

SPORT



All the profit from the sale of *Beyond The Whistle: The Untold Story Of Singapore's Football Legend* will go to the George Suppiah Sports Talent Fund.

KEY FIGURE

This book allows a new generation to understand the significance of what he achieved and the lasting impact he has had on Singapore football.



SUKHBIR SINGH, the Football Association of Singapore's head of referees, on the legacy George Suppiah left behind.



President Tharman Shanmugaratnam with (from left) the late George Suppiah's grandson J.K. Saravana, daughter Shamini Suppiah and daughter-in-law Yee Whoy Chong Suppiah at the launch of the football legend's biography at the Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore, on Aug 26. ST PHOTOS: ARIFFIN JAMAR

NEW BOOK HONOURS TRAILBLAZER SUPPIAH

Singaporean became the first Asian to referee a World Cup match in the 1974 Finals

Melvyn Teoh

Seven-year-old Shamini Suppiah was seated on the floor of her family's Owen Road home, glued to the black-and-white TV, surrounded by neighbours and relatives. They were the only household in the neighbourhood with a TV set, and on that June 19 night in 1974,

the crowd was there to watch history being made, almost 10,000km away. Cheers erupted when the screen showed a diminutive figure in black walking out of the tunnel at the Olympiastadion in Munich, flanked by towering European linemen and followed by the players from Haiti and Poland. He might have been small, but

her then 45-year-old father, George Suppiah, had become the first Asian to referee a World Cup match, which the Poles won 7-0 in then West Germany. Though Shamini was too young to grasp the impact of the occasion, she remembered that her father returned home a national celebrity, and for years afterwards, even well into his 80s, strangers would stop him on the street for a photograph or an autograph. "I remember a lot about that era... the pride and everything that we carried, the joy when we

watched that game," she said. "And when he walked out... and you had two towering Europeans next to him, he looked like a dwarf compared with the rest of them, but yet, the power and aura he carried showed." Suppiah had earlier operated as one of the linesmen for the Sweden and Bulgaria first-round match on June 15, before the Netherlands and Brazil second-round game on July 3 in the same capacity. Over a refereeing career spanning 1953 to 1978, he took charge of 43 international matches across

Asia, Australia and Europe. And beyond the pitch, he built a career as a teacher and referee instructor. Suppiah died in 2012, aged 83. In honour of her late father's legacy, Shamini and her nephew J.K. Saravana, along with author Nazimah Ram, launched his biography – *Beyond The Whistle: The Untold Story Of Singapore's Football Legend* – on Aug 26 at the Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore, with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam as the guest of honour. In his speech, President Tharman said: "We are all here because

George Suppiah's life is the story of the power of character. "How did someone who grew up in that rough and tumble background in Owen Road make his way through the toughest years of our history, and become Asia's first referee at the FIFA World Cup? There was something in his character. "So I think we're here to celebrate the character of someone who epitomised so much of what Singapore has been about and must be about." On the delay in launching the biography, Shamini said: "This was a dream for quite a while, we started before Covid, but then when the pandemic came, my brother passed on and my mum who was not very well passed on three months ago. "So it took us quite a bit of time, and also because he is a legend with so much history, it was very difficult for us to actually condense it all into a book. "We tried to do the best of our ability, and we hope it has come out right and I think that's why it took us so long." All profits from the book sales will be pledged towards the George Suppiah Sports Talent Fund, an initiative by the family to support promising young Singaporean athletes. While the family has not decided on how they will select recipients for the fund, Shamini believed that they will want to "do something for the sporting community." "As a family, we want to make sure that we're able to help kids who may not be able to achieve their dream in some way," she added. Current referees also paid tribute to Suppiah, with the Football Association of Singapore's head of referees Sukhbir Singh hailing the legacy he left behind. Describing Suppiah as "a pioneer who helped establish the credibility of Singapore referees on the international stage", he said: "This book allows a new generation to understand the significance of what he achieved and the lasting impact he has had on Singapore football." FIFA referee Clarence Leow said Suppiah "showed Singaporean referees what was possible and gave us something to aspire towards." Though he never met Suppiah personally, Leow said: "His name was one I heard often throughout my refereeing years, and the fact that we are still speaking about him today says everything about the legacy he left behind."

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School sports

SJI first team to retain C Div boys' basketball title in 4 years

David Lee
Senior Sports Correspondent

With his black headband and bright pink socks, Houston Cheng was hard to miss in the National School Games (NSG) C Division boys' basketball final at OCBC Arena Hall 1 on Aug 26. The forward backed up his flashy gear as he delivered an eye-catching 37 points to help St Joseph's Institution (SJI) beat National Junior College (NJC) 74-48, as they became the first team to defend the League 1 title since the Games resumed in 2023 after a pandemic-enforced two-year break.

His dominant all-round display was a welcome gift for Houston, who turned 14 on Aug 16, and proved to be redemption after a sub-par performance last season, when SJI clinched their first title just four years after their basketball programme tipped off. Houston said: "I've been wearing the headband after I didn't play very well in last year's NSG. I had long hair which blocked my vision, but I kept the headband even after I cut my hair to remind me that I need to play better. I also always wear red or pink socks for luck. "But I also want to thank my teammates for trusting me and helping me overcome difficulties. Even when things got messy in the second and third quarters, we didn't blame each other, and kept trusting one another." Aided by Houston's 12 points and captain Zachary Hui's seven, SJI made a blistering 25-12 start to the first quarter in front of a vociferous crowd of about 500 students and parents from both schools who cheered enthusiastically with flags, clappers and posters. The lead ballooned to 40-16 midway through the second period before NJC found their rhythm at both ends to go on an 8-0 run in the last five minutes of the half. NJC fought back to within 12 points near the end of the third quarter before SJI, coached by Koh Meng Koon, found their second wind to finish strong. After creating history, 14-year-old Zachary, who played alongside

Houston at the ActiveSG Basketball Academy when they were 11, is hungry for more as SJI eye the B Division championship in 2027. He said: "We cheered each other on, brought the energy back up when things were not going our way, and eventually got the defensive stops and baskets as a team. "We go again next year, and we are very confident we can win our first B Division title." Meanwhile, NJC captain Shaun Lim, who had a team-high 12 points, said: "SJI are the defending champions and nobody expected us to win but we put up a good fight and did well. There were lessons learnt – we need to start and finish games stronger, and we can be more resilient when we are down and continue to try our best." In the C Division Girls' League 1 final, Nanyang Girls' High School showed great chemistry and ball circulation as they also earned a blowout 71-20 win over Dunman High School. With 26 points, vice-captain and power forward Goh Yanqi was the top scorer in back-to-back finals, and her clinical finishing helped the team romp to their sixth straight title. The Nanyang girls, who had attempted 6,300 baskets under the watchful eye of their coach Chen Hui Hui during training in the week leading up to the final, saw their efforts pay off with a 63 per cent two-pointer success rate. Yanqi, 14, said: "I know I got here not because of myself, but because of my coach and everyone support-



Houston Cheng (in white), seen here cutting through National Junior College's Aaden Chua (far left) and Zechariah Lum, poured in 37 points to lead St Joseph's Institution to an emphatic 74-48 win. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

ing me. I'm thankful for our achievement and it made me know all our hard work paid off and I will continue working hard." Despite the heavy defeat, Dunman High captain Chlovelle Yaw was heartened by her team's first appearance in the C Division final, following bronzes in 2024 and 2025. She said: "I'm really proud of the team for making it to our first C Division girls' final, but we still have a lot to work on in terms of supporting one another on and off court when we are down." As the Secondary 2 players move

on to play in another division in 2027, Nanyang are aiming to uphold their proud basketball tradition, with their seniors having won the school's fourth straight B Division girls' title in April. Asked what makes Nanyang such powerhouses, their C Division captain Braelynn Nga said: "We have countless training sessions and team members giving their all. Everyone covers for one another and has each other's back. "Our seniors are also good mentors, always coming back to help us with whatever questions and is-

ues we have, and their support really helps us." But the Nanyang girls laughed as they conceded they have a lot to improve on after failing to hoist Chen after their win. In unison, Braelynn and Yanqi said: "Yes, we will be working on that." In the earlier third-place play-offs, Presbyterian High School pipped Raffles Institution 63-56 to the boys' bronze, while Raffles Girls' School beat Jurong Secondary School 60-47.

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FOUR-DIGIT DRAW			
Aug 26 2026			
FIRST ♦ 1564			
SECOND ♦ 2169			
THIRD ♦ 8947			
STARTERS			
2412	2588	3480	
5552	6607	7357	
7639	7988	9178	
	9933		
CONSOLATIONS			
1195	1445	2039	
2929	4022	4765	
6114	6303	6581	
	7490		