

SPORT



Infantry, with jockey Manoel Nunes aboard, leading (from left) Nova Strike, Lim's Samurai and Alibi en route to winning the Singapore Derby at Kranji. Alibi finished fourth in his bid for a Four-Year-Old Challenge sweep. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

INFANTRY SOLDIERS TO DERBY WIN

Top trainer Alwin Tan makes up for War Affair's narrow loss in this race two years ago

Nicholas De Silva

S'PORE DERBY RESULTS

- 1 Infantry (Win: \$28, place: \$8)
 - 2 Lim's Samurai (\$22, length)
 - 3 Nova Strike (\$26, neck)
 - 4 Alibi
- Forecast: \$93
Tierce: \$4,148.00
Trio: \$777

Trainer Alwin Tan finally exorcised the ghost of his 2015 Emirates Singapore Derby loss with a victory yesterday as Infantry marched home to capture the country's oldest horse race.

The New Zealand-bred gelding, ridden by jockey Manoel Nunes, clocked a winning time of 2min 2.29sec to finish a length clear of Lim's Samurai (William Pike) with Nova Strike (Derreck David) a neck

behind in third.

Not only was it Tan's first triumph at the Group 1 Derby, a \$1.15 million race over 2,000m, but it comes two years after his former star horse War Affair narrowly lost by a neck to Quechua in the 2015 edition.

That ended War Affair's bid to become the first horse to sweep all three legs of the Four-Year-Old Challenge.

Tan, who last year became the first Singaporean in 13 years to claim the trainer's premiership, was emotional as he savoured the moment.

He said: "I think it's the biggest race I've ever won. I have to thank my wife for drawing (barrier) six.

"I didn't have to tell Nunes what to do as he knows the horse so well. When they landed in fifth or sixth on the rails, I knew they would have a good chance.

"There are no words to describe how I'm feeling right now."

He was thrilled with the performance of Infantry, who notched his eighth win from 20 starts and has now earned more than \$1 million in prize money.

Tan said: "He's a real worker. He's got a big heart and ran a fantastic race."

Brazilian hoop Nunes was equally effusive in his praise for Infantry. The three-time Singapore champion jockey, who recently return from ankle surgery, said: "I know

this horse really well, and he gave me such great confidence.

"Today, he just showed me where to go, he is so professional.

"At the 700m, I had a lot of horse under me, and when the gaps opened, he just pulled away to a big break.

"He got a bit tired in the end but he had enough left in the tank to last it out.

"To come back in three weeks and win after they put a screw (in my ankle), it's unbelievable."

While Tan wrote his name into the history books, it was a different story for fellow trainer Michael Clements who saddled Alibi, one of the pre-race favourites.

The bay stallion had won the

Stewards' Cup and Patron's Bowl earlier, and was chasing a clean sweep of the Four-Year-Old Challenge.

Alibi eventually finished fourth in the 15-horse field, two lengths behind Infantry.

Despite the loss, Clements was proud of his runner's efforts and said the 10 furlongs was a step too far for Alibi, who had never attempted a 2,000m race before.

He added: "The horse travelled well and ran a great race. The jockey (Glen Boss) told me with 400m to go the horse had just about enough.

"It's too far for him."

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Traditional powerhouses grappling with new badminton reality

Lester Wong

For the better part of six decades since the first Thomas Cup in 1949, men's badminton was dominated by China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Such was their stranglehold that it took until the 2014 edition for another country, Japan, to claim the world team championships. And last year, Denmark became the latest first-time winners.

Now, the landscape has become even more competitive and the signs suggest an egalitarian future for the sport, Indonesia's double All-England singles champion (1993, 1994) Hariyanto Arbi told The Straits Times yesterday.

"It feels like every country is picking up, improving their standards. India, Thailand, Japan. No one is dominating now, not even China."

Son Wan Ho is the current world No. 1 and the first South Korean to achieve the feat since Badminton World Federation (BWF) computer rankings were introduced in 2009.

Five men from four countries have won the six BWF Super Series titles so far this year: Lee Chong Wei (Malaysia), Viktor Axelsen (Denmark), Lin Dan (China) and B. Sai Praneeth and Srikanth Kidambi (India).

The 45-year-old Arbi, who also won the world championship in 1995, said the scoring system change implemented by the BWF in 2006 was a big reason in levelling the playing field.

The rules were changed so that games were played to 21 points instead of 15, and rally point scoring was adopted, meaning that the winner of a rally scores the point regardless of who served.



Former top shuttlers (from left) Foo Kok Keong, 55, Yap Kim Hock, 48, and Ong Ewe Hock, 46, who brought much success to Malaysia, at the 6th Foo Kok Keong International Cup. PHOTO: ALICIA CHAN FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

"Before, your stamina and endurance was more important, and (because players could only score points on their serve) it was more

difficult for weaker opponents to catch up," said Arbi, who was in town for the Foo Kok Keong International Cup.

The three-day competition held at the Singapore Swimming Club, which ended yesterday, drew former stars like Malaysia's former world No. 1 Foo and Thailand's Boonsak Ponsana, who reached the semi-finals at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

Foo, 54, emphasised the importance of mental strength in today's game.

"The new generation has everything - sports science, preparation, technology. Everything is there," he said.

"Now, the problem (for not winning) lies with the players. Some take it too easy, or they think they are already there in terms of success."

Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are also struggling to find new talent to replace their ageing stars.

World No. 2 Lee is 34 and approaching the end of his career while Indonesia have yet to find a successor to former world No. 1 and world champion Taufik Hidayat, who retired in 2014.

Foo said: "But it's not easy to find another Lee Chong Wei, another person who combines all the same qualities of talent and hard work."

"We can look at 100,000 people and not find another one like him."

His compatriot and 1996 Olympic doubles silver medalist Yap Kim Hock added: "You look at India's top three (Kidambi, Praneeth, H.S. Prannoy), they are have the ability to beat Lin Dan or Chong Wei."

"Malaysia doesn't lack talented young players but we are still some distance away from grooming such top-level talent."

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Para-athletes aim for APG selection



Javelin thrower and shot putter Muhammad Diroy Noordin competing yesterday at the National Inclusive Athletics Championships at Toa Payoh Stadium. About 160 participants attended the 45th edition of the event, where Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth Sim Ann was the guest of honour. Diroy, together with Lionel Toh (100m, 200m), Ivan Chua (shot put) and Norsilawati Sa'at (100m), had been aiming to qualify for September's Asean Para Games (APG) in Malaysia. Nominations for the APG will be submitted to the Singapore National Paralympic Council today.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KELVIN CHAN