



BY
GODFREY ROBERT

TEACHING PRO BALRAJ SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE OF GOLF

NO STOPPING THE DEDICATED INSTRUCTOR AFTER 30 YEARS OF FUN AND ENJOYMENT

Commitment would be an appropriate middle name for Madasamy Balraj.

The dedicated golfer has just completed 30 years as a teaching pro, and his passion and enthusiasm remain as devoted as it had been when he stepped on the Green Fairways driving range in 1990.

Then, as a promising 28-year-old national player, he believed that teaching golf was the calling in a burgeoning industry of a limited pool of instructors as against a legion of good players.

It is not that Balraj did not have credentials as a player, his Putra Cup exploits and commendable successes at tournaments in Malaysia, Thailand and Hongkong – including amateur champion at the Singapore Open in 1987 and runner-up to Samson Gimson in 1986 at the historic Hongkong Open – attest to his playing ability.

But schooled in aspects of golf as an employee with Pro Golf Specialists and valuable tips from his uncle P M Samy, a multi club champion who worked for popular golf outlet Pan-West, saw him switch to teaching golf as a career.

And he has no regrets for that, having been with Green Fairways for 16 enjoyable years, Bukit Batok Range for three enterprising years and Orchid Country Club (OCC) for an exciting 11 years.

And the 58-year-old former Bartley Secondary School student, who comes from a golfing family that also includes younger brother Singapore Professional Golfers' Association president M. Murugiah,

relishes the thought of driving from his Ang Mo Kio home to OCC at Yishun at 7 am six days a week for lessons that sometimes keep him going for 12 hours.

"I take Thursdays off because that is the day when I play golf either with friends or my students. So, in fact, I work seven days a week, his rest only coming from power naps at home for a couple of hours on freer days," says the slim and trim Balraj.

"Balu", as he is popularly known, normally spends 90 minutes at each session (individual or group) with his students whose ages range from eight to 72 years. Each session is for about 90 minutes, the last half an hour spent on rules and golf etiquette.

No doubt, golf takes much of his time, but whenever time permits, the father of two girls, Samantha Hui En, 23, and Nicole Hui Ying, 20, both doing tertiary education, takes his wife, Jessica Sim and daughters for short family meals.

Occasionally, the proficient teacher who counts Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan, former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak and Brunei royalty Hakeem Bolkiah as having taken lessons from him, makes a brief all-expenses paid trip to Medan where he conducts lessons for Indonesian businessmen.

He has a simple philosophy in teaching: "Golf is already complicated, what with its physical and mental attributes. So make it simple for your students. Make it fun. I also do video analyses and taper the lessons according to the abili-

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— M BALRAJ (BELOW)



ties of the student.

"For older students, slight tweaks are enough to ensure that they get a little more distance for their shots, say 10 or 15 metres.

The students must enjoy the sessions."

Weekends are relatively tight for the golf fanatic, who took up the game at 22 under the guidance of

Samy at the former Seletar Club and Sembawang Country Club. On a visit to the Orchid range last Saturday, Balraj was busy with students, one of them was Chinese national Julie Zhu, who is in the import-export business.

"I have been in Singapore for 10 years, and I love golf. I find that since I signed up with Balraj, my game has improved tremendously," said Julie, who enjoys the outdoors and loves wearing colourful attire.

Balraj credits former Sarawak Minister for Agriculture Datuk Effendi Norwawi, Pro Golf Specialists boss Joseph Png and former Pan-West chief Datuk Loh Ah Joo as the three people who gave him the biggest break in golf when he moved into teaching. And he enjoyed the tremendous support of M S Maniam, the managing director of Seagull Group of Companies.

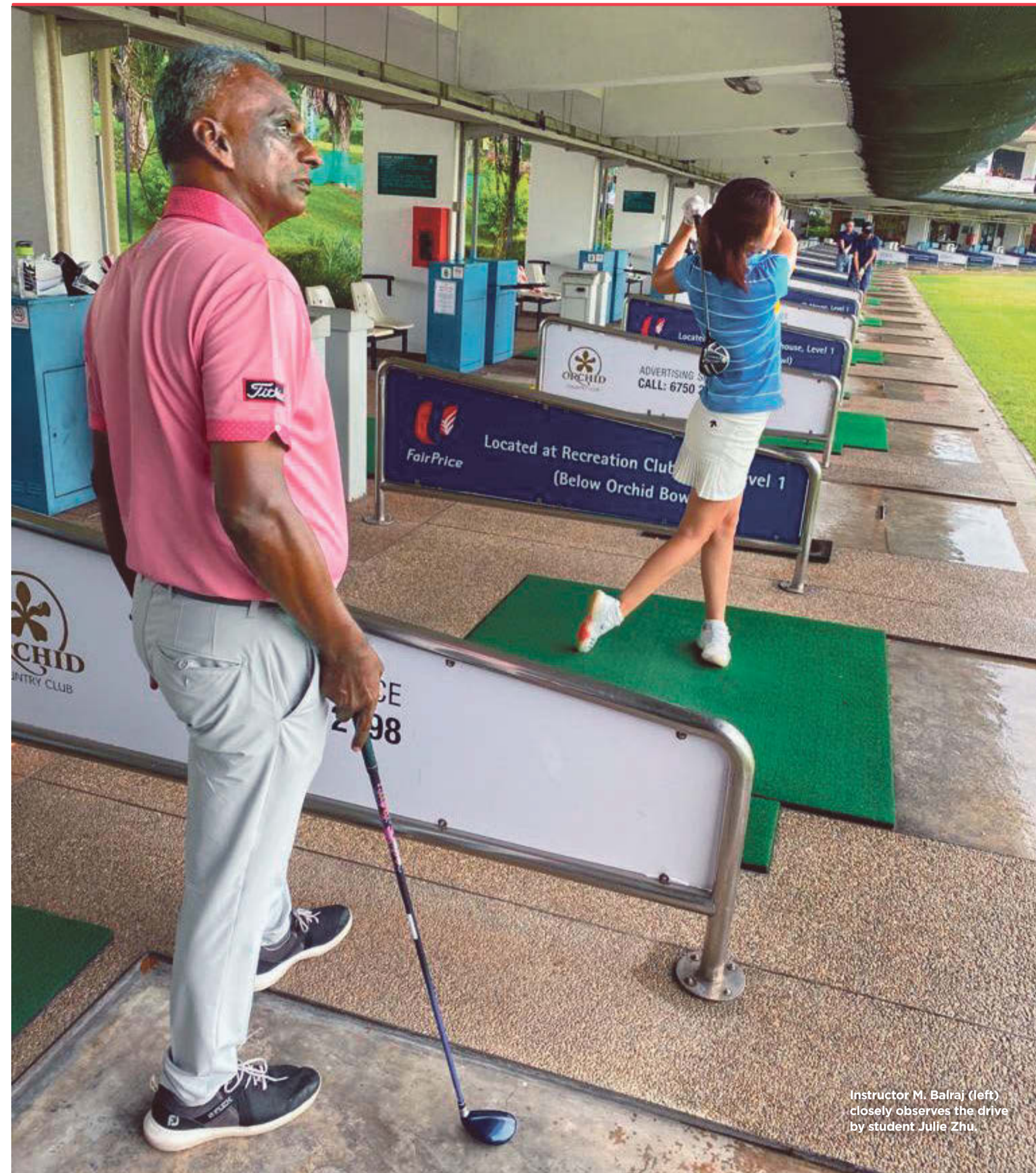
His favourite golfers are Tom Watson, Davis Love II and Fred Couples for their easy swing and he believes that Sentosa's Serapong and the former Garden course at Tanah Merah are two of the best courses in the region.

With his deep dedication and persistent patience, Balraj has won over many students, like Jonathan Mann and his wife Kiko who have been with him for more than 10 years.

This allegiance and faithfulness come from an attitude built on trust and friendship on Balraj's part, as he scans the horizon and landscape from the comforts of his exclusive bays at the right hand corner of the Orchid range.

Bays 1 to 6 have the mark of a leading teaching pro who has a knack of winning over and wooing students with a language that speaks simple golf.

Photos: Godfrey Robert, M. Balraj



Instructor M. Balraj (left) closely observes the drive by student Julie Zhu.