

Kings OF THE Kampongs

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The SICC Heritage
Chronicles



There was a time in the not too distant past when parts of both the Island and the Bukit were bordered by kampongs wherein dwelled many of the men, women and children who toiled looking after the needs of the Members and keeping their courses in pristine condition. They laboured as bartenders, waiters, cooks, course stewards, groundsmen, weeders, mowers and caddies. And these were the kampongs that gave birth to a band of golfers who carried the Singapore flag flying high in many a golf tournament at home and abroad, and who today are coaching and tutoring the champions of the future.



*Aerial view of the
Island location, 1970s*

The Island Course had kampongs that shared their boundaries with the 13th, 14th, 16th and 17th holes. Most of the children living in these homes were, like the Cabreras and the deVincenzos of Argentina, and the Hogans and the Nelsons of the US, part-time caddies who watched and studied the swings of the better players and the resident pros and used them as models for their own swings.

When the sun began to descend in the West and the last flight of golfers made their weary way to the 19th hole to find solace in their beers and whiskeys, these boys, casting aside their homework and household chores, would make a beeline for the 13th green of the Island where, using cast away or borrowed clubs, they would commence their practice routine for the day. This being the furthest point away from the Clubhouse and being safe from prying eyes, they would pitch and chip and putt to their hearts' content. When they were convinced

that the rest of the coast was clear, they would play the 14th and 15th, and after putting out on the 15th, they would wedge their way back to the 13th green and start all over again.

They were eagle-visions, but when it became really dark, their instinct and sharp radar-like ears would tell them where their ball had landed. Of course, on the greens, more help than mere instinct and sixth sense were needed. Here was where lighted candles would take the place of the flag stick, and since the shadows cast by the flickering light highlighted the contours and dips and rises of the green, they inevitably became expert putters. Only on Chap Goh Mei when the moon was full did they dispense with the use of the candles.

For *Phua Thin Kiay*, *Bill Fung* and *Bill Fua*, the 13th hole became their home as their houses and the fairway shared a common fence. Also did *Pang Tok Lim*



Thin Kiay (Left) with Chocolate Pang (Pang Tok Lim) at Bukit, 1970s

(Chocolate), who later became the Golfing Secretary of SICC, hone his skills here. Phua was the only one of this band of golfers who did not caddy but began his tenure with the Club as assistant to the Club Pro, Jim McGuiness.

The masters of the 14th hole were **Lim Kian Tiong** and his five brothers, **Lim Swee Wah** and his brother **Swe Chew**, and **Lim Ab Hong**. The undisputed virtuosos of the 17th hole were the **Pob brothers** and their sister **Serene**.

At the Bukit, the kampong stretched along the borders of the 10th and 11th holes. It began just after the then existing Maintenance Building on the left of the 10th and continued all the way to the 12th tee box. Where at the Island, the 13th to the 17th were available for this clandestine practice, the 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th of the Bukit were at the disposal of these nocturnal invaders. The 11th fairway was not available as it was the exclusive reserve of the kampong footballers. Whether from their ranks rose any Fandis or Kim Songs is not on record.

As at the Island, when it became too dark to follow the flight of the ball, this secretive band of intruders had to depend on the sharpness of their ears. And if the balls could not be found when buried in the deep rough, they would steal in the next morning before the workers came in the next day at 6:30am to retrieve them. Their practice range was the 16th hole. A lighted candle would mark the hole and they would fire away with their short irons from the gully below. So diligently did they practice that from their ranks rose the Ratim brothers (Ali, Amin, Juraimi and Kamisan), **Osman Abdullah** and **Teo Chin Seng** from the kampong, and from the Labourers Quarters, sited on land today occupied by the tennis courts, **M. Marimuthu**, **M. Ramu**, **Vellasamy**, **V. Lingam** and **George Muniandy** (Fat George).

One of the perks that the kampong afforded the golfing



Thin Kiay in front of the Wan Tho Building at Island, 1968



Thin Kiay, today

Members was the food they provided. Adjacent to the 10th fairway of Bukit just beyond the Maintenance shed was a drinks hut and a little Malay stall that served the best mee rebus you could find. It was not uncommon for golfers to pre-order this dish, and after nine holes, skip the half-way house, dash to the stall and after finishing their sumptuous feast, back track to the 10th tee box and fire away. It was at this humble little stall that the ordinary Members rubbed shoulders with the likes of Cabinet Ministers Goh Keng Swee and Lim Kim San.

Phua Tee Moo, living next to the 13th fairway, was only 17 when he joined the club and was Head Boy when he retired. His son **Phua Thian Kay** (born 1947) became the SICC Club Champion in 1968 at the age of 19. Thin Kay's ambition had all along been to become a teaching professional, which he became at the age of 22. But in the short period when he actively participated in competition, besides winning the Malaysian, Penang, Malacca and Singapore Amateur Opens, he also represented Singapore in the World Cup five times and led its Putra Cup teams to victory in 1967 and 1968. Today, as the Head Pro at the Executive Golf Course, he churns out champions like clockwork, among his protégées being names like Vincent Khua, Amanda Tan and Shearn Chua; three golfers whose achievements will be featured in future articles.

Marimuthu, son of P Mayalagan, a mandore (supervisor/green keeper) at the Bukit, is perhaps the most successful professional golfer Singapore has ever produced. Possessor of a sweet, syrupy swing and an impeccable short game, he has won more than 30 tournaments. Among his notable triumphs were the Maruman Golf Classic, the Dunhill PGA, Rolex Masters, Singapore PGA and a host of other prestigious

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Today: Marimuthu shares a joke with Poh Eng Teck

tournaments. During his heyday, he hogged the headlines, "The Marimuthu Miracle", "Muthu Wins Again" or "Presenting 'King' Muthu" appearing in bold print time and time again. He represented Singapore in the World Cup in 1983. Today he is a teaching pro with the SICC.

Of the Lim brothers, **Kian Tiong** is perhaps better known than his five brothers, **Kian Tong, Kian Chiong, Kian Nam, Kian Heng** and **Kian Kee**. All six of them had successes on the tournament circuit to varying degrees, but it is Kian Tiong who became a household name. His record of 61 on the Keppel Course during the Shell Open has never been bettered and he has won as many or more tournaments than Marimuthu. However, a severe illness in mid-career put paid to his playing career. He is now a teacher in SICC.



Lim Kian Tiong, today

The professionals with the most enviable and powerful swings must surely be the two brothers, **Lim Swe Chew** and **Lim Swee Wab**. Their father, **Lim Ab Beng**, a caddy champion, was the first local player to play in the Singapore Open in 1960. Swe Chew, who was helped in many ways by Club Members Thomas Ang and Loh Siew Pin, was like his father, the SICC Caddie Champion in 1970. He was the winner of numerous SPGA tournaments. He represented Singapore in the World Cup three times and was Marimuthu's leading rival and often, they went head to head before a winner



Lim Swe Chew (left) during his playing days in the 1960s and today (above)



Lim Swee Wab (right) in the 70s and today (above)



emerged, usually by the slenderest of margins. He is now a teaching pro in Jurong. His two sons, Kian Boon and Kian Wee, are also professionals and teach at the SICC.

Lim Swee Wah began caddying at the tender age of 11. At the age of 15, he began playing the local circuit and has won 10 tournaments including the Malaysian PGA twice. He has represented Singapore in the World Cup on four occasions and in the Dunhill Cup in St Andrews thrice. Not to be outdone by his father and brother, he too has won the SICC Caddy Championship. He joined SICC as a teaching pro in 1990 and is in much demand by the Members today to fix their errant swings.

Bill Fung and **Lim Ab Hong**, while still at school, began to caddy and were admitted as tour players on the local circuit. Bill, who has won eight times on the local tour and is now playing successfully on the Asian Senior Tour, has represented Singapore in the World Cup in 1982 and 1992. Ah Hong, on four occasions, narrowly missed winning the Caddy Championship, finishing second each time.



Bill Fung, today



Lim Ab Hong, today

The two of them, together with Bill Fua, who also lived near the 13th, can often be seen teaching at either of our two ranges. Ah Hong began to teach professionally in 1968 while Bill Fung and Bill Fua, much younger, began in 1973 and 1977 respectively.

The **Ratim** brothers began as caddies at the Bukit. Amin, the most talented of the four brothers, was the SICC Caddy Champion while **Ali, Juraimi** and **Ramisan** quit the tour and began teaching in the 70s. Ali is still teaching and can be found giving lessons at the Fairway Club.

The Poh brothers and sister Serene ruled the 17th fairway. They are the seven children of **Pob Kim Leong**, who was a daily worker at the New Course and who once manned a drinks stall between the 14th green and the 15th tee of the New Course. Their uncle, **Pob Kim Tow**, was a golf course superintendent. The six boys, **Eng Huat, Eng Soon, Eng Teck, Eng Chong, Eng Toon** and **Eng Hua**, not only caddied but played the tour with their father's full support. It is with delight that they reminisce the days, when squashed in the pick-up driven by their father, they would travel from tournament to tournament, returning home victorious more often than not. A far cry from the air-conditioned saloons they travel in now. Including



Pob Eng Teck, today

their sister Serene, who spearheaded the way for women golfers in Singapore, all seven of them are involved in the golf business. They run the Toa Payoh Driving Range. The only other siblings whose achievements come near to this incredible accomplishment are the Turnesa brothers of the USA, renowned for their golfing prowess and teaching skills.

Others who benefitted from the use of the facilities "provided" by the SICC are **Osman Abdullah, M. Ramu, Vellasamy, V Lingam** and **Shamsuri Sidek**. Ramu, who once played in the Asian circuit, and the Australian and PNG tours (winner of the Kokopo Open) is now teaching at the Fairways. Vellasamy is a teacher too while Osman has retired. V Lingam is now Director of Impact Golf Academy at Fairway Club while Shamsuri who used to work at the Bukit range in the 1970s is now a teaching professional at Warren Golf & Country Club.

Just as in the US, the days of champion golfers rising from the rank and file of the caddie brigade are now a thing of the past. Our pioneer professional golfers, the ones who brought us glory and who are now teachers to the next generation of children of country club members are a legacy which SICC can proudly boast of. They took their chances and seized



Shamsuri, today



V Lingam, today



V Lingam, back in the 1960s



Shamsuri Sidek putting at Bukit in the 70s

their opportunities, and with the leg up offered by many generous Members and magnanimous pros like Eric Cremin, Allan Murray, Jim McGinness and Cyril Horne, these underprivileged boys fought their way up and have made a life for themselves and their families.



Kings of the Kampong
Sitting from left: Lim Swee Chew, Lim Ab Hong, Phua Thin Kiy and M Marimuthu

Standing from left: Shamsuri Sidek, Pob Eng Teck, V Lingam, M Ramu, Lim Kian Tiong and Lim Swee Wab