

## SPORT

## S'PORE STICKS BY INDOOR HOCKEY

**SHF ramps up efforts to promote the sport along with its debut at the KL SEA Games**

Nicholas De Silva

With her own goals changing, Rahimah Abdul Aziz called time on her hockey career in 2011.

She had already achieved her dreams of representing the nation and turning professional, as well as being one of the first local female players to play in the European leagues when she featured for Parisian outfit Racing Club de France between 2010 and 2011.

After a wrist injury suffered during her overseas stint – and with her priorities changing – she decided to retire from competitive hockey to focus on other life goals.

Now 32 and a mother of two, Rahimah is donning national colours and playing competitively again – as part of the recently formed national indoor hockey women's team that will be taking part in the Aug 19-30 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur.

Said the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority specialist: "When I first heard they were forming the team, I thought I'd just try. I had support from my friends and family, I still had the passion for the game and wanted to represent my country again."

Alongside ice hockey, indoor hockey will make its debut at this month's Games, and since the announcement of its inclusion last September, the Singapore Hockey Federation (SHF) has ramped up efforts in creating a dedicated indoor programme.

Former Malaysian indoor hockey professional player Redzuan Ponirin has been roped in to coach the men's and women's teams, which are made up largely of former field hockey players, many of whom were involved in the national set-up like Rahimah.

Played on a wooden or synthetic court enclosed by downward sloping sideboards, the six-a-side game emphasises speed and constant movement.

Introduced in Germany in the 1950s as an alternative to field hockey and intended to be played during winter, indoor hockey has since gained popularity in Europe.

However, in South-east Asia, only Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia have dedicated indoor set-ups and rankings on the International Hockey Federation's list.

The Malaysians stand at 26th in the men's and women's world rank-



The Singapore Hockey Federation plans to run an indoor league and is also in talks with regional countries to stage an indoor South-east Asian Cup. PHOTO: MARCUS TAN FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

ings. Indonesia's men's team are ranked 34th and the Thai women are 32nd. Indonesia's women's team and the Thai men's team did not feature in last year's rankings.

Former Singapore national player Mohd Jumaen Amat Kamsin, 26, was one of the field hockey players who made the switch to the national indoor team. He explained: "I wanted to be exposed to another kind of hockey and try something new."

"Indoor hockey has a smaller space and is played at a faster pace, and what makes this game exciting is that we have to think quickly."

Fitness is another important aspect of the game, as Rahimah noted: "It's a lot of sprinting work. You need endurance for those three to four minutes you're on the court. There's no time to rest and recover as the ball rarely goes out of play."

To get these new national teams

up to speed, Redzuan trains both the men and women together at Sengkang Sports Hall.

Said the 36-year-old: "When we combined, the environment became more competitive. The men have to prove themselves technically and the women have to keep up with the physicality."

Despite the quality of the opposition at the SEA Games, Redzuan – who has also coached in Indonesia – remains optimistic.

"Honestly, I didn't expect (the team's progress) to be this good. We can definitely put up a fight. We are not far away and are moving in the right direction," he said.

The head coach's confidence is not unfounded. The men's and women's teams have given good accounts of themselves since their inception last November.

Both teams defeated Thailand to finish second in January's Singapore Indoor Hockey Challenge.

Four months later, they registered respectable scores against regional powerhouses Malaysia during a training trip to Klang. The men were defeated 4-2 and the women lost 1-2.

Although it will be their first time competing at a major Games, the players are relishing the challenge.

Said the women's team captain Chen Jingyi, 23: "We really hope to match up to other countries and actually set a level so that they can see us as tough competitors."

SHF president Mathavan Devadas is counting on the teams to cause an upset next month, although he admits the odds are stacked against them.

He believes a successful campaign in Kuala Lumpur will boost the sport locally, akin to how the Republic's 1993 SEA Games gold-winning women's field hockey team inspired a spike in interest in the sport.

Domestically, an indoor league scheduled to run outside the existing field hockey season is in the pipeline, with national sports body ActiveSG already on board.

SHF are also in talks with regional countries to stage an indoor South-east Asian Cup. Presently, the only continental indoor competition is the Asia Cup, held every two years.

Citing the success of indoor hockey in Australia, where it is referred to as fast-foot hockey, Devadas said: "We want to push indoor in a very big way because athletes develop good basic skills and positional awareness."

"We also found that kids really enjoy it because the ball is in play. There are different skills involved in playing indoor hockey, but I think we can attract more players to eventually play field hockey."

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HIGHER INTENSITY

**Indoor hockey has a smaller space and is played at a faster pace, and what makes this game exciting is that we have to think quickly.**



MOHD JUMAEN AMAT KAMSIN, former national hockey player, on the differences between field hockey and indoor hockey.

## Pennefather named FIH judicial commission chief

Lester Wong

Singapore veteran sports official Annabel Pennefather has been appointed president of the International Hockey Federation's (FIH) judicial commission, taking up her third position in a world sport body in the space of two months.

The FIH's executive board made its decision last Thursday, after Pennefather's predecessor, Don Davies, announced his intention to step down.

The judicial commission is a group of neutral legal advisers who acts as a mediator in legal matters.

"I consider it an honour to be the first Singaporean and also the first female to be appointed to this position," said the 68-year-old Pennefather, who was previously one of two deputy presidents on the commission.

"From my past experience, I know that the workload will be manageable within the scope of my other sport and legal roles."

The lawyer is also serving on the

International Association of Athletics Federations' (IAAF) disciplinary tribunal, after being appointed in June. Last month, the Badminton World Federation also named her in its external judicial expert group.

She said with a laugh: "All of a sudden, I seem to be getting this flood of interest. It's probably due to my high-profile role in the IAAF, so when the other international bodies were looking for people to fill similar positions, my name cropped up."

The former national hockey player has a long-standing connection with the sport, having served as the Singapore Hockey Federation (SHF) president.

Said SHF president Mathavan Devadas: "It is a great honour for Singapore to have an official appointed to such a senior position in the world body."

"Annabel is eminently qualified to hold the position, and I'm sure she will discharge her responsibilities well."

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Former national hockey player Annabel Pennefather continues to give back to the sport. She is the first Singaporean and first female to be appointed FIH judicial commission chief. ST FILE PHOTO

### Next 48 Hours

#### TODAY

##### FOOTBALL

AFC Cup Asean zonal final, 1st leg: Home United v Ceres Negros (Jalan Besar, 7.30pm. Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 7pm).

##### SWIMMING

World Cup Moscow: Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 11pm).

##### TENNIS

Washington Open Day 3 (StarHub Ch201, tomorrow, 4am).

#### TOMORROW

##### CRICKET

2nd Test Sri Lanka v India: Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch122 & StarHub Ch235, 12.30pm).

##### GOLF

Barracuda Championship Day 1 (StarHub Ch204, Friday, 6.30am).

WGC-Bridgestone Invitational Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch116 & StarHub Ch210, Friday, 1.30am).

Women's British Open Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 5pm).

##### SWIMMING

World Cup Moscow: Day 2 (Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 11pm).

##### TENNIS

Washington Open Day 4 (StarHub Ch201, Friday, 4am).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, visit singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.