

BY GODFREY ROBERT

WHY THE SINGAPORE OPEN IS SPECIAL TO MURUGIAH

HIS JOINT-FOURTH PLACING IN 1995 REMAINS THE BEST SHOWING BY A LOCAL IN THE ICONIC EVENT

Whatever the prize money, the Singapore Open is the most attractive golf event for local professionals.

So said M. Murugiah, the highest-ever local finisher in the annual premier event with his joint-fourth placing in the 1995 version held at the Singapore Island Country Club's Bukit course.

As the president of the Singapore Professional Golfers' Association, it might seem passe that the 55-year-old, who is the best senior local golfer, has made that point.

But Murugiah spoke with an authority thrust on him because of his own experience 25 years ago when from a position of little notice he thrust himself into the limelight because of strong fan support with 100 over "faithfuls" cheering him all the way for 18 holes on the final day.

After rounds of 71, 69 and 69, a fully-charged Sembawang pro



SPGA president M. Murugiah (right) and Warren president Charles Teo presenting a cheque for \$34,530 to a representative from Lakeside Family Services.

Murugiah turned on a stupendous showing with a five-under 66 to win US\$18,480, five shots behind Australian winner Steven Conran.

With six birdies, a bogey and a near hole-in-one (he was a few rolls short on the 204-metre, 12th hole with his three-wood), Murugiah attributed his scintillating performance to his supporters.

"I was really buoyed up by more than 100 friends who walked with me all the way. Talking and joking with them made me remain calm," said Murugiah in retrospect.

"This is what that can make the difference for our professionals, who really need to feel at home. They also need exposure, playing against top players of the region

and beyond," he added.

This time, a record 13 Singaporeans teed off in the SMBC event last Thursday, with Marc Ong making it through the hard way by finishing third on countback with 67 in the Monday qualifiers at the Tanjong course, behind Japan's Shunya Takyasu (66) and Sweden's Malcolm Kokocinski (67).

Veteran Mardan Mamat was making his 21st appearance in the Singapore Open, and the other players were: Quincy Quek, Koh Dengshan, Mitchell Slorach, Choo Tze Huang, Jesse Yap, Gregory Foo, Abdul Hadi, Joshua Shou and amateurs James Leow, Nicklaus Chiam and Low Wee Jin.

As president of the Singapore Professional Golfers' Association, Murugiah has worked hard to secure sponsors, especially from benevolent businessmen Tan Teck Kee and Ju Kai Meng, not only to organise tournaments for local professionals but also to do his part for charity.

This week, he raised more than \$10,000 from an event in Batam for orphanaged children, and last November he raised almost \$35,000 for Lakeside Family Services in aid of the poor with the support of Warren Golf and Country Club.

GAME ON, AS THERE'S SO MUCH BUZZ AT TANJONG

Asian Tour players joined Sentosa Golf Club last Wednesday for a spot of beekeeping, helping the club unveil its intentions for a new campaign called GAME ON, designed to make the golfing community aware of the global threat of climate change.

Singaporean players James Leow, Quincy Quek, Koh Dengshan and Japanese golfer Naoki Sekito, took a break from their preparations at the SMBC Singapore Open to learn more about the beekeeping practice, used by Sentosa GC as one of its environmental initiatives.

The bee population is declining, down by 70 per cent worldwide. With one third of food we eat relying on pollination by bees, Sentosa GC believes that creating just a few colonies on a golf course can make a difference.

With four colonies in existence currently, the club has ambitions to grow to 40 within 12 months, Sentosa GC said in a press release.

The players even donned beekeeping suits and took on the

iconic fourth hole on The New Tanjong, the location of Sentosa's bee sanctuary, which is managed by local professional beekeeper John Chong, from Bee Amazed.

DOWNLOADABLE

Voted the "World's Best Golf Club" at the World Golf Awards, the host venue of the SMBC Singapore Open has revealed GAME ON, a model that will educate and inspire the golf industry and better equip them to introduce modern sustainability practices, reducing a golf club's environmental impact, as well as improving the quality of facilities on offer throughout the world.

The model, which will become available in March as a free downloadable toolkit from the Sentosa GC website, has been developed by one of the world's leading agronomists, Andrew Johnston, general manager and director of agronomy at Sentosa GC.

Johnston is also one of the leading figures in the golf industry when it comes to sustainability,

helping Sentosa to become one of the most recognised eco-friendly golf facilities in the world through the measures he has implemented.

Right: Sentosa Golf Club has plans to increase its bee colonies to 40. Below: Quincy Quek, in beekeeping suit, hits a tee-shot.



photos: Singapore Golf Association, SPGA