

The Indonesian National Games of 1951 and 1953:
Identity, Ethnicity and Gender¹

Colin Brown
Faculty of Media, Society and Culture
Curtin University of Technology

Why sport?

The study of sport – its social, political, cultural and economic aspects – is now a well-established field of academic research, scholars widely acknowledging its significance in understanding how a society works. As Perkin puts it:

The history of societies is reflected more vividly in the way they spend their leisure than in their politics or their work.... the history of sport gives a unique insight into the way a society changes and impacts on other societies it comes into contact with and, conversely, the way those societies react back to it.²

There are some exceptions to this general rule. Thus *Third World Quarterly* in 2004 devoted a whole edition to the study of global games and what it called mega-events, such as the Olympics and the

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² Harold Perkin, 'Teaching the Nations How to Play Sport: Sport and Society in the British Empire and Commonwealth', in J A Mangan, ed, *The Cultural Bond. Sport, Empire, Society*, Frank Cass, London, 1992, p 211

soccer World Cup, to address what the issue's editors called the 'shortsightedness' of the discipline of International Relations in thus far failing to address sport seriously.³ They say:

Despite the fact that many people are far more likely to know, and care about, Beckham, Zidane or Ronaldo than Sharon, Kerry or Annan, and more likely to watch the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games than the UN General Assembly, the international politics of sport remains, with a few rare exceptions, widely neglected.⁴

A major shortcoming of the literature, though, is that research is only just now 'discovering' Asia. With few exceptions, of which Indian cricket and soccer are the most prominent, the research has largely ignored Asia.⁵ Interestingly, though, the *TWQ* issue mentioned above devoted four of its eight articles to sporting events held in Asia.⁶

³ David R Black and Janis van der Westhuizen, 'Editorial: the neglected allure of global games?', *Third World Quarterly*, v 25, no 7, 2004, p 1191

⁴ Black and Westhuizen, 'Editorial', p 1191

⁵ See, for instance, Paul Dimeo and James Mills, eds., *Soccer in South Asia: Empire, Nation, Diaspora*, Frank Cass, London, 2001; M. Bose, *The History of Indian Cricket*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1990; R. Cashman, *Patrons, Players and the Crowd: The Phenomenon of Indian Cricket*, Longman, Delhi, 1980; and E. Docker, *History of Indian Cricket*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1977. For a study of an indigenous Indian sport, and its place in debates over national identity, see Joseph S Alter, 'Kabaddi, A National Sport of India: The Internationalism of Nationalism and the Foreignness of Indianness' in Noel Dyck, ed, *Games, Sports and Cultures*, Berg, Oxford, 2000, pp 83-115. On China Susan Brownell recently commented: 'Book-length academic works on sport in China are almost non-existent, being limited to a political science work ... and a recent history More generally, scholarship on sports in east Asia is lacking.' See Susan Brownell, 'Why Should an Anthropologist Study Sports in China?' in Dyck, *Games, Sports and Cultures*, p 45. The *International Journal of the History of Sport* devoted a special issue to sport in Asia (19, 2-3, June-September 2002), later published as J.A. Mangan and Fan Hong (eds), *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, Frank Cass, London and Portland, 2003.

⁶ John Horne, 'The global game of football: the 2002 World Cup and regional development in Japan', pp. 1233 – 1244; David R Black & Shona Bezanson, 'The Olympic Games, human rights and democratisation: lessons from Seoul and implications for Beijing', pp. 1245 – 1261; Paul Dimeo & Joyce Kay 'Major sports events, image projection and the problems of 'semi-periphery': a case study of the 1996 South Asia Cricket World Cup', pp. 1263 – 1276; Janis Van Der Westhuizen, 'Marketing Malaysia as a model modern Muslim state: the significance of the 16th Commonwealth Games', pp. 1277 – 1291

Indonesian sport is particularly sparsely covered.⁷ Yet sport is hardly irrelevant to Indonesian society. Football, (badminton, tennis and volleyball all attract many players, spectators and commentators. Nor is this a recent phenomenon. The first overtly nationalist sporting associations, for football, tennis and korfbal, were established as far back as the 1930s. The precursor to the Indonesian Olympic Committee was founded just after the proclamation of independence in 1945. And the first Indonesian National Games were staged, in Solo in Central Java, in September 1948, in the middle of Indonesia's struggle for independence from the Dutch.

My objective in this paper is to fill out one aspect of the role of sport in Indonesian social history by examining the second and third National Games (*Pekan Olahraga Nasional -- PON*), one held in 1951 in Jakarta and the other in 1953 in Medan.

The primary sources used in this study are the commemorative books produced for each of these Games, recording the main activities associated with them.⁸ These books offer useful insights into the state of Indonesian society and politics at the beginning of the 1950s, at a time when the country was working out ways of giving substance to the independence recently won from the Dutch.

Introductions: Sukarno and Hatta

Both books start with introductory statements by President Sukarno and Vice President Hatta. And the

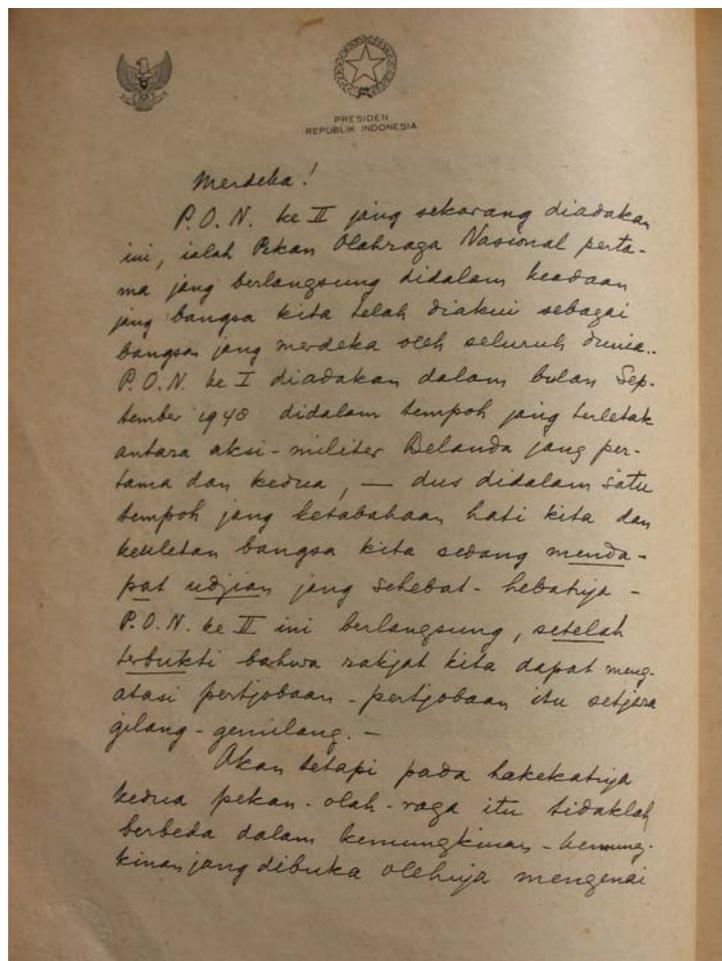
⁷ The exceptions include Ewa T Pauker, 'Ganefo I: Sport and Politics in Djakarta', *Asian Survey* 5,4, April 1965, pp 171 - 185; Swanpo Sie, 'Sport and Politics: The Case of the Asian Games and the GANEFO' in B. Lowe et al, eds, *Sports and International Relations*, Stipes, Champaign, 1978, pp 279 -295; Freek Colombijn, 'The Politics of Indonesian Football', *Archipel* 59, 2000, pp 171 – 199; Iain Adams, 'Pancasila: Sport and the Building of Indonesia — Ambitions and Obstacles', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19, 2-3, 2002, pp 295 – 318; Srie Agustina Palupi, *Politik dan Sepak Bola di Jawa, 1920-1942*, Ombak, Jogjakarta, 2004; Rusli Lutan, 'Indonesia and the Asian Games: Sport, Nationalism and the "New Order"', *Sport in Society*, 8, 3, September 2005, pp 414–424; Rusli Lutan and Fan Hong, 'The politicization of sport: GANEFO – A case study', *Sport in Society*, 8, 3, September 2005, pp 425–439; Colin Brown, 'Playing the Game: Ethnicity and Politics in Indonesian Badminton', *Indonesia*, 81, April 2006, pp 71-94. *Sejarah Olahraga Indonesia* (Direktorat Jenderal Olahraga, Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, Jakarta, 2003) is written for a popular audience, and marred by errors of various kinds.

⁸ *Kenang-Kenangan Pekan Olahraga Nasional Ke – II, Djakarta 21 – 28 Oktober 1951*. No other publishing details given; unpaginated. This book is referred to hereafter as *PON II. Laporan Resmi Pekan Olahraga Nasional Ke III 20 – 27 September 1953 Medan*, Komite Olympiade Indonesia, Jakarta, undated; referred to hereafter as *PON III*.

contrast between the two, in the style and the substance of their contributions, is marked.

Sukarno's statements are hand-written, not typed or typeset. The text in *PON II* starts with the rousing revolutionary salutation *Merdeka!* – Freedom! – with the exclamation mark for emphasis.⁹ It is a short message -- less than 170 words long -- and it is not really about sport at all. It is about independence, about Indonesia ruling itself, about national self-respect. Indonesia's national goal, he says, is to shape its national life in accordance with the principles of the Panca Sila. He then asserts: 'Holding the National Games I see as a most effective way of hastening the achievement of this goal.'¹⁰ The text of the statement is entirely in Indonesian.

Plate 1 Sukarno's Introduction in *PON II* (p 1 only)



Source: *PON II*

In *PON III*, Sukarno's statement, still handwritten, starts 'Hayo!' – 'Come one!', or 'Let's Go!'. It is

⁹ See Plate 1.

¹⁰ *PON II*, second page of Sukarno's statement. Underlining in the original.

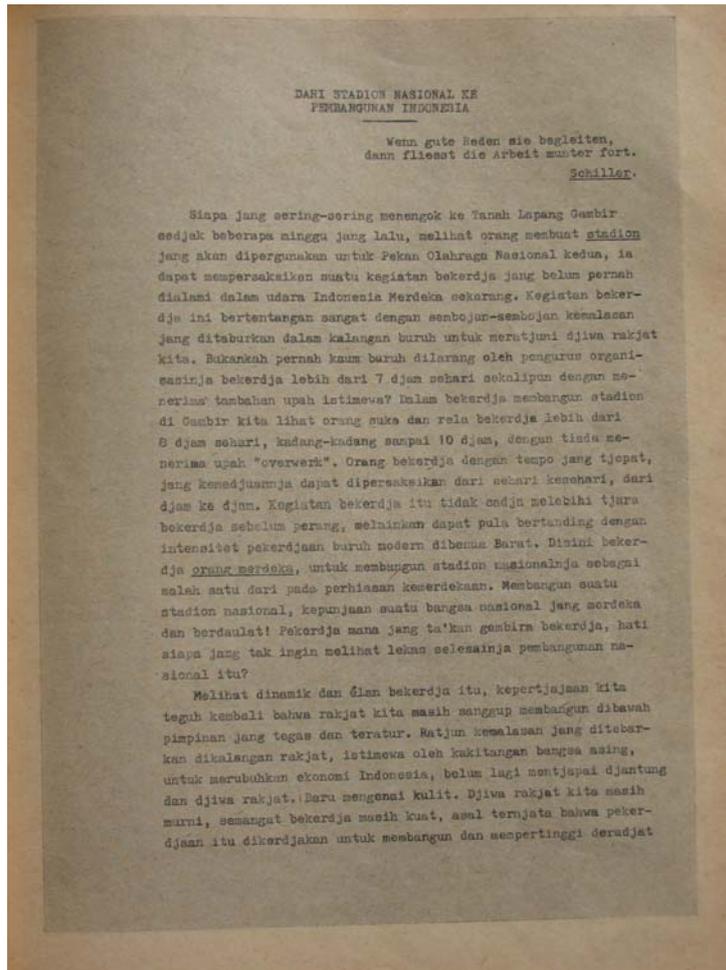
also short, and stresses the role of the games in uniting the young people of Indonesia. The increased interest in sport Indonesians were exhibiting at this time, Sukarno said, reflected the fact that:

amongst our young men and women, the three-fold pledge ‘one homeland, one nation, one language’ has never faded. Indeed, through sport, the commitment to the three-fold pledge is nurtured and given life!¹¹

Hatta’s remarks are very different. For a start they are type-written; they do not have the personal tone of Sukarno’s handwritten pieces. In *PON II*, it is a long statement: 3½ pages, totalling about 900 words. And although the bulk of it is in Indonesian, it is interspersed with Dutch, French and German words and phrases, including two substantial quotations from Schiller and Goethe, none of which are translated or explained in Indonesian. Presumably, Hatta expected that his readers, the sportsmen and women of Indonesia, were as familiar with the classics of German literature as – obviously – he was.

¹¹ *PON III*, second page of Sukarno’s statement. The ‘three-fold pledge’ was of course the Youth Pledge of 1928.

Plate 2 Hatta's Introduction in *PON II* (p 1 only)



Source: *PON II*

The title of the statement is 'From National Stadium to Indonesian Development'.¹² Its theme is the necessity for Indonesians to work, and to work hard, so as to ensure national prosperity and social justice. Hatta cites, approvingly, the example of workers constructing the National Stadium who worked not the standard 7 hours a day nor 8, but often 10, without overtime pay, thus giving the lie to the colonialist myth of Indonesian laziness.

The rest of the statement goes on in much the same vein, stressing the fact that 'prosperity and justice do not fall into your lap from above, but rather have to be worked for.'¹³ Similarly, in sport victory has to be fought for or struggled for. Yet Hatta also stresses what he calls the 'sporting spirit, the perfection of the sporting character'.¹⁴ The key to the sporting spirit is to know how to lose

¹² See Plate 2

¹³ *PON II*, second page of Hatta's statement.

¹⁴ *PON II*, third page of Hatta's statement.

gracefully. Here he is at his most political. He says:

It is this sporting spirit which our national sports have to promote in our people's hearts. This sporting spirit must give life to our developing democracy and to the achievement of social justice in the Indonesian community.... Through sport we can teach our people that they should be prepared to accept constructive criticism and opinions [of others] which are superior to their own; teach them to value opinions which differ from their own. Only through the competition of ideas and the testing of opinions, and through hard work, can our nation hasten the achievement of national development.¹⁵

In *PON III* the emphasis on the sporting spirit is repeated. 'As I have so often stressed', he says, 'the sporting spirit of the people is crucially important to the development of Indonesian democracy'.¹⁶

Hatta's position here was curiously, and presumably unwittingly, reminiscent of that which had characterised the emergence of modern sport in Britain the previous century and which had produced notions of fair play, of accepting losses as gracefully as victories, of respecting your opponents, of 'play up, play up and play the game'. This was the stuff on which the empire was built. Quite where Hatta got these ideas is unclear. In the Dutch social system, with which he would have been familiar, competitive sport played a much less prominent role than in the British; the Dutch empire was not created on the playing fields of some Low Countries Eton. The only other reference to sport in Hatta's writings located thus far is a small section in his autobiography recounting his high school experience playing football, and being one of the organisers of a football club, in Padang in West Sumatera, before he went to the Netherlands.¹⁷

Why was Hatta stressing the development of this 'sporting spirit' in Indonesia?

Domestically, this is the era of Constitutional Democracy, the time when Indonesia had in place its most pluralist political system, one based on the idea of competition for popular support between the parties and on acceptance of election results by all: losers as well as winners. Hatta was committed to this system; he was taking the time-honoured position of using sport as a metaphor for national politics.

But there was an international context as well. Hatta had commenced his *PON III* statement by noting

¹⁵ *PON II*, third page of Hatta's statement.

¹⁶ *PON III*, p 12.

¹⁷ See *Mohammad Hatta. Memoir*, Tintamas, Jakarta, 1979, pp 32-34.

that the Indonesia would shortly be taking part in the Asian Games:

The Asian Games are approaching. Indonesia will take part.... The honour of our nation will be at stake.... victories won will bring credit to the Indonesian nation, and reflect glory on the names of the Indonesian champions in the eyes of other nations. And on the other hand, defeats will lower the standing of the Indonesian nation.¹⁸

Then:

In the international arena, ... such as in the Asian Games, unsporting play, even if unintended, will demean the name of Indonesia in the eyes of foreigners.... It is not the skill of the players which is the most important thing in the international arena, but sporting play.¹⁹

So the national games were part of the preparation for international competition, participation in which was seen as an attribute of independent nationhood. This objective had been evident even during the revolution against the Dutch. Indonesia had tried to send a team to the 1948 Olympic Games in London; however because the British government refused to accept Indonesian passports, and because the Indonesians refused to travel on Dutch ones, the attempt had failed.²⁰

The differences between Sukarno's statements and those of Hatta are clear. Hatta's are by far the more didactic, and the more remote. Sukarno's are emotional, direct and personal. Hatta sees a national and international political context for the Games and worries about what foreigners might think of Indonesians; Sukarno's focus is directed more to nation-building in the local or domestic sense. Hatta's is strong on competitive sport as a moralising and educative enterprise, one which required effort and work. Sukarno simply recognised that sport could draw the masses in, could mobilise them in support of the cause of nation-building.

Sports played

The choice of the events contested at the Games reflected not only what sports Indonesians played at the time, but also how sport fitted in with the country's leaders' views of Indonesia's place in the world. This latter point – following Hatta's lead – was particularly important. Guttmann notes:

¹⁸ *PON III*, p 10.

¹⁹ *PON III*, p 12.

²⁰ See *Sejarah Lahirnya Pekan Olahraga Nasional Pertama* at www.koni.or.id/koni_pon.htm, accessed 14 September 2005

International sports events are ... opportunities for newly independent states to make known their presence to a world that customarily pays them little attention (except to report their natural or man-made disasters).²¹

The organisers of the Games certainly took this message to heart. In both Games, following Hatta's line, the emphasis was on sports played at the Olympics, and in the case of the Medan Games at the Asian Games. The list of events to be contested in Jakarta is prefaced by the explanation that 'so far as possible, the Organising Committee ... of PON II will schedule competitions for sports which are normally contested at the Olympic Games'.²² Twenty-three sports were then listed for competition.

In fact, only 12 of these games were actually played at Olympic level. A further seven sports were listed for competition even though they were not contested at the Olympics, 'because they were popular in Indonesia.'²³ These were tennis, badminton, archery, volleyball, baseball, korfbal and kasti.

The inclusion of baseball here is curious: only three provinces are listed as having sent teams, no national baseball association is listed, and the section discussing the sport starts 'Base-ball [sic] is not well known in Indonesia'!²⁴ It is noted that some schools played the game before the war, but that the primary boost for it came during the Japanese occupation, because the Japanese were very keen on it – 'baseball was virtually their national sport'.²⁵ It was now – i.e. 1951 – in decline. By 1953, it seems to have disappeared: certainly it was not contested at the Medan games. Its inclusion might simply have been the last gasp of a game which had enjoyed a slight rise in popularity a decade earlier. Perhaps more likely, though, is that it was seen as a 'modern' game, one played in modern places such as the United States – and, of course, Japan.

Korfbal²⁶ and kasti²⁷ were two remnants of the colonial era. Both games were popular in the

²¹ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 184. Colombijn makes a similar point: 'to project a sense of national unity and identity on the world stage, (nations) must adjust to an increasingly uniform set of strategies, including a good performance in dominant sports'. See Colombijn, 'The politics of Indonesian football', p. 172.

²² *PON II*, first page of 'Rentjana Penyelenggaraan'.

²³ *PON II*, first page of 'Rentjana Penyelenggaraan'.

²⁴ *PON II*, first page of 'Base-ball'.

²⁵ *PON II*, first page of 'Base-ball'.

²⁶ According to the International Korfbal Federation: 'Korfbal's origins can be traced back to a Dutch

Netherlands as well as Indonesia, but had minimal following in other parts of the world. Korfball was the better established, at least organisationally. A nationalist korfball association, the Persatuan Bola Keranjang Seluruh Indonesia, had been formed as early as 1936, at the same time as similar organisations for football and tennis were established.²⁸ These three were the first openly nationalist sporting associations formed in Indonesia, each – as Columbijn notes of the football association²⁹ – confidently using the word ‘Indonesia’ in their titles, and not ‘Hindia Belanda’. There was, though, no parallel organisation for kasti, which had disappeared from the Games by 1953.

But all of these sports except one had one thing in common: they were not indigenous or unique to Indonesia. They had been introduced to Indonesia during the colonial era. Some of them had very close connections with the colonial regime. Fencing for instance was noted in *PON II* as a sport which, at least before Independence, was only practised in military circles, in both the Dutch army and the KNIL.³⁰

The authors of the commemorative books seem to have been concerned about this dominance of the Games by foreign sports. Thus, for instance, they made much of the indigenous history of archery, tracing it back to the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires. They acknowledged that with the arrival of European armies, and with them the introduction of firearms, archery had declined in popularity. But from the time of the Japanese occupation, it was said to have been undergoing something of a revival.

schoolteacher, Nico Broekhuysen. Inspired by a game he had played during a summer course in Nääs, Sweden, Broekhuysen devised the game of korfball in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) in 1902. He called it korfball after the Dutch word for basket, ‘korf.’ See ‘Past and Present’ on the International Korfball Federation’s website, <http://www.ikf.org>, accessed 9 September 2005. For a slightly different version of the game’s origins, see Maarten van Bottenburg, ‘Als ‘n Man Met Baard op ‘n Bokkewagen’ *Vrijetijd en Samenleving*, 1, 1991, pp 5-27 cited in Guttman, *Games and Empires*, pp 186-187. See also *Oxford Companion to Sport and Games*, OUP, London, 1975, pp 582-584. Korfball is a team game, played by 12 people; unusually, the teams must contain both male and female players, though individuals are only ever matched up with players of the same gender.

²⁷ See Adhi Biono, ‘Kasti’ in *Ensiklopedi Nasional Indonesia*, vol 8, Cipta Adi Pustaka, Jakarta, 1990, pp 213-214. This game also originated in the Netherlands. All contemporary references to kasti (the correct Dutch spelling of the word) located thus far relate to the Netherlands. Kasti today in Indonesia seems only to be played at primary school.

²⁸ The organisation is still in existence, though it now uses the term ‘korfball’ rather than ‘bola keranjang’, presumably in part to avoid confusion with basketball (albeit that is precisely what the Dutch term means), and partly to conform to the usage of the International Korfball Federation, of which it is a member.

²⁹ Columbijn, ‘The politics of Indonesian Football’, p. 183

³⁰ *PON II*, second page of ‘Anggar’. The KNIL was the Dutch colonial army.

PON II notes: 'In recent years (and also during the Japanese era) archery has begun to be promoted as an indigenous sport'.³¹ The chair of the national archery association was Sultan Pakualam VIII of Yogyakarta: clearly also indicative of the effort to promote archery as indigenous. Nonetheless, the argument has the air of being rather forced: archery is indigenous to a whole range of societies and civilisations, from China and Japan to Europe, to Africa and the Americas. Indeed, Australia is probably the only major cultural region which did not develop archery independently.

The one genuinely indigenous sport contested at both Games was pencak silat. The 1951 Games book notes:

Whereas westerners, with their large, powerful bodies, emphasise sports and techniques of self-defence which rely on strength, Eastern peoples, including Indonesians, generally have smaller bodies and are reliant ... (and must be reliant) on their skill and their stamina.... Pencak is not particularly dependent on a strong body or great energy, but on skill and stamina, quickness of eye and of movement.³²

The difficulty facing pencak had been that Indonesia had had numerous related but different pencak traditions. All sports played in an organised way go through a process of standardisation of their rules as they are transformed from social pastimes into formal games. Followers of pencak had started this process of rule formation during the revolution, with the formation of the All-Indonesia Pencak League (Ikatan Pentjak Seluruh Indonesia, IPSI) in 1948. IPSI produced rules for three forms of pencak, which then were begun to be taught in primary schools. It was included as a demonstration sport in the first Games in 1948, and formally contested for the first time in Jakarta.

No other indigenous sports were contested at either the Jakarta or Medan Games. And since then, the only such sport which has emerged as reasonably important is sepak raga or takraw, which was first included in the National Games in 1981.³³

³¹ *PON II* first page of 'Panahan'

³² *PON II* first page of 'Pentjak'.

³³ *SOI*, p 359. The only other indigenous sport to have appeared by the 2004 PON – and it made its first appearance at these games – was tarung drajat, a form of self defence created by G H Achmad Drajat in 1972. See 'Olahraga Tarung Drajat', <http://student.unpar.ac.id/unit/boxer.htm>, accessed 14 September 2005. Several other 'Asian' sports had appeared by this time, though: judo, karate, taekwondo and wushu. Indigenous Indonesian games have received little scholarly attention; an exception is S. Roshe, 'Indigenous games of Indonesia: preservation of local culture', *International Journal of Physical Education*, 27, 3, 1990, pp. 28-34.

Who competed?

Examining the reports on the Games gives us some clues about who was playing the various sports.

The big sports, in terms of numbers of competitors and of events, were athletics and swimming.³⁴ In both fields there were competitions for both men and women, though rather more events for the former than the latter.

From the names of medal winners, it seems that competitors in the men's athletics events were fairly evenly spread across the main religious and ethnic groups of the archipelago.

Amongst the men the best individual performer at either of the two Games was Ndalipsingh (or Ndalip Singh) from North Sumatera, who won the Jakarta Games 5,000 and 10,000 metres, and the marathon; he was probably the best-known ethnic Indian Indonesian of all time, albeit one whose name has largely disappeared today.³⁵ There are a few ethnic Chinese medal winners, but certainly not out of proportion to their numbers in the wider community.

In women's athletics, roughly the same pattern emerges: a reasonable cross-section of the population, with a majority of medal winners being Muslims so far as we can judge by their names. If there was any religious-cultural problem with Muslim women taking part in strenuous sports like running and jumping, it was not evident here. The issue of clothing was noted, but in a time of changing social mores, apparently did not constitute a problem. *PON II*, speaking of the growth in athletics in the immediate post-war period, says: 'Even women, who a few years ago were embarrassed, and reluctant, and even forbidden by their parents to compete now routinely appear (in 'shorts' too!) on the sports fields'.³⁶

Where did these athletes learn their skills? School was certainly one location. In 1937 the Dutch colonial government had established a college for the training of physical education teachers in junior high schools although according to one source because of the quotas on entry, the number of

³⁴ This section is based on the results of the *PON II*, as recorded in *PON III*, pp 244-246.

³⁵ Although see Syahnan Rangkuti, 'Jalan Terjal dan Mendaki Olahraga di Sumatera Utara', *Kompas*, 2 June 2004 at <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0406/02/or/1059404.htm>, accessed 9 September 2005

³⁶ *PON II*, second page of 'Athletik'. English in original. The participation of Muslim women in sporting competitions has not been the subject of much scholarly study. One exception is Leila Sfeir, 'The Status of Muslim Women in Sport: Conflict between Cultural Tradition and Modernization', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 20, 4, 1985, pp. 283-305.

Indonesians admitted was very small.³⁷ *PON II* notes, however, that although athletics might have started out in schools, its further development took place outside the education system:

As a subject of study in the middle school, athletics was originally confined to the educational sphere. However in time, after people began to understand the real nature of athletics and its benefits, it attracted more attention and its adherents and its supporters grew outside the educational environment as well.³⁸

Here it seems that the writer is referring to the role played by sporting clubs. In the Netherlands at least, for most sports, social clubs played the role that schools played in Britain (and Australia) in supporting sports development.³⁹ The social-cum-sporting clubs in Indonesia were almost certainly more important for the development of athletics than the schools.

There had been a few Dutch athletics clubs established earlier in the century, which were brought together in the *Nederlandsche Indische Athletiek Unie* (NIAU) in the 1930s. *PON II* insists that there were quite a few ‘Indonesian athletics clubs’: ISV, Hellas and IAC in Jakarta, ABA in Solo, PAS in Surabaya ‘and many more in other cities’.⁴⁰ *Sejarah Olahraga Indonesia* confirms the existence of clubs such as ISV, Hellas and IAC, and notes that they were also members of the NIAU, but argues that this did not diminish their nationalist credentials: they joined the NIAU simply because it was the only organisation running athletics competitions at the time. They showed their nationalist sentiment in their names: although these were generally in Dutch, they used the word ‘Indonesische’, as in *Indonesische Sport Vereniging* (sic) (ISV) and *Indonesische Athletiek Club* (IAC), rather than the colonialist term ‘Indische’.⁴¹

In 1947 the Indonesian Sports Association (*Persatuan Olahraga Republik Indonesia*, PORI) was formed after the holding of the first post-war sports congress, in Solo on 18-20 January. Like many organisations of this time, PORI was intended to be the sole vehicle for national sporting activities, and was inaugurated as such by President Sukarno himself. It established an athletics section. At its

³⁷ See Swanpo Sie, ‘Historical development of physical education and sport in Indonesia’ in *Proceedings - Pre-Olympic seminar - History of physical education and sport in Asia*, Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport, Netanya, 1972, p 145

³⁸ *PON II*, second and third pages of ‘Athletiek’.

³⁹ See Pauline Deckers and Chris Gratton, ‘Participation in sport and membership of traditional sports clubs: a case study of gymnastics in The Netherlands (with British comparisons)’, *Leisure Studies*, 14, 2, 1994, p 123.

⁴⁰ *PON II*, third page of ‘Athletiek’.

⁴¹ *SOI*, pp 159-161. ‘Indonesische’ translates as Indonesian, whereas ‘Indische’ means Indies.

December 1949 Congress, PORI determined that it would no longer be directly involved with individual sports, but simply act as a coordinating body for sport in Indonesia.⁴² As a result on 3 September 1950 the Athletics Section of PORI re-constituted itself as the All-Indonesia Athletics Association (Persatuan Atletik Seluruh Indonesia, PASI).⁴³

Swimming presents a very different picture from athletics. Of the 15 individual medals won in the men's events at the Jakarta Games – i.e. excluding the relay events – 11 went to ethnic Chinese; for the women, the figure was 10 out of 12.

In the case of the women's events, Muslim concerns over clothing might have been more prominent than in the case of athletics, and a reason why so few indigenous women apparently competed in the pool, though this argument was not universally true: finalists with names like Farida Harahap, Fatimah and Zuladra Djamal must surely have been Muslims.

There were more powerful economic and social reasons for the dominance of swimming by ethnic Chinese competitors. For most of the athletics events contested – running, jumping and even some of the throwing events – minimal equipment was required. But for swimming, you needed access to a pool. And the bulk of the pools were to be found in the wealthier suburbs, and the better-off social and sports clubs, which in turn by the 1950s, with the exodus of so many Dutch, were predominantly ethnic Chinese in their membership. There had been virtually no tradition of indigenous Indonesians being attracted to swimming before the war, or indeed having had access to swimming pools.

Susan Blackburn notes of Jakarta in the 1930s: 'Sports were all the rage: European soccer clubs, tennis clubs, yachting, and swimming pools proliferated, some of them, like the Cikini swimming pool, out of bounds for Indonesians.'⁴⁴ Writing about the Ta Chung Sze, the largest ethnic Chinese social club in Semarang in the 1950s, Donald Willmott notes: 'It provides facilities for chess, pingpong, billiards, badminton, tennis, soccer, and weightlifting. A swimming section has special hours reserved for it at the municipal pool'.⁴⁵

Regionally, all the swimming medal winners, both individual and teams, were from Java. Again, this probably reflects the distribution of swimming pools and sports clubs.

Football falls somewhere between athletics and swimming in terms of its ethnic composition. One

⁴² *PON II*, third page of 'Sepakbola'.

⁴³ *SOI*, p 163.

⁴⁴ Susan Abeyasekere, *Jakarta. A History*, OUP, Singapore, 1987, p 115

⁴⁵ Donald Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1960, p 131

player of that era, Maulwi Saelan, recently estimated that, in the mid-1950s, about half the players in the national football league were ethnic Chinese.⁴⁶ To the extent that football players are identified by name in *PON II* and *PON III*, this roughly equal ethnic division seems about right. Hardly surprisingly perhaps, there was no football competition for women.

The competitors' stories

Although these commemorative books are chiefly about the sporting events themselves, they also tell us something about the human context within which the games took place. Perhaps the most striking stories they contain concern the difficulties some competitors and officials went through simply to attend the games. The Jakarta Games were not so difficult: Jakarta was after all not merely the national capital but also the transport hub of the country. But Medan was not. Nor was air travel the norm in those days – although interestingly Garuda advertised its services in *PON III*. Teams from outside Sumatera were dependent for transport on the ships of the KPM and Pelni lines. For some teams, transit times were particularly long. For the Maluku team, for instance, the journey from Ambon to Medan took nearly three weeks – and the return journey was just as long.⁴⁷ As *PON III* noted:

The journey was a test in itself: not enough sleep, difficulties with bathing, queuing up to eat, not to mention sea sickness when the waves were high and the sea was on the move as well as other problems while on the ship.⁴⁸

The team from South Sumatera had a rather different, but clearly just as challenging, a journey. It left Palembang by road on 10 September, stopped overnight in Jambi, Sungai Daerah and Bukittinggi, and finally arrived in Medan on 15 September. The reports in *PON III*, and the accompanying photographs, attest to the sheer physical difficulty of travelling by road through Sumatera at that time.⁴⁹

While competing, teams were accommodated primarily in local schools which had been turned into hostels. The word 'darurat' – emergency, perhaps more generously 'makeshift' – appears frequently in descriptions of these facilities. Certainly there was no hint of luxury, but by the same token the sense of these reports is that the conditions were adequate, given Indonesia's social and economic

⁴⁶ Maulwi Saelan quoted in Alwi Shahab, 'Sketsa Jakarta: Uang Saku PSSI Hanya 50 Perak', *Republika*, 30 June 1998.

⁴⁷ *PON III*, pp 31-32

⁴⁸ *PON III*, pp 31-32.

⁴⁹ 'Sumatra Selatan Mengirim utusannja ke PON III ke Medan', *PON III*, pp 232-236

situation at the time. Maladi, Secretary of the Indonesian Olympic Committee, said:

...in their accommodation, competitors had to acknowledge that this too is a part of [the Games]. Did the experience of being thrown together in this way not build their spirit and their determination ... and heighten the sense of unity and brotherhood amongst young men and women from all around Indonesia?⁵⁰

It would, of course, be useful to compare the views of this official – who presumably did not stay in the competitors' accommodation – with those of competitors who did.

What is all this telling us about Indonesia in the early 1950s?

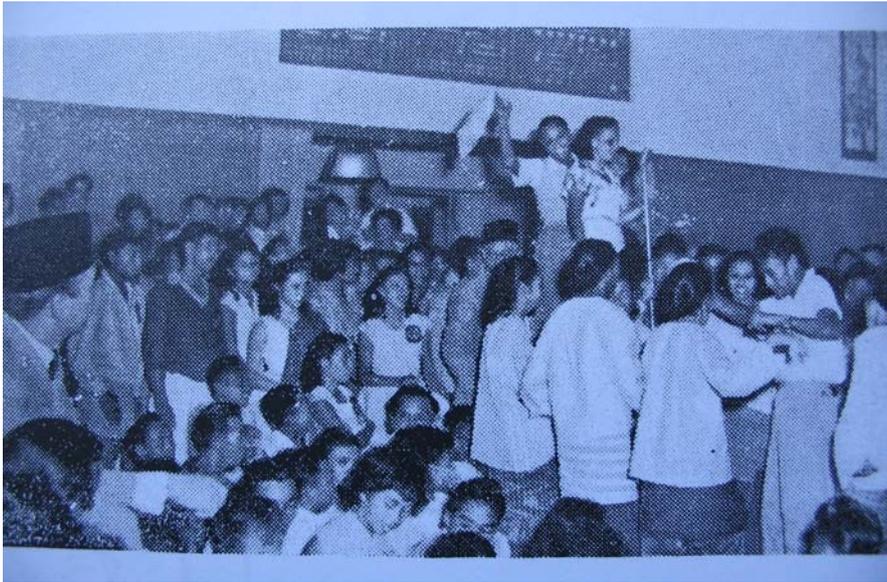
These national games were of considerable contemporary significance for Indonesia and Indonesians. They attracted the attention of the nation's leaders including Sukarno and Hatta, being taken into their political discourses; they absorbed a good deal of the nation's resources; they were amongst the most visible representations of the nation of Indonesia.

The latter was particularly important. We know quite a lot about the integrative effects of education in Indonesia; these National Games could well be compared with education in terms of national integration, in qualitative and perhaps also even quantitative terms. The people involved in both these activities – education and sport – were overwhelmingly young and, it seems reasonable to suspect, for the most part were making their first journeys outside their home regions. For the first time they were coming into contact with people of different ethnicities and religions – but who were fellow Indonesians. The caption to a photo of a group of Medan Games athletes dancing together noted that they had come from all around the country:

Although they met for only one week, yet the feelings of unity and brotherhood which developed in the hearts of these young people will give rise to a new generation of Indonesians imbued with the everlasting spirit of understanding and of the unity of our nation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Maladi, 'Selajang Kenang PON III Medan', *PON III*, pp 32-33. I have yet to find an appropriate gender-neutral word to translate 'persaudaraan', in place of the unsatisfactory 'brotherhood'.

⁵¹ *PON III*, p 15. See Plate 3.

Plate 3 Medan Games

Source: *PON III*, p 15. The figure at left wearing the black *pici* seems to be Sukarno.

There is undoubtedly an element of hyperbole here, but probably an underlying truth to the matter too.

But there was an important difference between the experiences of education and of these Games. Indonesians travelled from all around the archipelago to attend secondary schools and universities together, but these movements were overwhelmingly into Java, and in particular into two or three major cities including Jakarta and Bandung. The third Games were, quite deliberately, held outside Java, in Medan.⁵² Thus it was not just young people from Maluku and Sulawesi for instance who had to leave home; people from Java had to do so as well. Symbolically, this was significant. The difficulties athletes and officials encountered in travelling to the Games, and those in Medan in particular, are a stark reminder of how isolated so many parts of the country were in the early 1950s.

Moreover, those who travelled to Java for education were, for the most part, from economically or socially privileged backgrounds. Though the information in *PON II* and *PON III* is not conclusive, it seems likely that the participants in these Games were drawn from a wider cross-section of society. Athletics and football, in particular, seem likely to have drawn their participants from across the social spectrum, though as noted above the competitors in swimming (and weightlifting and table tennis⁵³) were likely to have come from a rather narrower section of society.

The sporting experience may have been less intense over time than that of education, but in other respects its significance merits serious comparison.

⁵² And the fourth Games were held in Makassar.

⁵³ These two sports were even more dominated by ethnic Chinese participants than swimming.

These reports show Indonesia as a transitional society, one which was trying to find ways both to retain and express its own identity, but also to take its place amongst the other nations of the modern world. In sport as in other areas of life, the influence of patterns of behaviour learnt in colonial times persisted. Peculiarly Dutch sports such as kasti and korfbal were still being played. Efforts were being made to find or recreate indigenous forms of sport, such as pencak and archery. But the main emphasis was on sports with international standing: athletics, swimming, fencing and the like.

It is clear that the reasons for holding the Games were not merely to give Indonesian athletes the chance to compete with each other; they were also held in order to place Indonesia within a global sporting environment, and thus to promote the international standing of Indonesia as an independent nation. Participation in the Asian and Olympic Games were active reflections of this desire: the National Games were part of the preparation for such participation.

The style of the games reinforced this point. They were run in a way which was overtly imitative of the Olympics: the relay carrying the Games flag from the previous site of the Games to the new one; the formal opening performed by the Head of State; the oath taken by one of the athletes on behalf of all those competing; the teams' parade around the stadium during the opening ceremonies; the ceremonies attached to the awarding of medals. These were all signs that Indonesia was on a par with other nations. The international political significance of the Games for Indonesia could not have been clearer.

The old social organisations and clubs, especially the ethnic Chinese based ones, were still influential in the sporting arena, and in the case of some sports such as swimming, contributed a distinct ethnic divide to the games. With hindsight, we can see that these clubs were in fact on the brink of a major decline. By the end of the 1950s, most had changed their names to Indonesian (-sounding) ones, and a number were on the decline. By the late 1960s, many had disappeared altogether. But in the early 1950s they were still in existence, and participating in national social life. Ironically perhaps, given their largely exclusive ethnic bases, they were contributing to the creation of a national community which itself cut across the ethnic divides.

And women were explicitly seen as part of this national endeavour, as well as men. By today's standards some of the comments made about female competitors were patronising. By the standards of Indonesia in the 1950s, though – and for that matter the standards of Australia at the same time – they indicate a consciousness of the need for the nation to be inclusive in terms of gender as well as ethnicity.

But additional questions are posed by the material contained in these books. The above discussion notwithstanding, we actually know very little about the clubs and associations which must have been the basis of Indonesian sport in the 1950s. Exactly who belonged to these clubs, and why? What range of activities did they support? What role did the education system play alongside the clubs in encouraging participation in competitive sport?

There are many advertisements in the books from local companies, seeking to promote sales of everything from sporting goods to textiles to books to inks and paint – and of course the ubiquitous cigarettes. But did business interests play any role in sponsoring or otherwise supporting the Games more directly? If not, where did the funding come from?

The regional politics of the Games is also almost completely missing from these books. Competitors attended the Games not as individuals but as representatives of their home provinces. At one level, this might have brought the regions together as part of the wider nation. But the competition might also have sharpened regional rivalries.⁵⁴ Did local or regional political leaders seek to use the success of individuals or teams to promote their particular political (or other) interests? How did the changing political climate affect sporting participation by different ethnic and religious communities?

Absent also is any significant discussion of the spectators at the two Games. There was some criticism of the bias of North Sumatran spectators at football matches played in Medan, especially those involving the home team, but otherwise we are given little insight into who came to watch the Games, in what numbers, and how they behaved.

And perhaps most importantly of all: what kinds of long-term impacts did participation in the Games have on the athletes involved? Given that most of them would have been in their early 20s, many must still be alive today and be able to be interviewed.

These two books, then, present some useful insights into Indonesian society in the early 1950s but raise at least as many questions as they answer.

⁵⁴

I am grateful to David Hill of Murdoch University for making this point to me.

Brown, Colin (2006) *The Indonesian National Games of 1951 and 1953: Identity, Ethnicity and Gender*, in Vickers, Adrian and Hanlon, Margaret (ed), *16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia*, Wollongong, 26 - 29 June 2006. Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) & Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), The Australian National University: Wollongong.