

GrowLLLLLLL Newsletter

Volume 1

Founded in 1999

The cougar is a majestic animal, which is mysterious and magical. Cougars are fit and hard to spot in the wild. They are smart and amazing hunters. Our athletes who are Cougars will possess such aptitude, values and qualities. Run and live like a Cougar!



Page 1

Running on a High – Dr. Bala featured on Tabla! 30 December 2016

IN A room at the end of a long corridor in one of the National Institute of Education’s (NIE) buildings sits Prof G. Balasekaran. The room is filled with memorabilia collected over the years. Portraits of late singer Prince and images of Genghis Khan vie space with that of the professor in his younger days – a slim figure with long hair.

That long hair has since become shorter and Prof Bala (as he is popularly known) has put on some weight. He is 53 but the former Singapore national champion in the 3,000m steeple chase still runs five to 10km four times a week.

Running is his passion. He does it not just to keep himself fit. He runs with his trainees who he wants to become champions in long-distance running.

Prof Bala is the Head of Department of the Physical Education and Sports Science (PESS) Academic Group, NIE and Programme Director of Sports Science and Management, NTU.

Trainee teachers with diploma, graduate and post-graduate qualifications are trained at PESS to teach physical education in schools here.

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Cougars Athletic Association
Be Brave, Fast & Strong like a Cougar!

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Running on a High (continued...)

The Sports Science and Management students are trained for the sports industry. Some of the trainee teachers are taken under Prof Bala's wings to train in long-distance running.

This is something that he has volunteered to do. And it has brought in good results.

One of those who trained under him, Eliza Ng, qualified for three events; 800m metres (6th), 1500 metres (6th) and 3000 metres steeplechase (8th) in last year's SEA Games.

Said Prof Bala: "At NIE I teach anything to do with physiology. So performance, adaptations, and ways to increase muscles and fitness are all part of it. Now as part of my volunteer effort, I am nurturing a few youngsters. This volunteer coaching helps me to know the ground as well as helps me to keep fit as I run with the athletes when they warm up and cool down."

Running is something that Prof Bala has been fond of since his school days. He used to play hockey and take part in track and field meets during his primary school days.

While at Anglo Chinese School he won the 3,000m and 2,000m steeple chase.

During his junior college days, he decided to focus more on running although he was still playing hockey. He gave up team sports after NS to concentrate on running. His logic: "I could control why I lost and won as opposed to a team sport where one is dependent on 10 other players to win or lose."

So he trained hard in running. Once he finished his NS he took part in the national athletic meet and was Singapore champion in the 3,000m steeple chase for five years.

He also represented Singapore in the 1,500m, 4x1600m relay, 5000m, 10,000m and marathon races. During this time he also took up a diploma in PE and taught at his alma mater, ACS.

But he felt he needed advanced training and also improve his educational qualification. So he applied to the Indiana University of Pennsybannia in 1987. Why this university?

"I had met a lecturer Ms Helen Gilbey who studied there and she advised me to go there to do a degree. I was about 22 then and I bought a one way ticket. The only problem was money," he said. His parents, from Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, moved here and his dad worked in the Public Utilities Board.

To overcome the problem of money, he trained harder. The university told him that if he finished in the top two in his pet event and the top seven in the cross country team, he would get a fee waiver. He did it and became part of the university's travelling team.

"This fee waiver helped me a lot and eventually I qualified and represented and ran in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) cross country championships in the USA," said Prof Bala with pride.

He was away for five years finishing his degree and masters in sports science.

Once he finished his studies, he did not have a full-time job but worked in the college lab and also trained the local police in fitness. That was when he got a call from ACS asking him if he was interested to take up a job at the school.

So he returned and taught again but not for long. He headed again to Pittsburgh to do his PhD.

This time he got a Singapore government scholarship which meant he had to return to fulfil his bond.

After five years teaching at NIE the itch to learn more about sports science and improve his skills grew and he headed back to Pittsburgh to do post-doctoral research in molecular genetics with a world renowned professor.

Almost three years later, he got an email from NIE asking him if he was keen to come back to join the faculty and so he returned in 2006.

Running on a High (continued...)



Teaching sports science and training athletes at NIE is not all what he does. Prof Bala is also the vice-president (training & selection) of Singapore Athletics Association.

He feels Singapore needs to nurture a large pool of youngsters, especially from the schools. With that strong interest and passion, Prof Bala set up the Cougars Athletic Association which is a non-profit track and field club that helps to groom, develop and nurture young athletes in Singapore.

He strongly believes in developing these young athletes to be the future stars of Singapore. He added that sports in Singapore is on a steady rise and there is a need to train the next generation of Singapore athletes and provide them holistic development.

The animal that represents the association is a cougar, which he said is mysterious and magical and also similar to symbol of Panthers of his alma mater University of Pittsburgh. “Cougars are hard to spot in the wild. They are smart and amazing hunters. The athletes who are Cougars will possess such aptitude, values and qualities. I believe Singapore has the talent but we also need to encourage youngsters to stay in the sport for some time after their school days are over. We have to look into their career path and provide them with incentives,” said Prof Bala who is of the view that more money needs to be invested in getting specialized coaches for each category of athletics.”

He said that the best time to start training youngsters is from the age of eight. The trouble with training students who come to NIE, he said is that they already have running habits “which I have to change”.

He added that in the US, when it comes to training children in athletics there is a lot of parental involvement. “If some parents here come up to me and ask me to train their children then I will be willing,” he said.

Prof Bala has worked on human performance predictions for the last six years and has come up with a unique model to predict performance.

“I am in the midst of publishing these findings and I hope to use them in athletes in Singapore and the world in the future.”

But how long can athletes break records, is there a limit? “Human beings evolve and adapt. I think they can go far but there are limitations.”

- Patrick Jonas, *Tabla!*

Dr. Bala – Forgotten National Athlete of Singapore (Part I)

The following three blog posts were beautifully written by Coach Rameshon from FlexiFitness. Sincere thanks to Rameshon for your kind words about Dr. Bala as Singapore's former national athlete.

“When I was introduced by some officials of the previous Singapore Athletics Association management about Dr Bala (now the Vice President Training and Selection of Singapore Athletics), they did not know that I was aware of him from the past till now. More importantly, I knew him as an athlete, who ran local and international races. We have not competed together, but I feel that he dominated the athletics scene in the early 80s. As for me, during late 1990s, in the former College of Physical Education. I started to train very hard as a trainee teacher and did my further studies. I went to teach again and attained a number of successes. One of the best success is attaining of the current National record of 2hr 24min 22sec in the 1995 South East Asian Games Marathon, which I will discuss here in future. In the same 1995 SEA Games, Koo Chin Poo, fellow Singapore athlete did 3hours 31min for the marathon race in Chiangmai.



Dr. Bala with Rameshon (FlexiFitness) and Haile Gebrselassie (two-time Olympic gold 10,000m event). From left to right: Rameshon, Haile and Dr. Bala

Did you know?

Dr. Bala was Singapore's reigning **CHAMPION** in the 3,000m steeplechase event for **FIVE** consecutive years!

Dr. Bala – sub 32 minutes for 10km

Dr Bala and I are one of the rare ones to have done a sub-32min for 10km. I shall discuss this later in another blog post of our timings etc. All I want to say is that I went for SAA IAAF 2015 course and most of the previous management did not know about Dr Bala, as a very successful runner. So far, only 5 runners in Singapore, including myself, have done a sub-32min, to date. This is for our fellow Singaporeans to know.

Once I saw my fellow former school mate of St. Joseph's Institution, Ow Kok Meng, who has a personal best of 3min 59sec for 1500m, speaking about Dr Bala. Ow Kok Meng told me that Bala was very talented in the 1980s. The latter came in as the individual champion of the former Caltex Age group championships and at that time none could beat him for any long distance races. Nobody could defeat him especially in the 3000m steeplechase event.

I shall talk about Dr Bala again in another blog post, as my reason for featuring him here is to mention that he is one of the forgotten heroes of Singapore Athletics. In 2015 South East Asian Games, we worked as a team. I was asked to head the Middle and Long Distance as a National coach and Dr Bala was the Team Manager. I shall share my experience that I had with him in the coming post, so look out for it."

See more at: <http://flexifitness.com.sg/dr-bala-forgotten-national-athlete-singapore/#sthash.JmWrU4oz.dpuf>

Written by Coach Rameshon, FlexiFitness



SEA Games 2015

From left to right: Dr. Ashley Liew, Coach Rameshon, Dr. Bala (Singapore Track & Field Team Manager), Cheo, Chea Nuan, Peggy & two happy kids



Dr. Bala competed in 5000m Men Open at the Asia Track and Field Championships with other Asian athletes

Did you know?

Dr. Bala's personal best timing for his 2.4km is 6mins 20s! How amazing is that! Can you run as fast?

Dr. Bala – Forgotten National Athlete of Singapore (Part II)

Ow Kok Meng was my former Saint Joseph's Institution (SJI) schoolmate, in 1977, when I was in secondary one. He used to practically call me to train every single day to improve my timings. Reluctantly, I used to run once in awhile. At that time, I was only interested in soccer. Earlier on, I was doing well in running, but later on Kok Meng was getting faster and the day came when I lost to him. While Kok Meng was in Raffles College, he was training us, the SJI runners, as there was no coach to train us during the holidays. Kok Meng was also training the Raffles College Cross – Country team. In the Old boys race, Kok Meng competed and did 16m 02sec, where he came in first. While I did a fast 15m 55sec, for secondary 4 boys, for the 4.8km SJI Annual Cross – Country race. I used to train nearly everyday at that time and became very passionate about running. A time came when I had to part with Kok Meng to do my own training. Over time, I was getting faster with more training and I did 16min 36sec in 5000m time-trial. In those days, we had time-trials which were transparent and we were selected based on merit. Current performance was the key. (The new SAA management is doing their best to put current performance in place for selections in order for fairness).

There was once I remember Kok Meng, who was training very hard, had actually lost to Dr Bala for 1500m race. Kok Meng had a personal best of 3min 59sec at that time. Not only that, Dr Bala won both races in the 5000m and 3000m steeplechase and also won the individual championship. Dr Bala defeated a number of favourites in various races in the former Caltex Age Group Championships, which showed that he was talented for many events, ranging from middle distance to long distance events. Kok Meng and Dr Bala are still friends now and there are times I have seen them gathering in some races. At that time, I was a developing runner. Kok Meng praised Dr Bala for his talent. Dr Bala was not really given support to run overseas races. He and I were mentored by Helen Gilby, our former College of Physical Education lecturer, who later on defeated Jeyamani, Singapore's top runner for 10km races. Helen Gilby lost to Jeyamani in the earlier days. Helen remained undefeated from then on. It was Helen Gilby who told me how to train and pace myself properly. Upon listening to her, in the 1987 cross country race, I started coming in first in all cross – country races. I was faster than all the Gurkhas, compared to my past races and they became my friends. I used to be ranked number one, until I left for England to study in Loughborough University. Although, Kunalan and Quek Jin Jong, dissuaded me to go to Loughborough, they encouraged me to go to the United States to study. As the Ministry recognised Loughborough University, I left for England to study and train with my own fund, supported by my parents as well.

Before that, Helen trained me and I rose to the top in running.

At this point, I would like everyone to pay closer attention. Helen spoke to me about Dr Bala one day. She told me that he was doing well in his studies in America. She then showed me a newspaper article of Dr Bala who did 31min 36sec for a 10km race in America. He looked extremely thin at that time, with visible lean muscles. In the past, my physique was also similar, very skinny, due to high mileage. It is very rare that you will see marathon runners big in size.

After so many years later, I saw Dr Bala one day. He ran with us 15km three times per week. At that time, I was helping Ernest Wong to do a sub-2hr 40min. We used to run the whole MacRitchie Reservoir and run to CCAB Evans Road. Finally, Ernest Wong did 2hr 37min in Hong Kong. It was fortunate that in year 2015, Dr Bala and I were working together as a Team Manager and Head Coach of Middle and Long Distance, respectively. We used to wake up at 5am and sleep at 12 mid-night. On Dr Bala's side, his runner, Eliza, ran three races, 800m, 1500m and 3000m steeplechase, while the athlete I coached, Dr Ashley Liew, ran the marathon race in the SEA Games 2015. So, both of us had runners competing as well. As no one have written about Dr Bala, it takes me great pleasure to introduce him to the world, at large. Many know that he is the Head of Physical Education & Sports Science (PESS) in National Institute of Education (NIE) and also the Vice President Training and Selection of Singapore Athletics.

It is a good to feature Dr Bala as many are not aware of his achievements and hidden fame. There are only 5 Singapore runners who have done sub-32min for 10km, which includes both of us. I have done a 31min 46sec in Loughborough Echo Race, in Loughborough University itself and Dr Bala had done a 31min 36sec. As such, I would like to say, to my perception, that he is one of the best runner that Singapore has ever produced. It is good to recognise this as in those days, we did not have much support as what an athlete is being provided currently. Recently, the new generation of athletes have Singapore Sports Institute to support them. During our time, this was non-existent. Nowadays, altitude chambers can be found here rather than travelling to countries with high altitude, to improve his/her running performance. A number of other facilities have also been given to athletes to support them in sports. If we had been given the kind of support that it is given now, I believe that our timings would have been much faster, and could be even sub-31min or sub-30min for 10km.

Great athletes like Dr Bala should not be forgotten but remembered for athletes to emulate in sports.

See more at: <http://flexifitness.com.sg/next-issue-dr-bala-forgotten-athlete-singapore-part-2/#sthash.aY52GLOd.dpuf>

Written by Coach Rameshon, FlexiFitness

Swift Athletes Association – SEA Games Appreciation Dinner

During IAAF Level One course held last year December, on one of the days, I had the opportunity to meet Haile Gebreselassie. That was the second time meeting Haile. Earlier, I met him at the hotel that I was having an accommodation, for the London Marathon race, in year 2007.

Haile came to give a talk and conducted a short clinic on long distance running before the Standard Chartered Marathon 2014. I met Dr Bala, a lecturer from National Institute of Education (NIE), famous for developing Physical Education (PE) teachers. He is from the PE Unit. Dr Bala had done 31min 36sec while I have done a 31min 46sec for 10km race. I was appalled to hear from Morales Menon that he did not know about Dr Bala's achievement when we discussed about our job scope.

During the IAAF course, I met Dr Bala and his athletes. We took a photo together with Haile and I continued the course. It was a good surprise that we worked together during the SEA Games 2015. It was all the Divine's work, I guess.

Later on, in the South East Games held in Singapore, between 6th and 15th of June 2015, Dr Bala was appointed as the Team Manager for the athletics team for Singapore. I was named as the official to take charge of all middle and long distance athletes. During the SEA Games, Dr Bala and I used to wake up at 5 30am to take our breakfast and later on proceed to do our job. We were working busy together hoping to see that there was no glitch at all.

During SEA Games 2015, Dr Bala, Morales and I met together to discuss about our job scope. We discussed about running and I realised that Morales did not know that Dr Bala was a runner in the first place. I also told Morales that Dr Bala was an individual champion for one of the age group championships in the 1980s, and that he was the fastest steeplechase runner of the past. Many do not know about this. I hope that my blog can serve its purpose and bring light to those who were greats of the past. I believe that it my service to Singapore Athletics to do this.



Dr. Bala with fellow national runner, Mr. Ow Kok Meng, after breaking the 5000m meet record.

Upon immediate completion of the SEA Games, Singapore Athletics decided to give us dinner, to acknowledge our contribution to Singapore Sports. It was very grand thing but I did not enjoy much of it, as I prefer a simple dinner rather than a pompous one. I also felt that I was not sitting with my friends whom I am supposed to sit with. I did not have the chance to sit with Dr Bala on that very day.

However, I was enthusiastic when we were later invited to join the Swift Athletes Association Appreciation Dinner for officials and athletes who participated in the SEA Games 2015. After our chat with some of the people, the climax came when Swift started to honour us. I was very surprised to see that Dr Bala and I were given some encouraging words, such that we felt humbled by it. At first, I was actually not in favour of going to the dinner. From now onwards, I think I shall go. Mr Loh Lin Kok, our president, gave us a token of appreciation. It was small but it had a lot of positive meaning to spur us to contribute more to Singapore Athletics. Also, despite his busy schedule, Mr Loh Lin Kok made it a point to be present and mixed cordially with everyone there. He was very friendly towards me and spoke to me casually. Mr Loh honoured SEA Games gold medalist Zhang Guirong (Shot Put – 14.60metres) and bronze medalist Michelle (High Jump – 1.81m). After the Swift Athletes Association Appreciation Dinner, I felt elated and was full of energy. We stayed there late and wanted to stay longer. However, the time was getting late such that we had to go back home. It was yet another day of discussion on athletics.

See more at: <http://flexifitness.com.sg/swift-athletes-association-sea-games/#sthash.gqsPmdDV.dpuf>

Written by Coach Rameshon, FlexiFitness

93rd Malaysia Open Athletics Championship 2016

Venue: UM Arena, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

Date: 30 September – 2 October 2016



Cougars on Podium

Miss Ng Yew Cheo, Cougars Honorary Secretary, winning bronze medals for both of her events – 10 000m and 1500m Women Open.

Cougars Honorary Secretary, Miss Ng Yew Cheo, competed in two races at the 93rd Malaysia Open Athletics Championship 2016. The weather in Kuala Lumpur was exceptionally hot and humid. The local athletes also commented that the weather was unusually warm. Although her 10 000m race was scheduled early in the morning, it was still very warm. Despite the heat, she completed both races back to back to her best ability. Training with Cougars indeed builds an athlete to be able to compete with resilience, determination and courage.

Here are her humble results:

- 1) 10, 000m Women Open (30 September 2016, Friday) – 3rd/ Bronze, 44.49.4mins (SB)
- 2) 1500m Women Open (2 October 2016, Sunday) – 3rd/ Bronze, 5.36.49mins

Cheo achieved season's best (SB) timing for 10, 000m. It is truly an honour to be representing Cougars Athletic Association in an overseas meet. The meet was a great experience for her and winning two bronze medals was a humble and unexpected bonus. Cheo also added that, "I'm fortunate that I was able to get sanction from Singapore Athletics (SAA) to participate in this meet. I am truly grateful to my coach, Dr. Bala, for never giving up on me and always pushing me to go beyond my capabilities. The medal won is a symbol of hard work, discipline, passion and dedication. Everything that Dr. Bala has taught and is still teaching. Most importantly, believing in him is what matters most."

Be Brave, Fast and Strong! Like a Cougar.

Cougars are proudly sponsored by Bat Dynasty, Bat Creations and Phiten Singapore!

More races upcoming and stay tuned for more exciting races and results!

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Cougars Athletic Association is proudly sponsored by Bat Creations, Bat Dynasty and Phiten Singapore!



Cougars Management Committee Members.
From left to right: Kirti, Eunice, Cheo, Jing
Jing, Dr. Bala, Jolene, Raymond, Chea
Nuan, Hema & Peggy.

Cougars Management Committee

Singapore



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