

Speech by Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, at Singapore Sports School's 15th Anniversary Celebrations cum Awards Night 2019 at Singapore Sports School Auditorium on 13 February 2019

Ms Tan Gee Keow

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Chair of Singapore Sports School

Mr Tan Teck Hock

Principal

Distinguished guests, teachers and staff,

Alumni, athletes and parents, ladies and gentlemen

I am very happy to join you this evening to celebrate the Singapore Sports School's 15 years of nurturing outstanding young Singaporeans.

2. The formation of the Sports School was built on the belief that, even with our small population, Singaporeans can do well on the world stage, and inspire fellow Singaporeans.

a. Combining customised athlete development programmes with a quality academic curriculum, the School set out to produce champions, whilst ensuring a clear focus on their academic development and character-building.

b. As the School puts it, you want to develop Learned Champions with Character.

3. The School has come a long way since.
 - a. From its first cohort of 140 in 2004, to 459 student-athletes enrolled currently.
 - b. It has produced many of our Team Singapore athletes at the Major Games and other international competitions.
 - c. In fact as Teck Hock mentioned earlier, the School has to date produced 8 Olympians, 13 World Champions and 460 national athletes.
 - d. At the 2017 Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, Sports School alumni and students contributed one third of Singapore's haul of 188 medals which constituted our best-ever away performance for the SEA Games.
 - e. And just two months ago, Singapore won 7 Gold medals at the 18th World Pencak Silat Championship 2018. Four of the gold medalists were Sports School alumni – Farhan, Ferdous, Suhaila, and Iqbal.¹
 - f. The Singapore Sports School has certainly given Singaporeans much to celebrate!

¹ Their full names are: Sheik Farhan Sheik Alau'ddin, Shiek Ferdous Sheik Alau'ddin, Nurul Suhaila Mohamed Saiful, Muhammad Iqbal Abdul Rahman.

4. When they are not busy training and competing, many Sports School alumni and students also walk the talk of what it means to be “Learned Champions with Character”.

a. I hear of the enthusiasm of students who spared no effort to raise funds for worthwhile causes through Project Champions Way over the last four years.

b. Some, such as hurdler Dipna Lim-Prasad, have continued to give back to the community after leaving the school².

5. There are also alumni who have taken on responsibilities in sport administration, helping to develop the athletes of tomorrow.

a. Sports School alumni – Dipna, paddler Isabelle Li and shooter Martina Veloso, are currently serving on the Singapore National Olympic Council Athletes’ Commission.

b. Former sailor Jovina Choo is now with the World Olympians Association. She is working on enhancing the development of National Olympians Associations in Asia, ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

c. Last year, former swimmer Tao Li served as the Chef de Mission for Team Singapore at the Youth Olympic Games.

² In 2017, Dipna founded the “In My Shoes” movement which works with the SportCares foundation to collect and redistribute running shoes to underprivileged youths who wish to pursue sport.

6. Sports School alumni have also made their mark beyond the world of sport.

a. Calvin Kang belongs to the school's pioneer batch of student-athletes. After he retired from competitive sport, he started his own businesses, and is currently spearheading the Singapore operations for Neuron, an e-scooter sharing service.

b. Another alumnus, bowler Christopher Hwang, co-founded The Golden Duck Company, famous for producing salted egg yolk potato and fish skin crisps, which has made inroads into 15 Asian markets through retail and online channels. Bowling taught him resilience, an important ingredient for success as an entrepreneur.

c. As Christopher put it very eloquently, "As in bowling, you aim for a strike in all that you do in life. You won't always get one, but failure is rarely final. You've got to pick yourself up and try again. Only you can tell yourself you're not good enough."

7. The years of training and competing imbue tenacity, discipline and resilience among our student-athletes, which I am sure they will draw on throughout their lives.

8. Returning to visit the Sports School today, 15 years on, I am proud of what the School, its alumni and its students, have collectively accomplished. My heartiest congratulations!

Launch of the E W Barker Scholarship

9. This evening, I am happy to announce the launch of the E W Barker Scholarship, which recognizes student-athletes who have shown both outstanding character and strong potential as athletes. The new scholarship scheme has been brought about by the E W Barker Endowment, supported by Temasek Foundation Nurtures.

- a. As most of you would know, Eddie Barker was one of our pioneer leaders, who served as Minister for over 25 years (1964-88).
- b. What was not as widely known is that he had a lifelong passion for sports, and was a serious sportsman in his younger days, including competitive cricket, hockey and badminton.
- c. He was the champion for sports in Cabinet for many years – nurturing our sporting culture and driving the building of the former National Stadium which came in time for Singapore’s hosting of the SEA Games in 1973 (then known as the Southeast Asian Peninsula, or SEAP Games).

d. He was also the first President of the Singapore National Olympic Council for over 20 years (1970-90).

e. Our late President Mr S R Nathan said of him, “In whatever he did, he always reflected the true spirit of ‘sportsmanship’ ”, and “best exemplified the virtuous qualities that sports can add to a person and to a nation – **competitiveness, discipline, sense of fair play, passion, and a spirit of camaraderie.**”

10. Starting this year, up to 24³ student-athletes from the Singapore Sports School will be offered the E W Barker Scholarship annually. Shirlene Hew from the Shooting Academy is one of the inaugural recipients of the scholarship.

a. Shirlene is a determined and hardworking student-athlete, who has consistently performed well in sports and academics.

b. Last year, she was part of the team that took home the silver in the 2018 East Asian Youth Air Gun competition.

c. Despite her achievements, she remains humble and is respected by her peers and coaches.

d. Congratulations, Shirlene! I hope you continue to grow and become an inspiration for others.

³ The EW barker Scholarship will be awarded to up to 24 student-athletes each year (5 student-athletes per secondary school level and 2 student-athletes per IB Diploma level). This year, SSP will be awarding the scholarship to 18 student-athletes.

11. I look forward to the recipients of the scholarship being inspired by the life of Eddie Barker, to develop yourself to the fullest, and do your best for Singapore.

Embracing Partnerships

12. The Sports School alone cannot raise champions.

a. It has partnered closely with our NSAs to ensure that its coaching and athlete development approaches are well-aligned with the broader ecosystem for each sport.

b. The National Youth Sports Institute (NYSI) was also set up in 2016 to further raise the bar for youth sports excellence. NYSI builds on the Sports School's capabilities by extending specialised support and providing guidance in athlete life management to Sports School students and youth athletes from outside the school.

c. The School-within-a-School (SWS) programme mentioned by Teck Hock, which combines intensive sports training with a quality academic curriculum, was developed in close consultation with the badminton and table tennis NSAs.

d. The Sports School and NYSI have also worked closely with the Ministry of Education to identify sports talents as early as Primary 4, and expose them to programmes to systematically nurture and develop fundamental skills.

13. I encourage more stakeholders to step forward to partner the School to provide even stronger support for our student-athletes and push Singapore's High Performance Sports to higher reaches.

Conclusion

14. Once again, my congratulations on your 15th Anniversary, as well as to all award recipients this evening. I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to all Sports School teachers, staff and parents for your passion and dedication to bringing out the best in our Singaporean sons and daughters.

15. To all Sports School alumni and students, I encourage you develop yourself to the fullest during your years in the School and beyond. Spread your red and orange wings, and soar!⁴

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⁴ The Sports School logo features a pair of red and orange wings, symbolising the soaring aspirations of its student-athletes, and balance between academic and sporting excellence.