

IT'S A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD IN LAWN BOWLS

Para-bowler believes physical disabilities won't put him at a disadvantage in sport

Zachary Tham

Khirmern Mohamad, 51, is a para-athlete who has dabbled in athletics, powerlifting and sailing, but is fascinated by the cerebral aspect of lawn bowls.

"Other sports are more dependent on physical ability but I want to challenge myself to think strategically," he explained.

"The mental game is a big part of



Lawn bowlers Khirmern Mohamad and 2019 SEA Games gold medallist Shermeen Lim hope to see more youngsters take up the sport. ST FILE PHOTO

lawn bowls, which I find to be really interesting."

The sport involves rolling a bowl, which is a ball with flattened sides, towards a white ball called a jack. The aim is to get as many bowls as close to the jack as possible.

Khirmern, who wears a prosthetic leg, represented Singapore in shot put at the Asean Para Games in 2014.

He said his next goal was not just to represent Singapore at another Para Games but to also compete against able-bodied athletes on the international stage.

"In lawn bowls, I can use my intelligence to compete with the able-bodied athletes, so they don't look at me differently because of my disability," he said.

"With my skill, I can give them a good fight."

For software engineer Melvin Tan, 36, the sport attracted him with its unique tests on focus, perseverance and teamwork.

Tan, who began playing in junior college about 20 years ago, said he found it odd to see many players with greying hair despite the sport not being one that was exclusively for the elderly.

"Currently the Singapore lawn bowls scene might have more older players but there are actually many young lawn bowlers worldwide," he said.

"I would love to see more young Singaporeans join us in the exciting world of lawn bowls."

Bowls Singapore, which governs the sport locally, is trying to shed

the stereotype by attracting more young players to the game. The average age of players in the national team is over 50 years old.

According to Bowls Singapore president and national team coach Rodger Kimpton, the aim is to introduce the sport to schools here through physical education (PE).

And Mus Effendi, a PE teacher at Yishun Innova Junior College, might play a critical role in that plan.

The 47-year-old, who currently trains with the national developmental team, has already introduced some of his students to the game and says the interest in the game has been promising.

Effendi said: "I introduced lawn bowls to the students under my CCA (co-curricular activity), modular sports, and the interest has been good. However there's nothing much we can do at the moment due to Covid-19 restrictions."

He added that he hoped to organise more outings to external lawn bowl rinks for his students when the pandemic eases.

In the meantime, interested players can try their hand at the sport as Bowls Singapore will be organising a Lawn Bowls For Fun Festival. This event aimed to introduce the sport to the public will take place on Aug 28-29 at the Singapore Sports Hub's Lawn Bowls Green Indoor Stadium at Kallang.

The festival will feature a number of events, including a coaching session for beginners and a demonstration game by the national Para-

BODY AND MIND

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KHIRMERN MOHAMAD, para-bowler, on the possibilities the sport offers.

lympic team.

Shermeen Lim, who won the gold medal in the women's lawn bowls triples at the 2019 SEA Games, said she hoped similar events could be held more often in the future.

The 32-year-old said: "Bowls is a game of adaptability in changing conditions, just like life.

"There're a lot of life skills to be learnt from the game and I hope to see more players joining through frequent weekend carnivals. That would be exciting."

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