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BY  
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# A STEADY, STRAIGHT-HITTER AT GOLF

THE LATE MR LEE KUAN YEW DID HIS  
CALCULATIONS BEFORE EXECUTING HIS SHOTS

The late Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman, Second Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1970 to 1973, once said: "He does not mind losing to a better player but he would fight to the last."

The Malaysian politician was referring to the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew's golf after having played a few rounds with Singapore's founding father in the Seventies.

Golf, it seems, was more than a passion for Mr Lee.

It was good exercise for Mr Lee, who has also kept himself fit with jogging and swimming at the Istana and during his official trips to countries around the world.

The game also gave him a good platform for serious business and good banter with many politicians and dignitaries in a relaxed setting.

As is often said about golf revealing a person's traits and behaviour, the game also gave glimpses of who, and what, the giant of man Mr Lee was.

On playing golf with Mr Lee, Tun Dr Ismail had said: "One of the reasons why I am so fond of golf is that it reveals much of a player's character."

"Lee Kuan Yew, when he plays golf, is very deliberate and calculates every move he wants to make."

"He takes his own time, so much so that he keeps not only those playing with him waiting longer than usual, but he also frustrates those who are following behind: a fact which he is unaware of, or if he is, he just ignores it."

"Often, because he is too calculating and deliberate, his ball either goes too short or goes past the hole."

In fact, Mr Lee, who played cricket and tennis while studying at Raffles Institution, and had reportedly achieved two holes-in-one, had encouraged both his sons, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Lee Hsien Yang, chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore, to take up golf.

And as Hsien Yang said in his eulogy at the University Cultural Centre on March 29: "Golf was Papa's prin-

cipal recreation and passion, so golf featured prominently not only on vacations, but also after work in the evenings."

"The nine-hole course in the Istana grounds provided ample room for us children to find adventure whilst he golfed."

"Both Loong and I were sent for golf lessons. We learnt to hit a long drive from the tee box, but neither of us re-

ally took to the game and we stopped when we grew up.

"But eventually, Papa too, prompted by Ling (daughter Wei Ling who is a doctor), gave up golf, and for exercise he took to jogging, swimming, stationary cycling as well as walking."

"He had read of the benefits of aerobic exercise, examined and accepted the evidence, and he had changed his old habits."

## MR LEE AS A GOLFER

So how was the late Mr Lee's golf?

"He was a good golfer," says Juraimi Ratin, who caddied for Mr Lee in the Sixties and early Seventies at Singapore Island Country Club's (SICC) Bukit course. Juraimi, 69, who was the club caddie, then apprentice pro and later full pro

at SICC, added: "He had a certain aura about him when he walked the course. I used to admire the way he studied the course."

"He paid attention to details, and his guesses of distances were almost always accurate."

"No doubt, he sought confirmation, and would leave it to me to choose his clubs. The four-iron was his favourite, and once he came close to holing Bukit's par-three second hole, playing off 158 metres with that club."

"I caddied for him a few times when he played with Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman and, of course, they also talked politics during the rounds."

"Sometimes he would ask for tips, and he would execute the swings with

relative ease.

"I remember when he played with the Commonwealth Heads of State in the early Seventies at Bukit. He played 80 and 76 off a 12-handicap."

Juraimi's eyes welled when he revealed that Mr Lee arranged for a Sikh English teacher from the Adult Education Board to help him improve his spoken English.

"Mr Singh taught me for three years and I paid no fees," added Juraimi, who



Mr Lee (right), playing golf with Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Razak (second from left), at the Bukit Course.



Mr Lee (above, seated) at the official opening of the Sentosa Golf Course at Sentosa Island.

attended Mr Lee's wake after waiting three hours in the queue on the Thursday of the week of mourning and then braved the rain to watch the cortege leave for the NUS Cultural Centre that Sunday morning.

PM Samy, 62, who started golf as a caddie when only 10 at the former nine-hole Seletar Golf Club in the Sixties, and caddied for Mr Lee in a social game at the club in 1972, said: "He hit the ball straight, often avoided trouble and had a strong mental game."

Told 10 days prior to the game that he would be Mr Lee's caddie by the Seletar officials, Samy was excited, and spent sleepless nights wondering about the do's and don'ts in golf.

"It was an experience of a lifetime for me, caddying for the biggest personality in Singapore."

"He was a fine down-to-earth Prime Minister who made me feel welcome. He spoke little during the nine-hole round, only asking me about distances but deciding on the choice of clubs himself."

"He also read the putting lines well, seldom asking about breaks."

"Then a 12-handicapper, he played a five-over round of 39, using the old Kenneth

Smith made-to-measure golf clubs.

"And I was given a handsome \$5, my biggest caddie fee during that time. More than that, what I took back was the measure of simply-attired Prime Minister – kind, humble and simple in his ways."

For Malaysian professional golfer Vellasamy Nellan (right), 65, who caddied for Mr Lee in 1962 and 1963 at Kuala Lumpur's Golf Club in Circular Road (later to become Royal Selangor Golf Club): "Mr Lee had a presence about him when he walked down the fairways."

The former Malaysian World Cup player (1976 and 1977) added: "I was overcome by grief when I heard that Mr Lee had passed on. Immediately memories of my time as a caddie for him at the golf course came flooding back."

"He used to play with former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak and Dr Goh Keng Swee and I was impressed by his steady golf game despite him not having the best swing."

"I was about 12 then and the caddie fee then was 65 cents. He used to give me \$1.50 which was good money then for a pre-teen."

"But what jolted me most was when he advised me to 'go back to school' when he heard that there were days when I caddied in the mornings and afternoons."

## CONSISTENT

Pro Alvin Liau, 68, who played a few times with Mr Lee, with British journalist, political writer and commentator Alex Josey and then-SICC pro Cyril Horne making the quartet, said that "Mr Lee did not have the best of swings, but he was good because he was very consistent in hitting the ball."

For former top Australian professional Alan Murray and now director of golf at Champions Golf Academy, who made his base in Singapore in the early Seventies, the late Mr Lee "was a fantastic personality".

Said Murray (right), 74, who ran a golf academy at the Singapore Island Country Club and was also a former president of the Professional Golfers' Association of Singapore, his social game with Mr Lee at the New Course in 1977 was "a day to remember for at least two reasons".

He said: "I was overwhelmed by his approach and attitude to the game. He took the game seriously. He took his time, did calculations before every shot and executed down-the-middle-of-the-fairway drives."

"In fact, I hit a couple of wayward shots. And the first time I drove into the bushes, I discovered something."

"When we started I was surprised that I could not see any of his security men following him. Only when I hit into the bushes and went to look for my ball that I discovered they were around, behind the trees."

Murray quipped: "That's efficiency. Now I know why Singapore is a safe and secure place".

