The first ever Youth Olympic Games (YOG) kicked off in style last night, celebrating the vigour and strength of young athletes from more than 200 countries. With about two billion people worldwide tuned in, it was a massive party marked with fireworks, fire and water displays, and song and dance repertoires.

With 5,500 performers on stage, and 3,600 athletes seated just before the platform, the Ceremony was an Olympic first to have an all-youth cast. Befittingly, Singapore is also the youngest nation to ever host an Olympic event, with the Lion City having turned 45 six days ago.

Held at the Marina Bay Floating Platform, the show kicked off at precisely 8.10pm. The performing acts told of courage, turning adversity into opportunity, and even environmental issues. Throughout the show, put together by local theatre practitioner Ivan Heng, impressive laser displays and light shows were emitted from surrounding buildings in the Central Business District. Fireworks were synchronised with music specially composed for the occasion.

Roughly 750 hours were spent rehearsing the event. With 12-hour rehearsal days, many of the performers even had to miss school. But most had no complaints, saying it was worth it.

“We can showcase what Singapore has to show the world. It is a worthy cause that we should be proud of,” said 14-year-old Sherwin Thie, who was in the choir that sang the national anthem.

The going was not easy, but placard holder Felicia Lin, 18, was not dismayed. “The honour, the eight seconds of fame, and also the contribution to YOG (made) it seem like all the sacrifices that were made were worth it,” she said. “It’s an honour to represent our school and our country. We can look back 10 years later, and say that we were a part of this.”

The Olympic Flag was carried in by eight Olympians: Tan Howe Liang, Yelena Isinbayeva, Yang Yang, Tan Eng Liang, Frankie Frederiks, Patricia Chan Li-Yi, Tao Li, and Sergey Bubka.

Just before the end of the night, the Olympic Flame arrived from across the bay perched atop a glowing phoenix shaped boat. Singapore sailor Darren Choy lit the lantern-shaped cauldron, the flames spiralling within before erupting from the top.

In the words of President of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge: “This is a new chapter in the history of the Olympic Movement.”

“This is a new chapter in the history of the Olympic Movement.” - Jacques Rogge
At the start of the flame’s journey in the host city, is situated the Marina Promontory on Friday, the flame made its way past colonial buildings and monuments in the city centre, all lasting legacies of the city’s era buildings and monuments in the city. The Singapore leg also highlighted to the world its commitment to conserve natural spaces, despite its limited land mass. The Singapore Zoo, where the flame was welcomed by two elephants dressed in Maharajah finery, is arguably one of the world’s best.

As Young Olympians from the world over begin their quest for glory in Singapore, travelling down Little India and Chinatown, the Flame passed temples built by early settlers, still in prime condition. In the final hours of the journey on Friday, the flame made its way past colonial era buildings and monuments in the city centre, all lasting legacies of the city’s history as a British colony.

As Young Olympians from the world over begin their quest for glory in Singapore, perhaps it would be good to explore the deeper layers of this fascinating island – where the diversity of the people mirrors the vibrancy of the land.

**NEWS OF THE WORLD**

**CANADA**

Canada’s flag-bearer for the YOG is swimmer Jeremy Bagshaw. He was born in Singapore, and moved with his family to Victoria when he was five.

**BRAZIL**

Brazilian soccer player Kaka has been working for the UN as an ambassador for child nutrition since November 2004.

**AFGHANISTAN**

Afghanistan’s national sport is Bukkashi, a team sport played on horseback. When translated, it literally means “goat grabbing.”

**NEW ZEALAND**

Neroli Susan Fairhall was the first paraplegic competitor in the Olympic Games. The New Zealander took up archery after a motorbike accident that left her paralysed from waist down.

**SINGAPORE**

Table tennis Olympic silver medallist Li Jia Wei is hot property here, and not just because of her table-tennis skills. She was placed fifth out of 30 in an MSN poll this year of hottest female athletes.
Home away from home

BY TAN SIHAN

Teenagers shout to each other across the residential blocks. A crowd of them walk by dressed in board shorts, T-shirts and flip-flops. Drying sporting apparel is draped between national flags.

If these signs are anything to go by, the athletes are settling in just fine. And the items they have chosen to help them settle into their home for the next two weeks are as varied and surprising as the countries and sports represented.

Modern convenience is found in the room of Australian boxer Brett Mather, 18, in the form of a MacBook and iPhone, and a touch of superstition in his lucky boxing gloves.

His only qualm, as he mentions offhandedly: “Wireless hasn’t been working. Got to figure the Ethernet connection. And there’s no TV in the room.”

Mementos of previous sporting achievements, such as medals, are favoured by others. Symbols of national pride are another common sight in the athletes’ quarters. 1000m runner Damaris Muthee’s room is unmistakable with her national flag draped between national flags.

She has been careful to preserve it as such, with a tided bed and toiletries lining the shelves. CDs of Catholic songs form her listening repertoire of choice.

When asked about the Village, she says, “It is not boring at all. It’s very nice and the food is very delicious.” Here, the Kenyan relishes the nearness of her lodgings.

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For instance, the Turkish athletes have brought over their own food and toiletries and are known for extending their customary greeting of a hug and kiss on either cheek to all they meet.

Perhaps most noteworthy of all are the attitudes that the athletes have brought over. For instance, the Turkish athletes are known for extending their customary greeting of a hug and kiss on either cheek to all they meet.

Little wonder that the Village is starting to feel like home.

A glimpse into the wardrobe of 17-year-old Lenier Pero Justiz.

PHOTO: TAN SIHAN

T • 30 MINUTES TO...

FIRST MATCH OF YOG

Excited to see the Iranian girls in action, photojournalist Eunice Chan was at Jalan Besar stadium to soak in the atmosphere.

5.30pm
The Iranian girls, getting ready and looking smart before the match.

5.20pm
Passed the X-ray scanners and got a spot in stands.

5.55pm
Heard the Turkish and Iranian anthems for the first time.

6.03pm
First goal - Scored by the Iranian team!

6.47pm
Spotted a group of Turkish dancing, cheering and waving the Turkish flag.

7.12pm
Turkey and Iran players collide and collapse in pain.

7.40pm
Competition concludes with Turkey winning 4-2.

Equestrian horse draw results out

The Equestrian horse draw conducted on August 13 at the Singapore Turf Club Riding Centre was a first in Olympic history.

To ensure a level playing field, all 38 steeds from Australia have been subjected to the same diet and training regime for the past 12 months.

Horses matched to the young riders will be fixed throughout the competition.

Tennis draw released

The draw for the First Round of Tennis singles for both boys and girls have been released. Starting today, 64 players in the singles and 16 pairs in the doubles event from 39 countries will compete to bring home the gold.

All matches will be played at Kallang Tennis Centre with the first match commencing at 10.30am today.

History made

The first ever match of the inaugural Youth Olympic Games kicked off at 6pm on August 12 at the Jalan Besar Stadium. The Girls Football match saw Turkey emerge victorious against Iran with a score of 4-2.

This historic moment also included the first appearance of the caps worn by the Iranian team.

“Even for me, with all the pain and suffering, the flame within me pushed me on.”

-Mr. Venkateshwaran Raman, 43, a torchbearer on crutches. He hurt his right ankle during a YOG rehearsal and is also recovering from multiple ligament tears.
**PROFILE**

**CEE NANTANA KETPURA**

**BADMINTON**

**USA**

“I am hoping for the gold. I also have a dream that maybe if USA won the gold in the Olympics, other people will start to play badminton.”

Having played badminton for nine years, Cee is hoping to clinch a gold at the YOG. Not just for herself and nation, but for her father who first exposed her to the sport. Photos by Xue Jianyue

**BY KHOO FANG XUAN**

Badminton flows in the blood of 16-year-old Cee Nantana Ketpura.

But that is hardly surprising, since her father is a badminton fanatic and her uncle, a badminton club president. Today, she is in Singapore representing the USA for badminton in the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). The badminton girls’ singles event will take place at the Singapore Indoor Stadium from August 15-19.

She earned the coveted slot to represent USA in girls’ singles after defeating Peru’s Katherine Winder in two easy games, 21-10, 21-9 in just 26 minutes.

In YOG 2010, only singles games would be played. Cee’s teammate is Zenas Lam, who will be playing for team USA boys’ singles.

When asked how she feels participating in the YOG, Cee says: I’m excited, I’ve been through a lot of competition before getting here. I’ve fought for every single point I gained.”

Cee first picked up the badminton racket at the tender age of seven when her dad introduced her to the sport. In the beginning, the duo played for fun, but soon, the games became more serious.

Shortly after her father’s death four years later, her family moved to the United States of America from their hometown, Thailand. “My uncle is the president of the badminton club that I play for now in the States, and I know my dad had a wish for me to become a champion in badminton,” explains Cee, regarding their decision to migrate.

Since then, she has been staying with her foster parents and now speaks English fluently.

Today, Cee trains three hours every day at the Orange County Badminton Club, California with famed coaches such as Tony Gunawan, a former Olympic gold medalist who coincidentally, is also Cee’s favourite player. Also coaching her are Halim Haryanto, Rudy Gunawan and Howard Bach.

In 2009, Cee created a new record for winning triple crowns (singles, doubles and mixed) for four years straight in the Junior National in Orange. She also made it to the quarter finals at the US Open in all three events. In the 2009 Adult National in Orange, she emerged as second runner-up.

The 16-year-old made a trip back to Bangkok before coming to Singapore for the Games. “My coach wants me to get used to the weather in Singapore, and the weather here is really like back in Thailand – hot!” exclaims Cee.

She also had the opportunity to practise with some of the players from her old club in Thailand. “All of my friends still remember me and it was so good meeting them again,” she said.

It is Cee’s goal to make badminton a more recognised sport in the USA. She says: “I am hoping for the gold. I also have a dream that maybe if USA won the gold in the Olympics, other people will start to play badminton.”

**Irina Merleni**

Wrestling

Ukraine

“I want all young people worldwide to join us, get encouraged by the Games, make their life more interesting, healthy and full of aspirations which sport can easily bring.”

– Irina on how the YOG empowers youths

**PHOTOS: INTERNET**

**CHAT WITH A CHAMPION**

Irina Merleni started wrestling at the age of 15. She competes in the 48 kg weight class. She has won two Olympic medals in the women’s freestyle wrestling.

The age at which Irina picked up gymnastics and chess. She then discovered her talent in wrestling at the age of 15.

The number of Freestyle Wrestling World Championship winner medals she has won.

The age at which she won her first Olympic Gold medal at the Athens Games in 2004. At the Beijing Olympics in 2008, she claimed a bronze medal.

“I want all young people worldwide to join us, get encouraged by the Games, make their life more interesting, healthy and full of aspirations which sport can easily bring.”

– Irina on how the YOG empowers youths
Hands up for handball

BY NUR ASYIQIN

The interview with the Singapore handball boys was just like a cramped family gathering, with the room overflowing with their constant clatter and boisterous ribbing.

And they might as well be family, despite knowing each other for just a year.

Ervin Sethi, the captain and inspiration of the team, is undoubtedly the big brother among them. And he had a mantra, which the boys knew by heart.

“Say your quote, say your quote,” they egged him on.

Ervin’s quote summed up the team ethos neatly: “What we lack in experience, we make up for with our never-say-die attitude.”

In their overseas competitions, they have had to handle more than just the opposition teams. The group of 17 and 18-year-olds had to deal with hordes of female fans, clamouring for photographs and autographs. But that was precisely because they were the favourites of the Hong Kong teenage girls. They showed up in force after the first day of the tournament, just to watch the boys in action.

“Because Wilmer’s cute,” pivot Koh Jingli teased, backed up by his hooting teammates.

Wilmer Tan, a left wing on the team, is nicknamed ‘Vinci’, after a fan gave him a laminated drawing she had painstakingly worked on.

The boys were armed with enough stories about each other to last a lifetime, and were always ready to spill the beans on each other.

Right back Jason Tan’s lucky charm, for example, used to be his headband, before he gave it away.

“To his top fan,” center pivot Ryan Goh revealed. “She’s very obviously (his) number one (fan). She’ll specially take pictures with him, go up and talk to him.”

Back home in Singapore, the opposite is the case. Handball is a little known sport with try-outs for the handball team only being held last year.

Training has been grueling for the boys, who practise dedicatedly, even during school holidays.

Having played in their first international tournament just over a month ago, the handball team is more than ready to rumble.

“I’m excited to see our opponents during YOG, because we’ve only faced adult teams,” Jason says. “It’ll be our first time seeing young handball players.”
THE 12TH MAN

BY LAI JUN JIE

"5-0 minimum!" The offhand remark by a Zimbabwean player in a Singaporean newspaper may have galvanised the nation to action.

Jalan Besar stadium was packed to near-capacity with 4,800 football fans, and judging by the deafening roar of the crowd, it was as if the home team had a 12th man on the field — in the form of a nation.

"I came today because Zimbabwe claimed they would trash Singapore 5-0," said Danial Shafiq Rahman. "I came to see Singapore prove them wrong."

Undoubtedly, the Singaporean fans were riled up and eager to see the home team show the Zimbabweans how locals play football. Even before the match began, the psychological effect of the 12th man was clearly visible.

The home team, waving and smiling to the crowd, appeared to derive their energy from chants of "Singapore! Singapore! Singapore!" The impetus appeared to give the Cub3s an extra push in their initial attack, granting the crowd their wish just 11 seconds into the game when Ammirul Mazlan nailed the point home with a goal.

In contrast, the Zimbabwean supporters were often shouted down by the Singaporean crowd, and the players on the field appeared to wilt before the aural onslaught. Occasionally, a player glanced at the spectator stands, and celebration by reminding the crowd to near-capacity with 4,800 football

"Sports is bringing together people of all races, religions and cultures." - Former Singaporean swimmer, Joscelin Yeo

Deputy mayor and former Singaporean swimmer Joscelin Yeo kicked off the festivities by reminding the crowd about the spirit behind the Games.

"Sports is bringing together people of all races, religions and cultures," she said.

The champion pole vaulter Isinbayeva made a surprise appearance and dispensed words of wisdom to the Young Olympians.

"Try your best and build friendships with your teammates and other countries," she said.

The evening was drawn to a close when local presenters performed the Olympic theme song, Everyone.

Deputy mayor, Joscelin Yeo addressing a packed audience at the village square.

PHOTO: NG JUN SEN

Final score at full-time, in Singapore’s favour

1-3
The Youth Olympics Games — the brainchild of IOC President Jacques Rogge back in 2001, has grown to dispel the notion that it is just a poorer cousin of the Summer Olympics.

**Gendering Sport**

To highlight the Olympic values of friendship and respect, a significant change to the Games comes from the mixing and matching of teams from different genders or nationalities. For the first time, a mixed gender event for the aquatics freestyle relay and medley relay is included. It will feature two male and two female swimmers.

Besides swimming, athletics, archery and triathlon are also getting a sci-fi movie, but differ little from the original. The environmental movement pushed for this change and it has made the game safer for both athletes and spectators.

New, viewers are allowed to watch the action from just 20 metres away instead of the usual 100. Pentathletes will take time getting used to the gun as there is less recoil with no need to reload.

"It will be more stressful — there are only ten seconds to shoot." The original game has a 24-second shot allowance. "It is a problem sometimes as it is more tiring and more skills are needed," the 24-year-old coach added.

Others beg to differ. "The new format is great," Germany girls’ basketball team head coach said. "But the rules are difficult — ten seconds for one offence."

Through the introduction of FIBA 33, a relatively more affordable and simpler game, it is hoped that more youths from countries outside of the USA, known for its NBA games and players, will have better opportunities to pursue this sport.

"There is a whole population of basketball players out there that we don’t interact with," Baumann said, "the challenge for FIBA is what happens the day after the Youth Olympics finish."

**Basketball 3-on-3**

Titled FIBA 33, this format was introduced as a fast-paced sport on basketball’s half-court. With one hoop, two teams with three players, they strive to be the first to score 33 points before time is up.

"It gives us the opportunity to have a fresh look at the game and to learn a little bit from extreme sports on the streets," Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA) secretary general said.

During two intensive five-minute periods, there are no time-outs as compared to the original version that allows for multiple time-outs. These changes help transform the sport into an invigorating version to play. "The 3-on-3 format is new and more fast-paced," Chile girls’ basketball team coach said. "It will be more stressful — there are only ten seconds to shoot." The original game has a 24-second shot allowance.

"It is a problem sometimes as it is more tiring and more skills are needed," the 24-year-old coach added.

The exhilarating one-day race that covers five events is said to be a true representation of the Olympic spirit.

In consideration for the safety of athletes as well as making the sport more accessible to all youths, horse-riding will be excluded from the race.

For the Youth Games, the sport will include swimming, fencing, and a combined run-and-shoot event so as to inject more dynamism into the sport.

Pentathletes will attempt stints on the shooting range, while running distances in between them. Modern pentathlon, an almost century-old sport, also made a drastic change by switching from traditional pellet-firing air pistols to high-tech laser guns for the shooting event.

These battery-powered guns from Germany may sound like something from a sci-fi movie, but differ little from the original. The environmental movement pushed for this change and it has made the game safer for both athletes and spectators.

Now, viewers are allowed to watch the action from just 20 metres away instead of the usual 100.

Pentathletes will take time getting used to the gun as there is less recoil with no need to reload.

"It will be more stressful — there are only ten seconds to shoot. It is a problem sometimes as it is more tiring and more skills are needed." — Chile Girls’ Basketball Team Coach, Natalia Osorio on the change in rules from the previous Olympic Games.

The number of players that are allowed on court at any given time instead of the usual five.
Olympic party by the waterfront

All eyes are on Singapore as the Games launches with a show of colour and exuberance


RIGHT: An excited boy cheers the performers on at The Float @ Marina Bay. PHOTO: IVAN TAN

RIGHT: A performer strikes a giant matchstick to mark the opening of the “Playing with Fire” act. PHOTO: NG JUN SEN

BOTTOM: Victoria School Choir’s student conductor Justin Goh leads Deyi Military Band members and student volunteers in a moving rendition of the National Anthem. PHOTO: IVAN TAN

ABOVE: In the opening to the “Monster” show segment, a shadow boxer faces his own demon, depicting an athlete’s struggle to excellence. PHOTO: LAM YARN