Ready to roll out the red carpet
Youth Olympic Village opens to athletes and officials from Aug 10

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SINGAPORE — At the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, 100m sprinter Canagasabai Kunalan was Singapore’s sole track and field representative, and limbering up on the practice track without a coach and teammates, he felt very much alone. But the Bahamas’ Tom Robinson, who won gold in the 200 yards at the Commonwealth Games a decade earlier, made the Singaporean feel welcome.

“I was just warming up and Robinson came up to give me tips on my starts,” said the 67-year-old, who was appointed a deputy mayor of the Youth Olympic Village yesterday.

He hopes to impart his experiences to the 14 to 18 year olds who will be occupying the Village during the inaugural Youth Olympic Games here in August.

“For me, it was a special moment. I have lots of stories about the Olympic values of friendship, excellence and respect, and I hope our youth will have these same stories after the Youth Games,” added the associate professor at the National Institute of Education.

Former Singapore swim queen Joscelin Yeo, the other Village deputy mayor, who took part in four Olympics (1982, 1996, 2000 and 2004), said sport cuts across culture, race and education.

“The Village is a place where athletes can interact. This is going to be an epic event for Singapore, and I’m very excited to be part of the Village, and the Games,” said Yeo, who is an executive at New Creation Church and also a Nominated Member of Parliament.

The duo, along with Village mayor Teo Ser Luck, were unveiled to the media by Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), during his tour of the Youth Olympic Village at Nanyang Technological University.

“The three of them will form a formidable team with the right balance of youth and experience, sports and administration,” said Dr Balakrishnan.

“They will be the face of Singapore to the athletes and officials. I’m sure there will be many issues that will come up over the course of the Games, but I’m sure they will be equal to handling them.”

Facilities housing the Village have been upgraded to accommodate over 5,000 athletes and team officials during the Games.

“The Village opens on Aug 10 and is divided into two areas — the residential zone will house training facilities, medical clinics, doping control facilities and a digital media centre, while the Village Square will host the arts and culture, as well as Chat with Champions programmes.”

Teo, the MCYS Senior Parliamentary Secretary, promised to give the 3,600 athletes from 205 National Olympic Councils a memorable stay.

“We want to ensure an enriching experience for athletes, officials and volunteers, and that their wellbeing is taken care of,” he said.

Team Singapore will be represented in 25 out of 26 sports — except for tennis — at the Games.