

Joseph Schooling's historic bronze at this month's World Swimming Championships got us thinking: Where would it rank in the list of Singapore's top 10 greatest sporting feats? The Sunday Times finds out

TAN'S ROME FEAT STILL INSPIRES

Despite numerous successes by Singapore's contemporary athletes, Tan Howe Liang's moment of glory at the Rome Olympics stands apart

Jonathan Wong

He was Singapore's first Olympic medallist and 55 years later, the memory of his greatness persists.

On Sept 8, 1960, at the Palazzetto dello Sport in Rome, Tan Howe Liang, 27, stood with his muscles straining, his teeth gritted in concentration as he lifted a total of more than 380kg over his head to clinch a weightlifting silver.

That momentous achievement has topped a poll conducted by The Sunday Times sports desk to identify the top 10 greatest feats in Singapore's sporting history.

We compiled a shortlist of 25 key achievements - dating back to pre-independent Singapore - and asked 45 current and former national athletes, coaches, officials and sports journalists to choose their top 10 from it. We collated their results to determine a final ranking.

Joseph Schooling's Fina World Championships bronze medal was second, followed by Ang Peng Siong's world-leading 50m swim at the 1982 US Championships.

Although four-fifths of those polled were not even born when Tan won his silver, his feat featured in all but one of the 45 lists, reinforcing his impact across different eras. "What Mr Tan accomplished has inspired future generations of local athletes," said two-time Sportsman of the Year and ex-national shooter Lee Wung Yew.

Seven sports featured in the top 10, with swimming taking three spots and table tennis two. There was also an equal gender division, with each occupying five slots.

Half the feats were achieved in the past decade - a factor that sets Tan's deed apart from the rest, noted veteran sports administrator Anabel Pennefather. "Compared to the level of support now for our athletes, there was precious little back then but that never stopped people like Howe Liang," she said.

From the initial shortlist, 10 feats received first-place votes. Tan received the most with 25 and the next best was Schooling with five.

Quah Ting Wen, who was at poolside when Schooling became the first Asian to swim under 51sec in the 100m butterfly, was stunned by her compatriot's feat.

"The level of competition was so high and he was on the outside lane, but he still pulled it off. It's something I will never forget," she said.

Fandi Ahmad's goal for Groningen against Inter Milan in a 1983 Uefa Cup second-round match was one of only two feats to receive first-place votes without making the top 10. The other was Ben Tan's Asian Games gold in 1994.

Nevertheless, for Lim Wei Wen, who last year won Singapore's first Asian Games fencing medal, that clip of his childhood idol was inspirational. "Fandi's goal showed me that local sportsmen could become legends too," he said.

Therein lies the power of a single act. And that is why, among Singapore's sporting epics, Tan Howe Liang's Italian masterpiece stands apart.

jonwong@sph.com.sg

• Additional reporting by Alvin Chia, Deepanraj Ganesan and Jeremy Lim.

1 Every one of the 25 shortlisted feats received at least one vote.

9 Nine of the 25 feats were achieved by athletes still active; with the women's table tennis team since disbanded, only three athletes in the final top 10 are currently competing.

1/3 Feats from this century received just over a third of the votes compared to those prior to 2000.

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ibrielle pig set a new world junior record in 50m back

The other fall on day ships came race - the w style relay. Australia's

Who we polled

ATHLETES

Athletics: C. Kunalan, Glory Barnabas, James Wong, U.K. Shyam, Calvin Kang

Badminton: Ronald Susilo, Derek Wong

Bowling: Jazreel Tan

Boxing: Syed Kadir

Fencing: Nicholas Fang, Lim Wei Wen

Football: V. Sundramoorthy, Aide Iskandar, Hariss Harun

Golf: Lam Chih Bing

Gymnastics: Lim Heem Wei

Hockey: Melanie Martens

Netball: Jean Ng, Micky Lin

Para-swimming: Theresa Goh

Rugby: Daniel Marc Chow

Sailing: Colin Cheng

Shooting: Lee Wung Yew, Jasmine Ser

Squash: Mah Li Lian

Swimming: Gary Tan, Oon Jin Gee, Russell Ong, Quah Ting Wen

Table tennis: Jing Junhong, Clarence Chew

Taekwondo: Wong Liang Ming

Water polo: Lim Teck Yin, Yip Ren Kai

OFFICIALS

Ng Ser Miang, Jessie Phua, Low Teo Ping, Annabel Pennefather

JOURNALISTS

Marc Lim, Lee Yulin, Chia Han Keong, Peter Siow, Jeffrey Low, Rohit Brijnath, Lin Xinyi



These feats are not far behind

The top 10 greatest Singaporean sporting feats were chosen from a shortlist of 25 achievements. Here are the 15 who did not make it to the top 10:

Adelene Wee: World bowling champion at age 19 in 1985, world's youngest and Singapore's first.

Benedict Tan: Won Singapore's first Asian Games sailing gold in 1994.

Fandi Ahmad (above): Scored against Italian football giants Inter Milan in the Uefa Cup in 1983.

Fred de Souza: Singapore's first and only Asiad shooting gold medallist in 1962.

Junie Sng: First woman in Asia to break nine-minute barrier in the 800m freestyle in 1983.

Justin Liu and Sherman Cheng: Won Singapore's first 420-class title in 2010.

Kelly Chan: Became world No. 1 windsurfer after winning 1992 Siam World Cup in Phuket.

Mardan Mamat: First and only golfer to win a European Tour event at 2006 Singapore Masters.

Men's water-polo team: Beat Japan to win Singapore's first and only Asiad gold in 1954.

Paul Lim: First athlete to score perfect nine-dart finish at World Championships in 1990.

Peter Gilchrist: Won the 2013 World Championships, beating billiards world No. 1 David Casuier.

Remy Ong: Won the masters event for his third bowling gold at 2002 Busan Asian Games.

Sheik Alauddin: Singapore's first silat world champion in 1990.

Tao Li: First Singaporean to win back-to-back Asiad swimming golds in the same event in 2010.

Zainal Abidin, Peter Hill, Alex Tay, Anthony Chua: Finished sixth in squash's World Team Championship in 1985.

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Championship in convincing f

an impressive ll for the final remained at arah and Ge- l straight, Far- an ultimate

world and three Olympic crowns. A double in Rio de Janeiro next year and Farah will be the best since Lasse Viren, the Finn who won a quartet of Olympic distance gold medals. Farah's achievement in the Chi-

