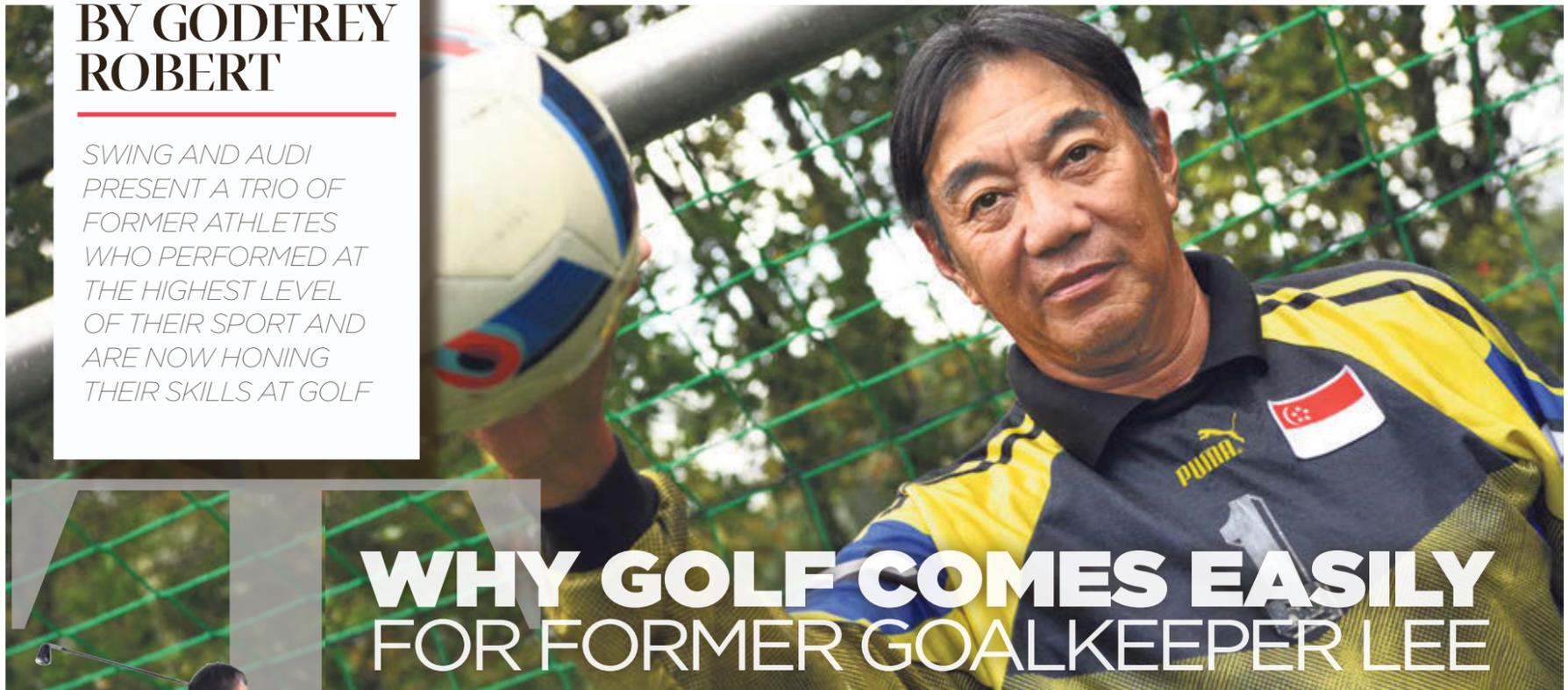


ATHLETES AND GOLF

## BY GODFREY ROBERT

SWING AND AUDI PRESENT A TRIO OF FORMER ATHLETES WHO PERFORMED AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF THEIR SPORT AND ARE NOW HONING THEIR SKILLS AT GOLF

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# WHY GOLF COMES EASILY FOR FORMER GOALKEEPER LEE

AT 61 AND DESPITE A LATE START, THE NATURAL SPORTSMAN CAN STILL TAME THE FAIRWAYS AND GREENS



aking to the sport of golf came as an after-thought for former national football goalkeeper

David

Lee. In his early teens, he dabbled in sports such as badminton, football, volleyball and hockey, in order of preference.

Natural talent drew him to badminton, speed pulled him towards football as a right winger, imposing height (already a six-footer then) tossed him towards volleyball and deft stickwork occasionally consigned him to the hockey pitches.

Assimilate all that, what you get is a true-blue born sportsman, who when introduced to golf at a relatively late age of almost 40 took to it like duck to water and became a single-handicapper within seven years.

No doubt, Lee, 61, is more easily recognised as Singapore's heroic No. 1 goalkeeper during the popular Malaysia Cup heyday of the Seventies to the Nineties.

With a glorious footballing career spanning 18 years (1979 to 1997) and being one of the few Singapore footballers with more than a century of national caps (106), even today Lee is a recognisable face to the general public.

The Leeds-turned-Liverpool fan accepted the greetings spontaneously from some friends and strangers during a lunch interview at the Singapore Cricket Club recently, always displaying the humility ingrained in him from his parents who worked hard to make ends meet and bring up six children at a rented two-bedroom flat at the Commonwealth area.

"Dad was a mechanic at Borneo Motors, but after he got retrenched early, my mum worked as a babysitter, washerwoman and house cleaner to bring us up. And I being the eldest child, much responsibility

was also thrust on my shoulders," said a choked Lee when looking back.

"But I have had a blessed life, both in my career and sport, and I suppose I should be very grateful for that," added Lee, who had spent almost 30 years in the waste management business and is now retired.

After playing several sports at school (Queensway) level, he excelled at badminton and was selected for the National Youth team at age 15. And he remembers most his match against former Singapore No. 1 and 1983 SEA Games champion Wong Shoon Keat in a schools' third-round match where he stretched the favourite before losing 15-9, 15-9.

But he gave up all other sports when the former Football Association of Singapore chairman N. Ganesan spotted him during a Police Force competition and told the impressive goalkeeper to focus on football and drafted him into the National Youth team.

He was on the losing side though, his team were beaten 2-1 by a well-organised Stable Boys XI in the final, but at the prize presentation by Ganesan he recalled the guest-of-honour's brief words: "Boy, what is your name? You have good potential, come join the national youth team."

That initiated an illustrious footballing career that saw him win two Malaysia Cup finals (1980 and 1994) donning the No. 1 jersey, a professional stint with Indonesian club Niac Mitra in 1982-1983 (where he earned over a handsome \$100,000 a year in salary, bonuses and allowances) and numerous showings at the full-house National Stadium.

"That is all water under the bridge, let's talk golf now," said the proud father of four career-minded children whose educational achievements as graduates, he emphasises, "were down to my wife Nettie's hard work and sacrifices."

After retiring from international football in 1997, he switched to golf by chance with the persuasion of former national team football manager Patrick Ang, who brought him to the driving range at Laguna Na-

tional Golf and Country Club for regular sessions.

After a few weeks, Ang, a member of Tanah Merah Country Club, forced him to play rounds at the Garden course, and not before long he obtained his handicap. Then it was golfing ascendancy, and golf clubs in Singapore were abuzz with news of Lee's supreme ability and prowess with golfers keen to play with him.

The 1.90-metre tall was driving an average of 240 metres, and his handicap gradually dropped to an impressive 5 or 6 and his fame spread because he was a member of the Golf Circle, a group of celebrities who graced many local tournaments.

"I was once invited to play alongside the legendary German pro Bernhard Langer at the pro-am of the Johnnie Walker Classic, and I truly enjoyed the round," said Lee, who currently plays at least three games a week.

A recurring back problem keeps troubling him, but the 14-handicapper who thrives on deft chipping and awesome putting is not one to give up golf easily.

"It's a great game for networking and socialising, as emphasised in the Audi-presented Business Times Corporate Golf League. I wish I had taken it up earlier. I hope to play into my old age," stressed Lee, who used to idolise Tiger Woods, but lately has switched his allegiance to Brooks Koepka.

Lee's best score has been one under at his "second home", the National Service Resort and Country Club at Changi. That was when he was a single handicapper, but if you think that the relaxed Lee is easy meat these days, think again.

For he rounded off the interview thus, with a modicum of modesty, and beamed: "I just played a great game at Changi and thoroughly enjoyed it. Everything fell into place."

"So what did you shoot?", I asked. "81", he whispered.

The lean Lee still has a mean game. Back problem or not.

### SPECIFICATIONS & FEATURES

**Model name:** Audi RS 5 Sportback  
**Engine:** V6, 2894cc, twin turbo  
**Power:** 450hp  
**Torque:** 600Nm  
**Top speed:** 250km/h (limited)  
**Consumption:** 8.9L/100km  
**Price:** \$387,000 inclusive of COE

### Features:

- Audi virtual cockpit with RS screen
- Head-up display with RS-specific display
- Flat-bottom RS sport steering wheel
- RS sport seats with rhombus pattern and embossed RS emblem



photos by Larry Lim