous with sports.

"Tunku and Razak were a different breed. They were sportsmen themselves. They were keen golfers, both played soccer and hockey in their college days during an era of sports for sports sake. There was no money in it," added Khoo.

Razak also used sports as a vehicle to spread the gospel of unity.

In the aftermath of the 1969 race riots, he saw sports as an excellent avenue to create a united society. His administration downplayed commu-

nal sports clubs and events.

"He encouraged non-Chinese to play basketball and table tennis. Concerted effort was made to organise events such as the non-Chinese table tennis championships. Razak, like Tunku, saw the value of sports in unifying the races," said sports aficionado Tan Sri P. Alagendra, who served under Razak in the Malaysian Hockey Federation.

"I remember him as a disciplinarian and an exemplary person of one who practised true sportsmanship."

Alagendra recalled that in the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok, Razak displayed great sportsmanship. Malaysia had lost to India 1-0 and the team management felt it was dubious decisions by the Japanese umpire that let Malaysia down. They proceeded to file a protest.

"Razak stepped in and directed us to accept the principle that the umpire's decision is final and should be respected."

Word soon spread in the sporting community and Razak's gentlemanly gesture became the talking point among the participating countries.

Razak also knew the international prestige attached in hosting international sporting events. During his tenure as OCM president, Malaysia twice hosted the SEAP Games (now SEA Games) — in 1965 and 1971.

Malaysia also played host to the hockey World Cup in 1975 and the famous Muhammad Ali-Joe Bugner heavyweight boxing match.

"He felt Malaysia should not just participate but also organise international sporting events," said Alagendra.

During his tenure in sports,



Malaysia also competed in four Olympics, four Commonwealth Games, four Asian Games and eight SEAP Games, and it was the halcyon days of Malaysian sports when the country remained supreme in athletics, football, hockey, badminton.

"There were less quarrels and petty infighting then. Simply because the leadership was firm and the times were simpler. It was fun, honour and national pride that was the motivating force," said Datuk R. Yogeswaran, a double international.

Razak also initiated the National Sports Awards in 1966 honouring the best Male and Female Athlete.

"He graced the event and I remember fondly his words of encouragement. Indeed, he did the *joget* with me that night. Very sporting," said M.

Rajamani, the first recipient of the award.

Rajamani and Dr M. Jegathesan were crowned the inaugural winners for their success in the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok — she for winning the gold in the 400m and Jegathesan, for scoring a treble in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m.

However, Razak died without fulfilling one of his dreams — a Hall of Fame which he mooted in 1970.

It was to showcase the rich and colourful heritage of Malaysian sports dating back to pre-war.

"I sincerely hope the glorious sporting past will be cherished and treasured by the future generation. The answer is a sports museum," said Khoo, a prominent historian himself.