

# GOLLINGS LENDS HIS RUGBY 7S EXPERTISE

Ex-England skipper gives guidance as men's team seek to do better at KL SEA Games

Nicholas De Silva

The Singapore national rugby sevens men's team's quest for gold at next month's SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur has been boosted by the assistance of English great Ben Gollings.

The International Rugby Board World Series' all-time points scorer with 2,322 points has been working with the team since last December in an advisory capacity.

Based in Brisbane, the 37-year-old operates remotely for

the most part – reviewing video footage of weekly training sessions and matches, identifying areas for improvement and providing training and tactical feedback.

He also visits Singapore once every few months to conduct training camps with the players.

Last Saturday was one such training camp, and the former England sevens skipper's competitiveness remains evident despite retiring from professional rugby in 2011.

"Don't just play, play to win," he barked at the players during an internal practice match.

Right after a try was scored, Gollings blew his whistle and brought the play back to the start before asking his charges: "What could you have done better?"

The scenario replayed itself multiple times throughout the two-hour session, with Gollings describing his coaching philosophy as open minded and centred on player involvement.

"I don't believe in structure too much. I like to involve everybody and have ideas from the players," he told The Straits Times.

"It's more of arming the players with the tools for decision making and getting them to adapt to the situation at any particular moment on the field.

"It's what in front of you that's

the key, and how you solve the problem at hand."

This approach has been well received by the national players.

Said Mattias Chia, 24, who will be playing in his first Games: "We're very lucky to have him. I really enjoy training under Ben.

"He doesn't spoon-feed us. We go through the drill on our own. He only steps in after its over and asks us to think where we went wrong before he gives his input on how it could have been improved."

For captain Marah Ishraf, 22, the opportunity to train under one of his idols is a dream come true.

"I remember watching him when I was about 10-years-old on TV, so to train under such a star... it's surreal," said Marah.



Retired English great Ben Gollings conducting training with the Singapore national rugby sevens team last Saturday at Turf City. The 14-man squad will head to Brisbane next Thursday for a four-day training camp. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

InGoodConscience

## Armstrong has new lease of life but jury is still out



Rob Hughes

If your past is shady, and possibly criminal, you might think it best to commit to a reformed life. Or hide.

Not Lance Armstrong, and not in the United States, where publicity is its own drug.

The man who doped his way to seven consecutive Tour de France titles, and who still faces a lawsuit brought by the US government and others seeking up to US\$100 million (S\$136.44 million) over his deception, has set himself up as a broadcaster and blogger on the good, the bad and the ugly of Le Tour.

The gruelling race that pushes riders to, and beyond, human capacity for 3,540km over 21 daily stages, ends at the Champs-Elysees tomorrow. Armstrong will not be anywhere near the finish line. He's calling this one from his own backyard in Austin, Texas.

"I can watch the Tour in my house, then walk across to my studio," he told CNN this week.

"God bless those on the Tour having to drive three hours every day between the stages. That's miserable, you need a vacation at the end of it."

Without leaving Texas, where he once thought of pursuing a career as state governor, he taps into the American (and fast becoming the

world's) obsession with celebrity.

By daily podcast and occasionally by Instagram, he feeds the curiosity of, it is claimed, 300,000 people per day across the States. He doesn't hold back.

He lambasts the tour director, an old adversary of his. He attributes blame for dangerous descents, or for reckless riders barging one another off the road. I'm not sure he addresses who, if anyone, among today's riders are drugged to the eyeballs, as he was. Or which team doctors might be helping men to follow his descent down the slope of not just cheating, but lying about it to the point of threatening legal and physical retribution.

Whether his criticisms, his insights, his attempted witticisms break with his past by steering towards truth is, I guess, for each follower to judge.

Armstrong sees the podcasts fill a void in his life. "I had two platforms before," he said. "Cycling and cancer. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, but they went overnight – not just the cycling but the cancer."

He added: "A man with no platform is a lost man."

His records are annulled. His future is hampered by a lifetime ban from competing at anything related to Olympic sports.

At 45, with five kids and planning to marry for a second time, he has to find some meaning in the second stage of life.

The estimated US\$125 million in his bank accounts, give or take what the government and other claimants including former team riders are trying to take away, is probably ring-fenced by retirement funds.

Lawyers did that for O.J.

Simpson, even while he served the first nine years of a jail sentence for armed robbery. Like Armstrong – and Alex Rodriguez, Marion Jones, Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire, who are back as TV analysts or public campaigners – Simpson divides opinions about how and when a fallen hero should get back some public esteem.

Simpson has just been told that the law agrees he has done his time.

He should be free by the first week in November when the government-backed lawsuit against Armstrong comes to court.

The US Postal Service, which sponsored the team Armstrong rode for, insisted that it would not have paid US\$32.3 million between 2000 and 2004 to the outfit, had it known the riders used banned drugs and blood transfusions.

The Postal Service is a government agency, and the court could order that money (of which Armstrong took the lion's share) to be repaid. Indeed, the judgment could triple the amount under the False Claims Act.

Armstrong's legal team argues that the Postal Service suffered no damages – and received far more in value from the sponsorship than the millions it paid. A jury must decide. And if those members of the public are anything like the people who respond online to Armstrong's daily podcast of the Tour, called Stages, they might end up divided between those who admire and those who detest him.

By his own admission, he is actively seeking a platform. He is trying to turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the trolls, and to draw some

kind of appreciation from those drawn to him.

Before these daily recaps on Le Tour, Armstrong teamed up with Outside magazine on a Facebook podcast called The Forward. His role there is as a presenter and interviewer with guests from literary, musical and sporting backgrounds.

Another dalliance with this new pastime came through HBO. The American TV station broadcasts what it calls mockumentaries, and casts Armstrong in a cameo role in Tour de Pharmacy.

"I watched it with my son the other night," he recalled. "It was funny, nicely over the top."

As one who has watched Armstrong at close quarters going "over the top" of the harrowing climb up Mont Ventoux in the French Alps, I can vouch that there appears to be something new in him. Humour.

Back in the days when he was riding, whenever I, and anyone else, interviewed him on the subject of drugs, there was absolute steely denial. His eyes bored right through. And with no evidence on the table at the time, his assertion had to be taken at face value.

Looking back, he was the best of liars. And humourless with it.

He might have turned one corner. A few months ago, he received a package delivered to his door with a demand notice to pay excess postage of US\$1.09.

Armstrong put that up online with the quip: "@uspostalservice wants 100 mil plus a dollar and 9 cents from you."

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## SportsWorld

Young Lions whacked 7-0 by Aussie U-23s

Singapore were knocked out of the Asian Football Confederation Under-23 Championship Group F qualifiers after a 7-0 beating by Australia in Yangon.

George Blackwood and substitute Milislav Popovic had braces, while Stefan Ingo Mauk, Devante Clut and Jaushua Sotirio also netted.

The Young Lions, who had Ilyas Lee sent off for a second yellow card, had lost 0-2 to hosts Myanmar on Wednesday and finish off against Brunei tomorrow.

Amita loses to Russian fencer in round of 32

Singapore national fencer Amita Berthier lost 10-15 to world No. 14 Svetlana Tripapina of Russia in the round of 32 of the women's individual foil competition at the World Fencing Championships in Leipzig, Germany yesterday.

The 16-year-old, ranked 137th in the world, had defeated 72nd-ranked Liu Yan Wai of Hong Kong in the round of 64 to become the first-ever Singaporean to advance into the last 32 of the championships.

Chicharito to become a Hammer

LONDON • West Ham have agreed on a deal to sign Mexico striker Javier Hernandez from German side Bayer Leverkusen, the Premier League football club said on Thursday.

The 29-year-old former Manchester United and Real Madrid player, also known as Chicharito, is expected to arrive in London in the next few days for a medical examination and to finalise personal terms on a transfer British media are reporting to be worth £16 million (S\$28.4 million). REUTERS

Leicester turn down Roma's bid for Mahrez

LONDON • Leicester manager Craig Shakespeare confirmed yesterday that the club had rejected an offer from Italian side Roma for Riyad Mahrez.

The Algerian footballer is likely to command a fee of £50 million (S\$88.6 million), with Roma's offer believed to be short of that figure.

Mahrez, who indicated that he wanted to leave the club at the end of last season, was a key figure for the Foxes on their run to the Premier League title in the 2015-16 season, scoring 17 goals and making 10 assists. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Rich Warriors fans may get personal seat

OAKLAND (California) • The Golden State Warriors are bringing the personal seat licence to the National Basketball Association (NBA), and the fans interested in purchasing them will be asked for a 30-year commitment.

While pricing has not been revealed, ESPN cited a team official as saying that the number of seats dedicated to season-ticket holders will fall from 14,500 at the Oracle Arena in Oakland to about 12,000 at the Warriors' new US\$1 billion (S\$1.36 billion) Chase Centre in San Francisco scheduled to open in 2019. REUTERS

Auckland might host next America's Cup

WELLINGTON • Auckland has firmed as favourite to host the next America's Cup, after holder Team New Zealand canvassed the prospect of holding the regatta there in 2021.

New Zealand won the Auld Mug last month with an emphatic 7-1 victory over Oracle Team USA in Bermuda and, as defender of the trophy, gets to set the terms of the next regatta.

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