

BY
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S'PORE CAN WIN WAGC

CONSISTENT PERFORMANCES
AND TOUGH QUALIFIERS THE KEY

Local golfers have proven to be some of the best amateurs in the world, with two consecutive second-place finishes at the World Amateur Golf Championships (WAGC) Finals in the last two years.

Coach of the Singapore side M Balraj believes that it could be third time lucky for the Republic who could finally jettison the bridesmaids' tag and win the tournament this time out.

The WAGC Finals will be hosted at South Africa's Durban Country Club from Oct 22-29.

The Singapore qualifiers will be held on July 20 and 26, with the Singapore Finals on Aug 2, with aspirants slugging it out on the Tampines Course of the Tanah Merah Country Club (TMCC).

"I think Singapore has consistently done well because the qualifying process is tough. Previously the tournament was held in Sentosa, and now TMCC, and both are very tough courses. And because they've qualified from a course like that, they are able to handle most golf courses," said Balraj who watched his five-member Singapore team surrender their lead only on the final day of competition at the 2015 Finals in Turkey.

"Tampines is a very tricky, mature course. By that I mean the trees are huge, and they will often come into play, and once you get into the trees, it'll be very hard to get out. I've played there a couple of times, and it's not easy at all," he added. "I think whoever qualifies from there will go out and win the WAGC."

Having had a look at some of Singapore's qualifiers in recent years, Balraj believes that Singaporeans are often equipped – in terms of skills – with only some adjustments required before they leave for battle against their global counterparts.

"I usually get the boys to play a round of golf, then do a little bit of detection and correction for their game – just fine-tuning, really – because if they qualified, they'll probably have played quite a bit of golf already," he said, adding that Singaporean golfers are often modest about

their abilities.

Willy Teo who was part of the quintet who flew the Republic's flag in the Finals last year, seems to illustrate Balraj's point.

"Hopefully I can do what I did last year and qualify, but I'll need a bit of luck. I'm expecting more good players to take part this time, and I haven't been playing well recently," said the 51-year-old who has already signed up, along with friends, some of whom are WAGC first-timers.

"This year there seems to be more publicity on the tournament and more people are aware of it and taking part, at least some of my friends who did not take part last time are definitely more keen now."

Teo asserts that taking part this year would be money well spent, in more ways than one.

"This year it's more worth it to take part, and I guess that helps too. We paid \$480 in registration fees – that's less than the \$500 last year – and we got a goodie bag that's worth more than \$750. It's definitely more worth it to play," said Teo for whom the \$300 Ice Chrono Elektrik watch is the pick of the goodie bag.

"And if I can make the cut, it means I'll be able to play at least two rounds of golf – and stand a chance to feel the pride of representing the country again."

The Singapore Qualifiers will be played across five divisions based on a golfer's handicap: A (0-5.4), B (5.5-10.4), C (10.5-15.4), D (15.5-20.4) and E (20.5-25.4), with the winner of each division going on to represent Singapore at the WAGC Finals in Durban.

The entry fee for the qualifiers is \$480, with each golfer receiving a goodie bag worth \$750, including an Ice Chrono Elektrik watch worth \$300, and golfing vouchers at Laguna Bintan and TMCC.

To register go to www.tnp.sg/wagc

Singapore WAGC representative Willy Teo (right) and coach M Balraj (inset).

tnp photos: Mohd Ishak, Jeremy Long