

## After gold No 23, it's time for a change

2011 Games could see new format for men's waterpolo, as Singapore emerge champs again

TANYO-HINN  
yohinn@mediacorp.com.sg

VIENTIANE — When Singapore defend their men's waterpolo crown at the 2011 SEA Games, it could be in an under-23 format.

Yesterday, the Republic clinched its first gold medal of the 25th SEA Games here and its 23rd successive title in men's waterpolo, after beating Thailand 8-5 at the National Sports Complex in Vientiane to top the group.

The Philippines collected the silver while Indonesia took home the bronze medal.

Plans are already afoot to change the format in the next edition of the competition in 2011, which will be held in Indonesia.

Speaking after the team's win, Ivan Tan, vice-president (waterpolo), Singapore Swimming Association, claimed the move would help Singapore move beyond success at just the SEA Games.

Tan, who is also the Asian Amateur Swimming Federation (AASF) waterpolo technical delegate told MediaCorp: "The purpose of this is to inspire the younger players to want to play at the SEA Games. The senior players should be playing at the Asian Games level and beyond.

"Now, most of the senior players would (only) come back and train when there is a SEA Games. That's not good for the sport. The senior players should look at higher level competitions, at the Commonwealth and Asian levels, and even the Fina world league."

Right now, the men's football competition at the Games is an under-23 event.



Singapore beat Thailand 8-5 to clinch a gold medal in Vientiane yesterday. DON WONG

**It's an exciting day for the Singapore contingent and the Singapore community here in Laos. We've won the first SEA Games gold ever awarded in Laos.**

Singapore's ambassador to Laos, Jeyaraj Benjamin William

There are also plans to introduce a women's waterpolo competition for the 2011 SEA Games.

It is understood that many of the countries are keen on the proposals, which will be submitted soon to the sport's continental

governing body, the AASF, and the SEA Games Federation for the green light.

The Singapore men, who finished third at the Asian Games in 1986 — their best result on the continent — are aiming to qualify for next year's continental showpiece in Guangzhou, China.

Right now, they are savouring their latest success at the SEA Games.

The victorious polo boys threw Team Singapore's chef-de-mission Jessie Phua into the pool in celebration yesterday, and the Republic's bowling chief didn't mind getting wet.

"I don't think this medal was ever in doubt, but to bring back the 23rd consecutive gold is an awesome feat," said Phua.

Watched by a noisy crowd that included Singapore's ambassador to Laos, Jeyaraj

Benjamin William, the Republic trailed the Thais 3-2 after the second quarter in a tempestuous affair.

There were several ugly incidents, including a deliberate head-butt by Julanut Jintanugool on Terrence Tan that went unpunished.

Patience was the key to success for the Singapore men, who had earlier beaten Indonesia (14-5) and the Philippines (8-1).

They withstood the Thais' early onslaught to eventually power home 8-5, thanks to two goals each from Lin Diyang and Eugene Teo, and one each from Lin Diyan, Alvin Lee, Luo Nan and Tan.

Said vice-captain Yip Ren Kai: "We didn't get into the game quickly enough, but we knew that if we stuck to our game plan, we would bring back the gold.

"We have never lost, not even drawn a match in SEA Games history, so it is a legacy we wanted to keep up."



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#### TODAY

9.30am **NFL** Baltimore v Green Bay, StarHub Ch 117

#### TOMORROW

3.45am **Uefa** Juventus v Bayern Munich, mio TV Ch 61  
3.39am **Uefa** Marseille v Real Madrid, mio TV Ch 62  
3.39am **Uefa** Wolfsburg v Man U, mio TV Ch 63

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