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# PLAYING THE GAME: ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN INDONESIAN BADMINTON<sup>1</sup>

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The scholarly study of sport—in which “sports are viewed as cultural products that develop within sociohistorical contexts”<sup>2</sup>—is now well established. However, the literature suffers from two important and related defects. One of these defects is its geographical focus. As van Bottenburg notes in his study, *Global Games*, the scholarly literature on sport “is mainly limited to developments in the Western world. Information on the other continents is at best fragmentary, often collected in wide-ranging surveys.”<sup>3</sup> In particular, relatively little has been written on sport and politics in the Asian context. South Asia is perhaps best served, for reasons which are mentioned below, but even here the coverage is slight compared with that of Europe and North America.

The second defect is that the sports receiving the most attention are overwhelmingly those of British or North American origin, and in which peoples from these two traditions are still dominant. Very little has been written on sports where British people or Americans are not dominant, or at least major, participants. In part,

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Fifteenth Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Canberra June 29–July 2, 2004. Professor Robin Jeffrey encouraged me to write the conference paper, for which I thank him. I gratefully acknowledge the comments made on an earlier draft of this paper by Dr. Philip Moore, Guy Gibson, badminton players and officials in Indonesia, and an anonymous reviewer for *Indonesia*. Nevertheless, I am responsible for all the errors of fact and judgment which remain.

<sup>2</sup> Maarten van Bottenburg, *Global Games* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

this undoubtedly reflects the cultural and ethnic origins of most sports scholars. But there also seems to be an assumption that the important sports are the “universal” ones, and that the processes of globalization are reinforcing the position of these sports at the expense of those with a narrower or more specific appeal. The description of the series, *Sport in the Global Society*, notes that:

the interest in sports studies around the world is growing and will continue to do so ... [Sport] will continue to grow in importance into the new millennium as the world develops into a “global village” sharing the English language, technology, and sport.<sup>4</sup>

This series reflects this “global village” idea by focusing largely—but not, admittedly, entirely—on sports created by, and dominated by, Britons and Americans.

Van Bottenburg makes the same point when he argues:

Buoyed by Western international expansion, sports spread fast to all corners of the world. Wherever traders, migrants, and colonial officials settled, they set up sports clubs in order to meet other Westerners in foreign parts, to sustain cultural ties with their mother country, and to relax after the day’s work.<sup>5</sup>

In the Asian context, most of the work that has been done follows this pattern by focusing on sports that derived from the Anglo-American tradition and often discussing these in the context of the impact of colonialism on sporting practice. In South Asian sports studies, the field is crowded with discussions of games developed by and dominated by the British. Cricket and soccer, of course, have attracted the most attention.<sup>6</sup>

These tendencies to neglect the sports of Asia and to neglect sports not dominated by Europeans come together in the case of Indonesia. Sport is as significant to Indonesia and Indonesians as it is to most other societies, yet the paucity of studies of sport in Indonesia is striking. The only such scholarly studies located so far are by Ewa T. Pauker and S. Sie, focusing on the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO)<sup>7</sup>—an episode in Indonesian history that itself hardly rates a mention in most standard histories; Iain Adams’s ambitious, but ultimately not very successful, study of sport and Pancasila;<sup>8</sup> and Columbijn’s recent, and excellent, study of football.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See the general description of the series, edited by J. A. Mangan, facing the title page of Paul Dimeo and James Mills, eds., *Soccer in South Asia: Empire, Nation, Diaspora* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Dimeo and Mills, eds., *Soccer in South Asia*; M. Bose, *The History of Indian Cricket* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990); R. Cashman, *Patrons, Players and the Crowd: The Phenomenon of Indian Cricket* (Delhi: Longman, 1980); and E. Docker, *History of Indian Cricket* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Ewa T. Pauker, “Ganefo I: Sport and Politics in Djakarta,” *Asian Survey* 5,4 (April 1965): 171-185; S. Sie, “Sport and Politics: The Case of the Asian Games and the GANEFO” in *Sports and International Relations*, ed. B. Lowe et al. (Champaign, IL: Stipes, 1978), pp. 279-295.

<sup>8</sup> Iain Adams, “Pancasila: Sport and the Building of Indonesia—Ambitions and Obstacles,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19,2-3 (2002): 295-318.

<sup>9</sup> Freek Colombijn, “The Politics of Indonesian Football,” *Archipel* 59 (2000): 171-199. See also Srie Agustina Palupi, *Politik dan Sepak Bola di Jawa, 1920-1942* (Jogjakarta: Ombak, 2004), based on the author’s *sarjana* thesis at Gadjah Mada University.

Football is probably the most popular sport in Indonesia, but badminton must run it a close second. Badminton is, one Indonesian commentator asserts, like football in Brazil: it is “part of life and identity, and also a ‘religion’.... [It] eliminates sadness, suffering, poverty, powerlessness and injustice.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is a game where Indonesians excel internationally—the only such game.

Columbijn concludes his study of Indonesian football by making “a plea to pay more scientific attention to sport in Indonesia and to football in particular.”<sup>11</sup> Here I want to begin to answer the first part of this plea, but by using badminton rather than football as the exemplar.

### Origins in Indonesia

It is difficult to discover just when badminton began to be played in Indonesia or the circumstances of its introduction to the archipelago. The website of the PBSI (Persatuan Bulutangkis Seluruh Indonesia, All-Indonesian Badminton Federation), the national badminton organization, suggests: “It was the activities of Dutch or Eurasian boys<sup>12</sup> who brought the game to Indonesia, and of Indonesian students returning to Indonesia, who quickly made the game popular.”<sup>13</sup> No evidence is offered in support of this argument, nor are the names of any players offered. Further research might give weight to this argument, but for the present it is difficult to see it as being very persuasive, primarily because the evidence so far available is that in its early days the game was dominated by players of ethnic Chinese, not Dutch or indigenous Indonesian, origin.

I suspect that badminton was introduced to Indonesia from the Malay Peninsula and, to a lesser extent, Singapore via the long-standing commercial and social ties linking ethnic Chinese communities on both sides of the Straits of Melaka.<sup>14</sup> Badminton was well established in Pinang by early in the twentieth century. By the early 1930s, ethnic Chinese clubs in Medan were inviting badminton players from Pinang, initially to play exhibition games, but subsequently for competitions. Yan Eng Hoo, for instance, was apparently a particularly influential Pinang player who frequently visited Medan and Jakarta in the late 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ignatius Sunito, “Birmingham Menanti Ukiran Prestasi Bulutangkis Indonesia,” *Bola Sportsline*, July 18, 2003 at <http://www.bolanews.com/sunito/6740.php>.

<sup>11</sup> Columbijn, “Politics of Indonesian Football,” p. 197.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase used is “*sinyo-sinyo Belanda*.”

<sup>13</sup> See [http://www.koni.or.id/koni\\_pb\\_pbsi.htm](http://www.koni.or.id/koni_pb_pbsi.htm).

<sup>14</sup> See T. D. Asmadi, ed., *Sejarah Bulutangkis Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pengurus Besar PBSI, 2004), pp. 10-11. Much of the discussion that follows is drawn from this source. An essentially similar story, though much less detailed, is told in Max Karundeng, *Pasang Surut Supremasi Bulu Tangkis Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1980) and in *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas: 50 Tahun Mencetak Juara* (Jakarta: PB. Tangkas, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, p. 4. I have not yet discovered any further information about this player. Unfortunately, the lack of consistency in transliterating Chinese names makes tracing individuals difficult. Thus *Sejarah* cites a Malayan player named Yang Eng Hoo as playing exhibition matches in Jakarta in 1928 (p. 14, though no source is given). A player whose name is reported as Yap Eng Ho—who apparently originated from Medan—was described in *Sejarah* as playing for a Jakarta club, either YMFA

One measure of the popularity of the game in Medan can be seen in the advertisements for badminton equipment placed by local sporting goods shops in the local press. A survey of *Pewartar Deli* shows that, by January 1932, at least two such shops—Hari Bros and Liang You—were advertising such equipment.<sup>16</sup> And interestingly, these advertisements frequently offered badminton sets, including six shuttlecocks, one net, two posts for the net, and four rackets.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that the equipment was likely to be used for entertainment, perhaps among members of a family, as much as for competition.

By the mid-1930s, the game had spread to other major cities in Java, including Surabaya and Bandung. One observer writes:

In the 1930s, badminton also spread to various regions, including Bandung (West Java), Semarang, Solo (Central Java), and Surabaya (East Java). In 1934, Central Java held a championship tournament. This speedy development of badminton was primarily the result of visits undertaken by a player from Jakarta, Oei Kok Tjoan. He visited cities in East Java on a number of occasions, raising the popularity of badminton. The game even began to penetrate the small towns such as Tuban, Bojonegoro, Malang, and Jember, which soon followed Surabaya in playing the game. The 1930s, it could be said, was the period when badminton spread through Java.<sup>18</sup>

It would seem that at this early stage of its history, the game in Java, as in Medan, was as much about entertainment as about physical exercise or participation. The game was popularized through being played as entertainment at night markets (*pasar malam*) in major towns and cities; by the late 1930s, as one observer puts it, “there was no *pasar malam* [in Java] which did not stage a badminton tournament.”<sup>19</sup>

As the game became more competitive and organized in the 1930s, the dominance of the ethnic Chinese became clear. In the early 1930s, a group of Jakarta-based clubs formed the Bataviasche Badminton Bond (BBB); rival clubs then set up the Bataviasche Badminton League (BBL). The players and officials in these two associations were primarily ethnic Chinese;<sup>20</sup> the BBB for instance, was, for at least part of the 1930s, under the leadership of Oh Sien Hong, and the BBL under Ong Tian Biau. These two

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(Young Men’s Fraternal Association) (p. 12) or Hua Chiao (p. 15). I am unable to say whether these are the names of three different people, or the same person.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, *Pewartar Deli*, January 7, 1932, p. 8 and January 8, 1932, p. 7. See also Asmadi, ed., *Sejarah*, p. 12, citing *Sinar Deli* of the same year (the precise date was not noted). Both imported (primarily British) and locally made equipment was sold; the imported brands included Wm Sykes, Slazenger, Ayres, and Walter Briggs, and the local ones Champion, Popular, Special, and Liang You. See Asmadi, ed., *Sejarah*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> See the advertisement for Hari Bros in *Pewartar Deli*, January 7, 1932, p. 8. The cost of the set was f.18.

<sup>18</sup> *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* The term “night market” does not really give an adequate picture of these events, which would offer, in addition to food and produce stalls, a wide variety of entertainments. Usually located in the central square of the town and held over several days annually, these festivals would typically include everything from theatre to displays of people with unusual physical characteristics.

<sup>20</sup> From December 24, 1933 to some time in 1935, the BBB was renamed and called the Batavia Chinese Badminton Federation; it then resumed its original name. See Asmadi, ed., *Sejarah*, p. 15.

groups were apparently in competition with each other, but were brought together around 1940 by Tjoa Seng Tiang to form the Bataviasche Badminton Unie (BBU), with headquarters at Molenvliet West (now Jl. Gadjah Mada) 175.<sup>21</sup> Leading members of the BBU included Ang Bock Sun, who was to continue to play a prominent role in Indonesian badminton until his death in 1985, and Lauw Tjoan Sioe.<sup>22</sup>

An organization similar to the BBB also existed in Surabaya: the Soerabaiasche Badminton Bond. I have little evidence about this organization, though it seems to have been formed in 1936, and—like its Jakarta counterpart—it had significant ethnic Chinese connections.<sup>23</sup> In Semarang, the Heerenstraat Badminton Club was in operation by the end of the 1930s, with competitions for both men and women. The results of a competition held in December 1939 suggest that the club was also primarily for ethnic Chinese: all the winners and runners-up listed in the local newspaper were of ethnic Chinese background.<sup>24</sup>

It seems unlikely that badminton was a major game played by Dutch people. There is no mention of badminton in the *Encyclopaedia van Nederlandsche Indië*. In *Sport in Indië* (undated, but apparently published in the late 1930s), the author notes there were twenty Dutch sports associations in Java, extending from tennis, athletics, and football clubs to yachting and motor racing. Even cricket was noted, and, of course, golf. But badminton is not mentioned.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to measure the extent to which indigenous Indonesians were playing the game. In Medan, there seem to have been at least two clubs for indigenous players in operation by 1939: Signal Silver Badminton Party and Antara Badminton Party.<sup>26</sup> Although not entirely clear, it seems that the players were overwhelmingly, and perhaps exclusively, male. The *Pasang Surut* history lists a number of players as being prominent immediately before the Japanese invasion. These included many ethnic Chinese competitors, but also indigenous Indonesians, including Sudirman, Sayoto, Ali Imbran, Jasin, Kisno, Surono, Basrul Djamal, and Nafsirin.<sup>27</sup> Of the latter, Sudirman was to be the most prominent, though primarily as an administrator rather than a player. Referred to frequently as the “father” of Indonesian badminton, he was the first vice president of the Indonesian Badminton Federation (in 1951) and then its president for two terms—1952-1963 and 1968-1981. He was also vice president of the

<sup>21</sup> “Tjoa Seng Tiang,” in Sabaruddin Sa, *Apa & Siapa: Sejumlah Orang Bulutangkis Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jurnalindo Aksara Grafika, 1994), pp. 343-344.

<sup>22</sup> See “Ang Bock Sun” and “Lauw Tjoan Sioe,” in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 5-6, 141-142.

<sup>23</sup> I know of, but have not yet had a chance to gain access to, *S.B.B. Creatie dari Soerabaiasche Badminton Bond, 1936-1939*, [di] *Gedong Hua Chiao Tsing Nien Hui*, 3 Juni 1939 (Surabaya: SBB, 1939), identified as the Jubileumnummer 3 jr. bestaan.

<sup>24</sup> See “Badminton Wedstrijden,” *Locomotief*, December 16, 1939, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Feith, *Sport in Indië* (Deventer: van Hoeve, n.d.). See e.g., pp. 49-50. This book is hardly an exhaustive treatment of the subject, being intended chiefly for a juvenile audience, but if badminton were played to any great extent by the Dutch, it is likely that it would have rated a mention.

<sup>26</sup> See *Pewarta Deli*, February 4, 1936, p. 6. The names were given in English.

<sup>27</sup> Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, p. 6. Virtually the same list, but with the addition of Kusumajadi in place of Nafsirin, is recorded in *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, p. 5. The ethnic Chinese players included were Njoo Kiem Bie, Tan Po Siang, Oey Hok Tjoan, Gan Kai Ho, Then Giok Soei, and Liem Soei Liong.

International Badminton Federation, and gave his name to the Sudirman Cup for the world mixed-team championships. In Surakarta, RMS Tri Tjondrokoesoemo established the IBIS (Ikatan Badminton Indonesia Surakarta) immediately before the Japanese occupation; under the Japanese, it continued to operate under the name Genki. Among its best known players were Soerono, Busro, Suroto, and Harto. Soerono was probably the most prominent of these, becoming Greater East Asia champion in 1942 and 1943. He was later a coach for the Indonesian Thomas Cup and Uber Cup teams.<sup>28</sup>

The ethnic division of social life in the pre-war Indies was of course firmly established. Columbijn suggests that, to some extent, football bridged the ethnic divides,<sup>29</sup> but there is no strong evidence that badminton did too. This is well illustrated by the relationship between badminton and the Indonesian nationalist movement.

Adams argues that “in some ways the independence and nationalistic fervor of Indonesian youth was kindled through sport.”<sup>30</sup> This is something of an exaggeration. Nonetheless, sport and politics did mix in the nationalist movement. Columbijn firmly asserts that football was an important element in the nationalist struggle. He notes that “the dividing line between the moderate nationalist movement playing football and a football association supporting nationalism was blurred.”<sup>31</sup>

The first three Indonesian nationalist sporting associations, formed in the early 1930s, were the Persatuan Bola Keranjang Seluruh Indonesia (PBKSI, All-Indonesian Korfball Union), the Persatuan Sepak Bola Seluruh Indonesia (PSSI, All-Indonesian Football Union), and the Persatuan Lawn Tennis Indonesia (Pelti, Indonesian Lawn Tennis Union).<sup>32</sup> Then in 1938, the Ikatan Sport Indonesia (ISI, Sports League of Indonesia) was formed to act as a nationalist counterweight to Dutch sporting organizations. It held a Sports Week in 1938 at which badminton was played.<sup>33</sup>

But there was no badminton nationalist organization to parallel the others noted here. In fact, it might be speculated that badminton—and probably tennis too—was a much less significant reflection of nationalist sentiment than football, for a number of reasons. First, the substantial presence of ethnic Chinese players would have diluted

<sup>28</sup> See “Tjondrokoesoemo, RM Soedjirin Tri” and “Soerono,” in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 345-346 and 245-246. The Thomas Cup, for men’s teams competition, was donated by Sir George Thomas, the founding president of the International Badminton Federation and England’s leading male player in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The Uber Cup, for women’s teams competition, was donated by Mrs. H. S. (Betty) Uber, also an English player and winner of seven All-England mixed-doubles titles with her husband, D. H. Hume.

<sup>29</sup> Columbijn, “Politics of Indonesian Football,” p. 182.

<sup>30</sup> Adams, “Pancasila,” p. 297.

<sup>31</sup> Columbijn, “Politics of Indonesian Football,” p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Columbijn (*ibid.*, p. 183) points to the “confident use of the word ‘Indonesia’ in the title of the football association, with its nationalist connotations, rather than ‘Hindia Belanda.’” In fact, as can be seen, all three federations used this term, a pattern that helps confirm the link between these sports and nationalism.

<sup>33</sup> Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, pp. 5-6. Columbijn does not mention ISI, although Palupi says the PSSI was one of its initiators, and *Pasang Surut* confirms that the PSSI was a member. See Palupi, *Politik dan Sepak Bola*, p. 84, and Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, pp. 5-6.

the nationalist element of the game, since the majority of these athletes (if we can trust generalizations about ethnic Chinese sentiments) would have been unlikely supporters of the nationalist resistance. Second, although this factor is not easy to measure, it seems highly likely that badminton was not as popular a game as football anyway and perhaps was perceived by many indigenous Indonesians more as an entertainment than as a sport in which to participate. Thus its capacity to mobilize the population politically, the capacity for it to serve as an attractor of support for the nationalist cause, would have been much less than that of football. Third, football and badminton were sports that represented different things for Indonesians and Dutch people, differences which complicated the relationship between sport and nationalism. Football has a much longer history in Indonesia and was closely associated with the Netherlands. There was patriotic, nationalist value for Indonesians in challenging the Dutch at football. In badminton, though, Indonesians had a game in which the Dutch had never played a significant role. Thus even if Indonesian players had been able to defeat Dutch ones, this victory would have had limited symbolic importance—to play badminton was to play a game that meant little to the Dutch, and was clearly not Dutch, and indeed one whose local origins might well have been traceable to Malaya and to Malaysians of ethnic Chinese origins.<sup>34</sup> In any event, unlike football, badminton is a game played primarily by individuals rather than teams; an individual Indonesian competing against an individual Dutch man or woman would have been far less likely to act as a channel for nationalist sentiment than would a team of Indonesians playing a team of Dutch competitors.<sup>35</sup>

Against this characterization of football as a more apt vehicle for nationalist sentiment, one might note that by playing football Indonesians were—quite literally—playing the Dutch game, under rules the Dutch (or at least the British, the quintessential colonialists) had determined. In a sense, therefore, it could be argued that the act of playing badminton was itself nationalist—or at the very least noncolonial. Badminton was played outside the colonial realm; it was an activity in which Dutch people could claim no significant role, and one where any international connections were primarily with other colonial subjects—for instance, with players and clubs from Malaya.<sup>36</sup> But to the extent that the realm within which badminton was played was ethnic Chinese, then clearly nationalism in the generally accepted sense of the term was not reflected in the game.

During the Japanese occupation, Dutch-based sporting clubs were closed down. The nationalist football association, PSSI, was also terminated.<sup>37</sup> Although no evidence on this matter has yet been found, it might be assumed that the same fate befell the

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<sup>34</sup> Even in Malaya, badminton may well have been introduced not by the British, but rather by Indian immigrants. See Stephen A. Douglas, "Sport in Malaysia," in *Sport in Asia and Africa*, ed. Eric A. Wagner (New York: Greenwood, 1989), p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *Indonesia* for this point.

<sup>36</sup> Dimeo and Mills note that this contradiction can be present in the one sport. Writing about football in India, they say: "The urge to reject British systems and the desire to take the colonizer on and beat him at his own game are contradictory responses that are nevertheless born of the same emotion to resist." Paul Dimeo and James Mills, "Conclusion: Soccer in South Asia—Past, Present, and Future," in Dimeo and Mills, *Soccer*, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> Columbijn, "The Politics of Indonesian Football," p. 185.

other sporting associations. The ISI, though, seems to have survived, at least until 1942, when its badminton section headed by RMS Tri Tjondrokoesoemo took up the challenge posed by the organization's chair, Widodo Sastradiningrat, to find an Indonesian word to replace the Dutch (and English, of course) word "badminton."<sup>38</sup> This was the point at which the modern word "*bulutangkis*" was invented.<sup>39</sup> Badminton was one of the sports included in the Gerakan Latihan Olahraga Rakjat (Gelora, People's Sports Exercise Movement), later replaced by the sports section (Tai Iku Kai) of Putera.<sup>40</sup>

After the proclamation of independence in 1945, badminton's relationship to Indonesian nationalism became more complicated still. Sudirman was instrumental in forming the Persatuan Olahraga Republik Indonesia (PORI, Indonesian Sports Union) after the holding of the first post-war sports congress, in Solo on January 18-20, 1947. Like many organizations of this time, PORI was intended to be the sole vehicle for national sporting activities and was inaugurated as such by President Sukarno himself. The organization was dominated by indigenous Indonesians: aside from Sudirman, its leadership included Syamsuddin Saat, Jusuf Said, Ramli Rikin, Sarmada, Djaswadi, and Soemantri.<sup>41</sup> No ethnic Chinese appear to have played prominent roles in the organization. The badminton division of PORI was headed by RMS Tri Tjondrokoesoemo.<sup>42</sup> Branches of the badminton division of PORI were established in around twenty residencies in Java and Madura, and the first interprovincial team championships were commenced in July 1947. Plans for the finals of these championships to be held in Yogyakarta on August 17, 1947, however, had to be cancelled because of the political situation.

In Jakarta the BBU was reformed after the proclamation of independence, probably in 1946. In light of the changed circumstances it faced, though, its members determined to change its name to Persatuan Badminton Djakarta (PERBAD, Jakarta Badminton Union)—the literal Indonesian version of its Dutch-language name, which still used the term "badminton" rather than *bulutangkis*. However, the organization retained its essentially ethnic Chinese character, which then brought it into conflict with the nationalist badminton movement as it was starting to emerge.

PORI, consistent with its claim to be the single national sports organization, wanted to see a single badminton organization established in Jakarta, and to install its own badminton section (PORI Djakarta Bagian Bulutangkis, headed by Djaswadi) as that organization. But PERBAD was clearly the most established Jakarta league. The PORI leadership did try to negotiate the absorption of PERBAD into their own

<sup>38</sup> "Badminton," the term by which the game was known in the Netherlands, was, of course, an English word, the name of the seat of the Dukes of Beaufort where the modern game was developed in the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>39</sup> See "Tjondrokoesoemo, RM Soedjirin Tri," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 345-347.

<sup>40</sup> The extent to which badminton continued to be played during the occupation I do not yet know. As noted above, however, the Ikatan Badminton Indonesia Surakarta continued to operate during the occupation under the name Genki. Badminton does not appear to have been a game the Japanese themselves were particularly interested in.

<sup>41</sup> See "Tjoa Seng Tiang," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 344.

<sup>42</sup> Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, p. 8.



badminton section, but found this politically problematic. Many of PERBAD's members were not only ethnic Chinese, but also not Indonesian citizens. PORI insisted that citizenship was an essential component of membership, and thus would not recognize all members of PERBAD as it was then constituted.<sup>43</sup> Negotiations between PORI and PERBAD over a merger reached a stalemate.

At this point Sudirman, from the Bakti club,<sup>44</sup> took over as head of the PORI negotiating team. I am as yet unable to say exactly what transpired, except that on July 15, 1950 PERBAD and PORI Djakarta merged; rather confusingly, the new organization used the old name PERBAD until the formation of the PBSI in Bandung on May 5, 1951, at which time PERBAD became the Jakarta branch of the PBSI. Sudirman was the chair of the new organization, and Tjoa Seng Tiang the vice chair.<sup>45</sup> It seems probable that the condition of citizenship was retained; but the new organization was clearly one in which ethnic Chinese had a major role to play. Sudirman retired as chair in 1955 and was replaced by Oei Soen Eng (1955-1957) and then Lauw Tjoan Sioe (1957-1958).<sup>46</sup> Habiboellah Halim (1958-1962), Naziruddin Naib (1963-1965), and J. C. Tambunan (1966-1982) led the organization until 1982, when Justian Suhandinata (of ethnic Chinese descent) took over. Until 1961, the headquarters of PBSI Jakarta was in the Tjandra Naja building, at Jl. Gajah Mada no. 188—which was also the headquarters of the Sin Ming Hui, the ethnic Chinese social and educational association.

### International Prominence

The late 1950s was the start of the golden era in Indonesian men's badminton. Tan Joe Hok won the men's all-England championship in 1959, defeating Ferry Sonneville in an all-Indonesia final.<sup>47</sup> In the fifteen years from 1968 to 1982, Indonesians won the title eleven times and were the runners-up on the other four occasions. One player, Rudy Hartono, completely dominated the game from 1968, winning eight all-England titles, seven of them consecutively. Either Rudy Hartono or Liem Swie King participated in all fifteen finals between 1968 and 1982. Rarely in any sport conducted at the international level have two players from one country so dominated competition for a decade and a half.<sup>48</sup> Indonesia won the Thomas Cup for the first time in 1957;

<sup>43</sup> Though the leadership of the badminton section of PORI did have some ethnic Chinese members: Sie Kok Tie, Gwie Kwat Kong, Lie Po An, and Njoo Kim Bie in the period 1947 to 1951. See the list of committee members in Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, p. 193.

<sup>44</sup> Badan Usaha Kesatuan Tenaga Indonesia, a club formed by Indonesians who had been sailors in the Dutch merchant marine, whose leadership also included Suropto, Ramli Rikin, M. A. Sjarifudin, M. Zaer, and Sutan Hamid Tahar. Ferry Sonneville was also a member. See Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> This discussion is based on *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> Lauw had played a leadership role in the BBU before the war. See "Lauw Tjoan Sioe," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> Sonneville was a Eurasian, a member of an ethnic community whose position in Indonesian society was probably even more marginal than that of the ethnic Chinese.

<sup>48</sup> In fact, the dominance of these two players was even greater than these data show, given that twice during these years they played each other in the finals, the championship going to Rudy Hartono in 1976 and to Liem Swie King in 1978.

between 1957 and 1998, Indonesian players competed for the Cup on seventeen occasions, winning eleven times and placing second four times.<sup>49</sup>

The success of Rudy Hartono and Liem Swie King was particularly significant, in that this was the only occasion—certainly until the Barcelona Olympics of 1992—when Indonesians dominated any sport played internationally. As Columbijn points out, in the modern world “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.”<sup>50</sup> Indonesia was meeting part of this requirement, but of course badminton was not a major sport in the places that tend to determine which sports attract the most media attention and respect—chiefly Europe and North America—and thus Indonesia was missing out on the international status that its performance might otherwise have been expected to produce.

Nationally, however, the successes Indonesian badminton players achieved in international competition was the source of enormous pride and a confirmation of Indonesia’s significance in at least one international arena. The irony here, of course, is that those responsible for this national pride came overwhelmingly from an ethnic group excluded from, or at the least frequently rendered marginal to, Indonesian nationalism: the ethnic Chinese.<sup>51</sup> Yet judging from the sources that I have been able to examine thus far, this fact attracted little comment. The reception these players received at home, and that was accorded victorious Thomas Cup teams, suggests clearly that they were perceived as Indonesian and not Chinese.<sup>52</sup>

Some players, in fact, have argued that the way badminton was organized and conducted actively encouraged national integration and tended to discourage ethnic or racial discrimination. Ferry Sonnevile went so far as to argue that this was one of the reasons Indonesia was successful in the sport. He wrote:

From the beginning, badminton in Indonesia was characterized by a tradition of non-discrimination. So you can understand why badminton here is so strong. The tradition of non-discrimination and having particular goals to be reached are specific examples of how you can reach high levels of performance, and are reasons for the continued significance of our game. In my opinion, if these conditions are responsible for our success in badminton, why can’t we apply the

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<sup>49</sup> Women players, though, were much less prominent. It was not until Susi Susanti’s victory in 1990 that an Indonesian took the women’s singles title at All-England. Through to 2004, Susi Susanti is still the only Indonesian to have won the title (she has won the tournament three times), though Verawaty, Sarwendah, and Susi herself have been runners-up. The reasons for this lack of success by Indonesia’s women’s players need investigating, but will not be further explored here.

<sup>50</sup> Columbijn, “The Politics of Indonesian Football,” p. 172.

<sup>51</sup> There is a fleeting parallel here with football. The mid-1950s represented the high point of Indonesia’s international football prowess. At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, for instance, the Indonesian team held the Soviet Union to a 0-0 draw. At this time, about half the major league football players in Indonesia were reportedly ethnic Chinese. See Alwi Shahab, “Sketsa Jakarta: Uang Saku PSSI Hanya 50 Perak,” *Republika*, June 30, 1998.

<sup>52</sup> On this point see, for instance, S. Iskandar, “Nationalism: Suharto Stirs A Hornet’s Nest,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter *FEER*) 76,16 (April 15, 1972): 50. Here Indonesia was following an international pattern; globally there are, of course, many examples of such overt national acceptance of sporting champions from otherwise marginalized ethnic or religious communities.

same approach to other sports, such as chess, volleyball, basketball, bridge? I think that the success of badminton should be borne in mind by other sports.<sup>53</sup>

The only exception I have discovered so far to this general public acceptance and acknowledgment of ethnic Chinese players as Indonesians who contributed to Indonesia's national prestige is to be found—surprisingly, perhaps—in the *New York Times*, where a commentator said of Rudy Hartono that, “As a national hero, he is something of an anomaly because [he] is not really an Indonesian. He's mostly ethnic Chinese, and his Chinese name is Nio Hap Liang.”<sup>54</sup> The writer did, though, go on to note: “Maybe that bothers a few ardent Indonesian nationalists, who tend to berate the 3,000,000 other ethnic Chinese of Indonesia, but for the majority, ethnic origins are irrelevant.”<sup>55</sup>

But whether the successes of these players contributed positively to the position of ethnic Chinese in the broader Indonesian community is more difficult to say. A recent book, *Perspectives on the Chinese Indonesians*, addresses this question, albeit only peripherally referring to badminton. One author, Didik J. Rachbini, argues that badminton players Rudy Hartono, Liem Swie King, and Verawaty Fadjin were examples of “prominent figures from the Chinese community that [*sic*] contributed positively to improving relations” between the ethnic Chinese and *pribumi* communities. Yet another commentator suggests the opposite: that such players, and other Indonesians of ethnic Chinese origin, are seen as individuals, rather than as representatives of the ethnic Chinese community.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the ethnic Chinese community as a whole does not benefit from the success of its individual members. This point is made by Boenjamin Setiawan, who observed that there are (or were) ethnic Chinese Indonesians who were prominent in many walks of life in Indonesia, including as “badminton heroes and heroines,” but that their Chineseness was not stressed or identified.<sup>57</sup>

Another test to help determine national attitudes toward ethnic players would be to ask whether these players are treated as well when they do things that fail to strengthen Indonesia's image abroad, for instance if they lose games or tournaments. On a number of occasions, Indonesian teams have lost to China in the Thomas or Uber Cup competitions. I do not yet have much evidence on this point, but suspect that ethnicity does not really become an issue in such cases. The 2004 Indonesian losses in the Thomas and Uber Cups, played before hometown crowds in Jakarta, saw spectators:

happy, singing and clapping in rhythm, of course booing the opponents and cheering for their heroes, but always in a spirit of fair play. Even when their

<sup>53</sup> *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>54</sup> James A. Sterba, “Badminton Champion is Indonesia's Hero,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1972, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>56</sup> See Didik J. Rachbini, “Democratizing the Indonesian Economy,” in *Perspectives on the Chinese Indonesians*, ed. Michael R. Godley and Grayson J. Lloyd (Adelaide: Crawford House, 2001), p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> Boenjamin Setiawan, “A Just and Prosperous Society,” in Godley and Lloyd, eds., *Perspectives*, p. 115.

home team Indonesia lost, they didn't seem so angry and still applauded their heroes on the way out.<sup>58</sup>

But perhaps the biggest test is when players leave Indonesia to play for other nations. Are such players perceived as betraying their country, and in this way demonstrating not only their failed national loyalty, but bringing into question, by ethnic association, the loyalty of their compatriots? Indonesia has gone through two periods when such movements have taken place in sufficient numbers as to have a potentially significant impact on the country's international standing in this sport.

The first period was in the 1960s, when a number of Indonesia's leading ethnic Chinese players and coaches left for China, at a time when many other ethnic Chinese were making this same journey.<sup>59</sup> As one Indonesian commentator put it, discussing China's rise to prominence in world badminton and the likelihood that it would eventually threaten Indonesia's position:

... the seeds [of China's rise] came from Indonesia in the 1950s, when Hou Chia Chang and Tang Hzien Hou returned to their Ancestral Homeland from Solo. Tang, whom we knew as Tong Si Fu, did come back to Indonesia, but because his application for citizenship was not dealt with properly, he returned [to China]. And the successor to this pair of pioneers developed and perfected their [training] methods.<sup>60</sup>

A leading Indonesian player, Mulyadi (Ang Tjin Siang), made the same point later, arguing that it was the Indonesians who developed badminton in China. In the 1950s, he asserted, there was no badminton in China; the sport developed only after a number of players from Indonesia relocated to China because of PP10, the Presidential Regulation that forbade anyone holding other than Indonesian citizenship from engaging in retail trade in rural areas.<sup>61</sup>

Three leading Chinese players and coaches, members of the International Badminton Federation's Hall of Fame, who do seem to fall into this category of contributing substantially to China's subsequent badminton successes are Tang Xianhu (known when in Indonesia as Tong Sin Fu or Thing Hian Houw), Chen Yu Niang (Tan Giok Nio), and Hou Jiachang (Houw Ka Tjong—possibly the "Hou Chia Chang"

<sup>58</sup> Raphael Sachetat, "Memories of ... the Thomas and Uber Cup Finals," May 21, 2004, <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=1519W>. This was, of course, not always the case, as Indonesian spectators on other occasions have earned a reputation for being very loud, often to the point of disrupting games. In 1967, crowd behavior at the Thomas Cup final in Jakarta resulted in Herbert Scheele, Honorary Referee from the IBF (International Badminton Federation), canceling the competition. The Indonesian team—possibly under government pressure; I cannot say—refused to play the final match in a neutral country (New Zealand), and the tie was awarded to Malaysia. See "1967: Peristiwa Scheele," in Asmadi, ed., *Sejarah*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the issue of ethnic Chinese leaving for China, see Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Sunito, "Birmingham." "Tang Hzien Hou" and "Tong Si Fu" are presumably typographical errors in the original text: the former spelling should be "Tang Xian Hu" (or "Tang Xianhu") and the latter "Tang Sin Fu."

<sup>61</sup> "Ang Tjin Siang: PBSI Jangan Mata Duitan," *Kompas*, November 19, 2001. For a discussion of PP10, see J. A. C. Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959-68," in *The Chinese in Indonesia*, ed. A. C. Mackie (Melbourne: Nelson, 1976), pp. 77-138.

mentioned above).<sup>62</sup> Another was Liang Chiu Sia (Leung Tja Hua), who moved to China in 1966, following Suharto's rise to power.<sup>63</sup> As was often the case, some of Liang's siblings accompanied her to China, and others stayed in Indonesia. Among those who stayed was her younger brother, Tjun Tjun, who was to win the All-England men's doubles titles for Indonesia six times between 1974 and 1980, partnered by Wahjudi. Liang eventually left China for Hong Kong, and finally returned to Indonesia, re-acquiring Indonesian citizenship in 1986, "thanks to the combined efforts of the government, in this case the offices of the Ministers for Sport and Employment, the Indonesian National Olympic Committee, and the Indonesian Badminton Federation."<sup>64</sup>

The movements of these players do not appear to have aroused any substantial anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia; I have found no evidence of any significant official or unofficial criticism of the ethnic Chinese players relocating to China. It might have been perhaps because at this stage China was not a major player in world badminton, and partly also because the ethnic Chinese who went there were not the very best of Indonesia's players. Had Tan Joe Hok or Rudy Hartono left Indonesia, the situation might conceivably have been different. And it might have been different too had more people shared Mulyadi's view that the long-term effect of this migration was to build up China's badminton strength. But neither of these conditions prevailed.

The second period, though, from the mid-1990s onwards, posed a greater long-term threat to Indonesian badminton. The first players to leave Indonesia were Fung Permadi and Mia Audina. Permadi was representing Taiwan by 1996. Then Audina—silver medalist in the women's singles at the Atlanta Games—left for the Netherlands to join her husband, and by 2000 she was representing the Netherlands internationally. By the late 1990s, this exodus threatened to become a flood. By 2002, Indra Wijaya, Ronald Susilo, Hendra Wijaya, Henry Kurniawan, Wandry Kurniawan, and Dicky Purwotjugiono were playing in the Thomas Cup representing Singapore; Lenny Purnama had joined the Australian team; Agus Hariyanto, Albertus Susanto Njoto, and Johan Hadikusuma Wiratama were representing Hong Kong. In 2004, Tony Gunawan represented the US in the Thomas Cup competition being played in Jakarta. Mulyo Handoyo, former Indonesian national coach, moved to Singapore in 2001, joining his compatriot Hadi, who was in charge of the men's doubles.<sup>65</sup> Some of these players and coaches were leaving for personal reasons—this was true of Audina, for instance, and of Tony Gunawan, who originally went to the United States to study—but most seem to have been attracted by the salaries that were now being offered overseas, particularly in Singapore and Hong Kong.

<sup>62</sup> See "Members of the Hall of Fame," <http://www.intbadfed.org/Portal/intbadfed/HoF.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> See "Liang Chiu Sia," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 142-144.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>65</sup> "ABC to Mediate in RI-S'pore Badminton Dispute," *Antara*, February 23, 2002; "Taufik Hidayat Tak Berdaya," *Bola Sportsline*, October 30, 2003, at <http://www.bolanews.com/bulutangkis/7263.php>; Raphael Sachetat, "Singapore sets high target for its badminton squad," *WorldBadminton.net*, January 31, 2003, at <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=822>; <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=1433>. Wiratama is the brother of Alan Budikusuma, winner of Indonesia's first Olympic men's singles gold medal in badminton, won at the 1992 Barcelona games.

This was a much more worrisome development for Indonesia. Mia Audina was seen as a player of enormous potential, someone who might replace Susi Susanti at the top of the women's league. The players who relocated to Singapore were not, by and large, top-flight competitors, although Taufik Hidayat—an indigenous Indonesian—perhaps belonged in that category.<sup>66</sup>

But the issue here, as perceived by many in Indonesia, was that Singapore, in particular, was, in effect, trying to “buy” world-class badminton standing by importing Indonesian male players (for the Thomas Cup) and Chinese women players (for the Uber Cup). Indonesian ire was directed primarily at Singapore for trying to buy players, rather than at the players for being willing to “sell” themselves. The regionalization—if not yet the full globalization—of sport was starting to take its toll on Indonesia. For many Indonesians, the real concern was not that the country's former players and coaches were now earning money overseas (or perhaps in some cases seeking safety there from the unrest surrounding and following Suharto's resignation in 1998), but rather that they were now representing those countries in international competitions, such as the Thomas and Uber Cups, against Indonesian teams. The PBSI protested at the early defections—particularly that of Audina—arguing that players should at least represent their home countries in international tournaments.<sup>67</sup> Its protest against Audina's being permitted to play for the Netherlands was upheld by the IBF, and this decision postponed her appearance for her adopted country. This would suggest clearly that the PBSI was very aware of the international prestige attaching to these tournaments—and presumably that in no other sport were Indonesian players in this position. Indonesia had much more to lose from these defections than did the other country that happened to be supplying significant numbers of players to other nations—that is, China. China had much more sporting depth than Indonesia. It also protested against its badminton players being lured elsewhere—but badminton was not the central pillar of China's international status as a sporting power, the way it was for Indonesia.

### **Discrimination**

None of this is to suggest that ethnic Chinese badminton players have not been subject to the same kinds of discrimination to which other Indonesians of ethnic Chinese origin have been exposed. They have. As badminton players, ethnic Chinese may have been accepted as Indonesians by the vast bulk of the population—win or lose. But as perceived by the public service bureaucracy, for instance, they remained ethnic Chinese, with all that implied. Ivana Lie, a leading player in the 1980s, became something of a cause célèbre in this regard. In 1976, she had been recruited to the national badminton training center, but was prevented from traveling overseas to compete in the Asian Junior championships that year as a representative of Indonesia because she was denied a passport—on the grounds that her father was not an

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<sup>66</sup> He went on to win the men's singles title at the Athens Olympics, earning Indonesia's only gold medal for those games.

<sup>67</sup> “ABC to Mediate.”

Indonesian citizen.<sup>68</sup> It took four years before she was granted the Certificate of Nationality (SBKRI, Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia), which enabled her to travel overseas, and she claims that her request was granted only because she, a prominent badminton player, was able to raise the matter with President Suharto personally.<sup>69</sup> She was apparently asked by Suharto what reward she wanted for her performance as a competitor; she replied that all she wanted was an identity card.<sup>70</sup> She officially became an Indonesian citizen in September 1982.

But Ivana was, as one commentator noted, lucky:

Because, when she wanted to get her Certificate of Nationality, she was a leading athlete who had brought honor to the nation. But what about the citizenship of other ethnic Chinese who were not as prominent as she was?<sup>71</sup>

Author and playwright Arswendo Atmowiloto raised this issue in a film he wrote and produced for television, entitled *Ing Tak Perlu Menangis* [Ing, There's No Need to Cry]. This film was based on the experiences of Ivana, and was broadcast on the SCTV network in February 2002. Arswendo was quite clear that he meant this film to act as a political statement, even though the story was apparently fictional. To underline this point, the film was broadcast at the time of Chinese New Year. Moreover, Arswendo was quoted as saying, "Badminton is not just a sport, a hobby, or a business. It's also full of political meaning."<sup>72</sup> One commentator said of the film that, "At the least it reflects the fact that, despite discrimination, the nation's honor can still be defended, as shown by Ivana Lie."<sup>73</sup>

But although Lie's case was arguably the best known one—perhaps because, by her own acknowledgement, she could be a "difficult" person to deal with<sup>74</sup>—she was by no means the only ethnic Chinese player to suffer such humiliation. Tan Joe Hok—first Indonesian winner of the men's singles at the All-England championships and, with Ferry Sonneville, one of Indonesia's greatest players of the 1950s and early 1960s—suffered a similar fate.<sup>75</sup> Much more recently, in May 2002, Hendrawan, silver medalist at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, was reported to be unable to secure his citizenship certificate. "What more could or should I have done in defense of my country?" he asked, and continued,

<sup>68</sup> See "Lie Eng Hwa, Ivana," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 145. It should perhaps be noted that Lie never won a major international badminton title. The closest she came was runner-up in the 1980 world championships held—fortuitously, perhaps—in Jakarta. She was, however, a member of the Indonesian Uber Cup team in 1978, 1980, and 1986.

<sup>69</sup> See Sella Wangkar and Rafael Setyo "Ivana Lie Optimistis Soal SKBRI [sic]," *Liputan 6*, January 23, 2004, at <http://www.liputan6.com/fullnews/70723.html>

<sup>70</sup> See "Hendrawan Masih Dipusingkan Pengurusan Kewarganegaraannya," *Kompas*, May 1, 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Wangkar and Setyo, "Ivana Lie Optimistis."

<sup>72</sup> Agus Muttaqin, "Visualisasi Perjuangan Ivana Lie Meraih Kewarganegaraan (1)," *Jawa Pos*, February 7, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Sucipto Hadi Purnomo, "Menepis 'Cina Wurung, Jawa Tanggung,'" *Suara Merdeka*, February 10, 2002.

<sup>74</sup> "Lie Eng Hwa, Ivana," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> In 1980, Sitor Situmorang, a leading Indonesian poet, published a poem entitled "Untuk Ivanna dan Tan Joe Hok." See *Kompas*, June 20, 1980; and Junus Jahya, ed., *Nonpri di mata pribumi* (Jakarta: Yayasan Tunas Bangsa, n.d.), pp. 118-119.

When I will get my certificate, I have no idea. The official told me, "that's difficult to say, it could be a month, three months or a year or two years." ... They say they will tell me when it is ready, but when will that be? My older sister has been waiting for twenty years and still has not got it. All I can do is wait, and follow the rules.<sup>76</sup>

Discrimination of this sort did not arouse public protests during the New Order period. From 1965 to 1998, badminton players, and ethnic Chinese ones in particular, were politically invisible—as were sports stars generally. However, since the fall of Suharto, as restrictions on political activity by Indonesians have begun to crumble, the issue has been taken up publicly and vigorously. On June 24, 2002, the newly formed Komunitas Bulutangkis Indonesia (Indonesian Badminton Community) wrote to President Megawati to request that ethnic Chinese Indonesians no longer be required to produce the Certificate of Nationality as proof of citizenship. The letter was signed by thirty-six current and retired players, mostly ethnic Chinese, but also including Ferry Sonneville and Icuk Sugiarto.<sup>77</sup> This move was followed up by meeting with leading politicians, including Amien Rais (Speaker of the Parliament), Hamzah Haz (Vice President), and Yusril Ihza Mahendra (Minister for Justice and Human Rights).<sup>78</sup>

Two years after the original letter was written, on March 15, 2004, the vice president's office issued instructions to state officials, including the attorney general, the chief of police and territorial administrators, indicating that the president had determined that the SBKRI was no longer to be used.<sup>79</sup> Whether this will indeed be the end of the matter remains to be seen. Past experience would suggest that eliminating this kind of discrimination at the local level requires more than letters from ministers.<sup>80</sup> But for our purposes, the significant point to be drawn from the issue is that for the first time badminton players are using their national prominence to pursue a political issue. And—perhaps equally significantly—although ethnic Chinese players led the protest, other players have joined in too. Thus former world champion Icuk Sugiarto, who is not ethnically Chinese, said in 2003,

Indonesian Chinese had sufficiently shown their patriotism and their capability to achieve something for Indonesia, so that it was ironical if there were people who still doubted their nationality.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Hendrawan Masih Dipusingkan Pengurusan Kewarganegaraannya."

<sup>77</sup> See *Sinar Harapan* and *Bisnis Indonesia*, July 3, 2002, for reports of the letter, a copy of which is in the author's possession.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, "'KTP' Diskriminasi Itu Bernama SBKRI," *Sinar Harapan*, March 13, 2003; "Indon Gov't Urged To Abolish Discriminatory Policies On Citizens of Chinese Descent" *Antara*, May 6, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Copy of the letter in the author's possession.

<sup>80</sup> Alan Budikusuma and Susi Susanti, gold medal winners from the Barcelona Olympics, were to carry the Olympic torch for Indonesia in Athens, but in April 2004 they were having difficulty securing passports because of the SBKRI problem. President Megawati was reportedly "very concerned" by the difficulties Alan and Susi were facing. See Erlangga Djumena, "Megawati Prihatin Masalah Alan dan Susi," *Kompas*, April 14, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> "Veteran Shuttlers: 'Stop Discrimination Against Indon Chinese,'" *Jakarta Post*, March 12, 2003.



### Prominence of Ethnic Chinese

It is difficult to explain why Chinese are so prominent in the game of badminton in Indonesia; my response must at this stage be largely speculative. Maarten van Bottenburg examines a number of hypotheses which seek to explain the prominence of particular communities in particular games.<sup>82</sup> These include natural characteristics of a region, such as climate, the physical build or “temperament” of different ethnic groups, facilities, cost, and the influence of television. But each of these factors, he argues, is “wholly inadequate” to explain the phenomenon, their principal shortcoming being “that they reify sports and detach them from their social context.”<sup>83</sup> Examination of the popularity of badminton in Indonesia provides some support for this view.

We can begin by considering how badminton was brought to Indonesia. As noted above, it seems highly likely that it came from Malaysia, and in particular from Pinang, directly across the Straits of Melaka from Medan. And the Malaysian players who visited Indonesia seem to have been overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese.

Badminton was also picked up by several of the ethnic Chinese social-cum-sporting clubs that were prominent features of the urban scene in many parts of pre-independence Indonesia. These clubs tended to have the financial resources to bring in leading players for exhibition matches, either from the major urban centers of Indonesia or from Malaysia. There were no—or at least very few—such clubs for indigenous Indonesians. As noted earlier, the first Jakarta headquarters of the post-war badminton federation was in the building owned by the Sin Ming Hui, which itself had formed a badminton group in March 1946, only weeks after the group’s foundation on January 20 of that year.<sup>84</sup> Sin Ming Hui’s players at this time may not have been particularly good, but its facilities were: they were frequently loaned out to other clubs, and to the PBSI.<sup>85</sup>

By the 1960s, these clubs had, at least formally, lost their ethnic exclusivity, although their identities were still clear, either from their names or their addresses. *Tangkis* lists twenty-eight clubs that were members of the Jakarta branch of the PBSI in 1962, together with the addresses of their playing facilities.<sup>86</sup> Among the clubs were ones that were clearly directed primarily towards the ethnic Chinese community, including Chung Hua TNH, Im Gak Hwee, Luu Ching Duey, Persatuan Warga, and Tjandra Naja; their addresses were clustered in the region north of Medan Merdeka, in

<sup>82</sup> See especially, “The Popularity of Sports: Measurement and Interpretation,” in Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, pp. 15-44.

<sup>83</sup> Van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, pp. 21, 40. It could, of course, be argued that build is an issue here, in that speed, agility, and endurance are more important to a badminton player than sheer strength or height (I am indebted to *Indonesia’s* reviewer for this point); but although this might possibly be part of the explanation for the prominence of Southeast Asians in the sport, it provides little assistance in determining why Indonesians of ethnic Chinese descent are so much more prominent than Indonesians of other ethnic origins.

<sup>84</sup> *Buku Peringatan Sin Ming Hui 1946-1956 10 Tahun* (Jakarta: n.p., 1956), p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>86</sup> *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas*, pp. 15-16.

Mangga Besar, Kemakmuran, and the like—all locations with heavy concentrations of ethnic Chinese people.

There is another economic factor too. When asked why ethnic Chinese dominated the sport, Rudy Hartono answered, "I'd say it's because badminton is a sport that not every family can afford to play. Playing outdoors costs little, but indoors can be expensive."<sup>87</sup> Against this theory, though, must be set Ferry Sonneville's view that, "It was particularly fortunate for Indonesia and Malaya, and for other Asian countries such as India and Thailand, that their climates allowed badminton to be played on outdoor courts the whole year around."<sup>88</sup> It is very possible that these two sportsmen are thinking about different categories of players, and that Hartono is referring not to everyday competitors, but to those who seek to develop their skills to higher levels. Very few players who only had access to outdoor courts, subject to the vagaries of wind, light, and rain, would have been able to move into the latter category. Anecdotal evidence of this fact comes from Christian Hadinata, winner of All-England men's and mixed doubles championships. He says that he started out playing badminton on an outside court, but that he got his real break when he was invited by an opponent, Oey Hwie Kian, to practice on the court of a hotel owned by his father.<sup>89</sup>

Commercial considerations cannot be overlooked either. On the one hand, badminton has been sponsored by a number of powerful ethnic Chinese-owned businesses, most ironically perhaps by *kretek* cigarette companies such as Djarum of Kudus. The Jakarta club Tangkas, one of the most powerful and wealthy in the country, has effectively been run since the early 1950s by the Suhandinata family, a wealthy business family in its own right, and sponsored variously by the Tunas Sakti Group (in which both Suharso Suhandinata [Souw Han Seng] and his son Justian Suhandinata have been prominent), by Bimantara, and by Bogasari, the flour milling company. Ciputra and Bimantara have also been major sponsors of badminton more generally, at least until the onset of the financial crisis in 1997.

Some observers have suggested that there are cultural factors at work here too. The Chinese cultural background is said to encourage persistence in tasks undertaken, determination to succeed, and refusal to be satisfied with second best.<sup>90</sup> I am generally suspicious of this kind of explanation, whether of ethnic Chinese prominence in badminton or in business. For one thing, it provides no explanation for failure, unless it is to argue that ethnic Chinese failures are somehow less culturally "Chinese" than winners. It assumes that the cultural qualities cited are to be found in the ethnic Chinese community rather than the indigenous one. However, based on the entries in *Apa dan Siapa*, the vast majority of Indonesia's leading ethnic Chinese badminton players are *peranakan*: people who are most acculturated to the indigenous community

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Christopher Clarey, "This is No Picnic: In Southeast Asia, Respect Rides on a Shuttlecock," *New York Times*, June 25, 1996, p. B14.

<sup>88</sup> Ferry Sonneville, *Bulutangkis Bermutu* (Jakarta: Kinta, 1962), p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> See "Makcomblang Pelatnas," *Matra*, June 1997, pp. 107-109. Christian is himself ethnic Chinese.

<sup>90</sup> A point made to me by a number of officials and observers in Jakarta in 2004.

and less likely to be practicing what are seen as traditional Chinese values than the China-oriented *totok* community.<sup>91</sup>

It might be the case, however, that, as with minorities in other societies, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia historically had limited fields of endeavor open to them where they could exert themselves on an equal basis with the majority community, and that badminton provided a field where they could compete on their own merits without encountering formal discrimination. Sport generally is inherently meritocratic, at least when played at the international level.

### Politics and Badminton

The political profile of badminton, at least up until the start of the Suharto period, was low. And again, it seems reasonable to assume that ethnicity had something to do with this. Nonetheless, Sukarno took considerable public interest in the game, welcoming victorious players home, granting them medals, and, of course, making speeches to them and being photographed with them.

In one case, national politics did impinge on badminton, albeit peripherally, because Sukarno was convinced that Indonesia's standing in the world had been damaged by an insult from the International Olympic Committee. It is now largely forgotten, but in 1963 Indonesia became the first nation to be suspended from the Olympic Games by the IOC for its failure to issue visas to enable athletes from Israel and the Republic of China to compete in the Asian games, which were being held in Jakarta. As Ewa Pauker notes,

Indonesia was furious at the International Olympic Committee. Its anger was directed particularly towards the American President of the IOC, Avery Brundage. A few days later, the idea of GANEFO—Indonesia's answer to the Olympics—was announced.<sup>92</sup>

Sukarno made it quite clear when talking about GANEFO that sport and politics were deeply intertwined; the possibility that they could be separated was not considered. The move to establish GANEFO was clearly part of Sukarno's bid for leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>93</sup> Ultimately the IOC, probably realizing the danger to its own position should GANEFO prove to be successful, quietly readmitted Indonesia to membership. GANEFO then folded. Badminton had been one of the sports featured at GANEFO.

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<sup>91</sup> Why *peranakan* Chinese would dominate over *totoks* is an intriguing question that requires further research to resolve. Examining the membership of the ethnic Chinese social clubs referred to above would be a good starting point.

<sup>92</sup> Pauker, "Ganefo I," p. 173.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 13, citing Sie. Houlihan also argues that Sukarno broke with the IOC and established GANEFO in an attempt to divert the attention of the Indonesian people away from domestic problems; this is the standard explanation offered for virtually all of Sukarno's actions that observers have perceived as illogical or extravagant. It is generally too bland an explanation, and one which tends to deny the possibility that there were, in Sukarno's opinion, significant issues involved concerning Indonesia's status in the world.

When Suharto came to power, Indonesia drew back from involvement with the nonaligned world. But the significance of badminton as a symbol of Indonesia's international standing remained. One measure of the national political significance being given to badminton by the 1970s can be seen in the circumstances surrounding the victory of Rudy Hartono over fellow-Indonesian Liem Swie King in the All-England final in 1976. At this tournament, Rudy Hartono set a record by winning his eighth championship, one more than Danish player Erland Kops.

There were those who argued that Rudy's victory had been engineered, that in fact King should have won, given his performance in earlier games and the fact that Rudy was suffering from an injured foot.<sup>94</sup> But of greater moment was the fact that at the end of 1975 it looked as if Indonesia would not be sending any more players to the championships at all. In June of that year the International Badminton Federation, meeting in London, had determined it would not admit China to membership. In retaliation, the Asian Badminton Confederation (ABC), led by Thailand, decided to boycott the All-England games in protest.

This resolution greatly concerned Indonesian officials. On the one hand, they were strong supporters of the ABC and wanted China admitted to the IBF. There was clearly a feeling in Jakarta that Asia was now the dominant badminton-playing region, and Indonesia was dominant in Asia. But the IBF was still controlled by the Europeans. Boycotting All-England would have demonstrated these points, because the quality of the games would be clearly diminished by the absence of the Asian players. And there is some evidence that the Indonesian government had been thinking of using badminton as a means of reestablishing some links with China, which had been broken in the aftermath of the September 30, 1965 affair. In 1971, for instance, Vice President Adam Malik is reported to have said that Jakarta might send Rudy Hartono to China on a goodwill mission, though nothing came of the proposal.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, precisely because it was the premier badminton-playing nation, Indonesia had most to lose if Asian nations boycotted the championships; in particular it stood to lose the opportunity for Rudy Hartono to move ahead of Erland Kops as the most successful player ever. And ultimately it was this consideration that won out.

The PBSI sent Suharso Suhandinata and J. C. Tambunan to negotiate with ABC members to persuade them to permit Indonesia to send its players, including Rudy, to the championships. Suharso apparently stressed the enormous importance Indonesians placed on Rudy's participation: "130 million Indonesians have a burning desire to see Rudy Hartono win the All-England championship eight times. This burning desire is something which simply cannot be denied."<sup>96</sup> Members relented and allowed Indonesia to compete.

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<sup>94</sup> This debate is captured well in Teguh Budiarto, *Maestro: Menyingkap Rahasia Sukses Rudy Hartono* (Jakarta: Pustaka Merdeka, 1987), pp. 199-206.

<sup>95</sup> O. G. Roeder, "Djakarta: Still on Ice," *FEER* 74,44 (October 30, 1971): 21. Budiarto does not mention this incident in *Maestro*, his biography of Rudy.

<sup>96</sup> Budiarto, *Maestro*, p. 204.

Early the following year, the issue came up again when Herbert Scheele of the IBF was reported to have said:

If other Asian nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia boycott All-England, the championships will go on and I will not be the slightest bit bothered, because there are many good badminton players from outside the Asian region.<sup>97</sup>

Needless to say, this comment reignited the debate in the ABC, and Suharso and Tambunan had to engage in another round of shuttle diplomacy to try to prevent a reimposition of the boycott. Suharso took the line that there might be an element of intent here—perhaps the Europeans were trying to discourage the Asians from competing. If Rudy Hartono played and won, thus setting a new performance record, then “a son of the Asian continent would have become ‘king’ in the continent of the white people.”<sup>98</sup>

For a second and final time, Suharso prevailed, and Hartono played. But then, so the argument goes, he had to win in order to show that all this effort had been worthwhile—hence the debate about whether the match with King was in any sense fixed.

Domestically, badminton became more politicized under Suharto. At the public level, Suharto missed few opportunities to be associated with Indonesian successes at badminton. He saw off Thomas and Uber Cup teams as they departed for the tournaments, wishing them well and assuring them that all Indonesians stood behind them.<sup>99</sup> And he showed a decidedly modern predilection to be photographed with successful players.<sup>100</sup> (There is some slight evidence that Golkar used badminton strategically to attract voters in domestic elections,<sup>101</sup> however I am as yet unable to say how widespread this phenomenon was.)

But there was a harder political edge to Suharto’s involvement with the game too. As it did with so many other civic organizations, including sporting ones, the New Order government moved to put military officers in control of the PBSI, albeit at a fairly slow pace, perhaps recognizing the strength of the organization. Established badminton figures such as Ferry Sonneville, Suharso Suhandinata, J. C. Tambunan, and Sudirman remained, formally anyway, in control of the organization at least until the late 1970s.

But gradually they lost control. The first clear evidence of military intervention into the PBSI that I have been able to identify is the appointment of then-commander of the Siliwangi Division, Lt. Col. Emon Suparman, as deputy chair of the PBSI for the period

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., *Antara*, May 8, 1996.

<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, the picture of Suharto chatting with players in Karundeng, *Pasang Surut*, p. 172; with players and holding a racket in Budiarto, *Maestro*, p. 150; shaking hands with Icuik Sugiarto and Wisnu Subagyo in *Ferry Sonneville: Karya dan Pengabdiannya* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *FEER* 70,44 (October 31, 1970): 20.

1971-1974.<sup>102</sup> From then on, more and more military men were appointed to senior positions in the PBSI and its regional offices. In 1985, a Dewan Kehormatan was formed, headed by the Minister for Youth and Sport. The Dewan Penyantun was headed by Gen. Soepardjo Rustam, the former Minister for Home Affairs, with Suharto's son Bambang Trihatmojo as the deputy chair and Probosutedjo and Ponco Sutowo as members. Gen. Try Sutrisno was chair of the PBSI for two terms, 1985-1989 and 1989-1993. When first appointed, he was Vice Chief of Staff of the Army; his successor—in both the military and sporting positions—was Gen. Soerjadi.<sup>103</sup>

Clearly, these appointments were effectively being made by the government. Military Police Colonel Sumaryono was appointed deputy chair of the PBSI in 1993; speaking later of this appointment, he said, with commendable honesty:

I had absolutely no background in badminton. As a military man, who was always prepared to follow any orders he is given, I accepted the appointment as Deputy Chair and Ketua Harian of the PBSI.<sup>104</sup>

Following the fall of the Suharto government in 1998, opportunities for Indonesians to participate in political events expanded considerably. Political actions by badminton players in support of citizenship rights have already been noted. Some players went further. A number of leading players, led by Rudy Hartono and Susi Susanti, protested to the Legal Aid Foundation about the anti-Chinese riots, rapes, and murders which took place in Jakarta in May 1998, just prior to Suharto's resignation.<sup>105</sup> To some extent, this could be perceived as similar to the citizenship issue: in both cases, athletes used their influence to call attention to an issue that had particular significance for the ethnic Chinese community (it should be noted that the rapes and murders aroused a strong degree of revulsion from virtually all quarters of Indonesian society). Nonetheless, what we have not seen to date is the use of sporting prominence to promote political causes that might be regarded as more politically mainstream.<sup>106</sup> Badminton players are far more likely to appear on television screens advertising shampoo than promoting political parties or leaders.

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<sup>102</sup> "Suparman, Emon, Letkol (CPM)," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 290. Gen. Sajidiman Soekamto was chair of the PBSI in the period 1961–1965. However, he had a history of involvement with the sport going back at least to 1948, when he represented East Java at the First National Sports Week (PON 1) competition held in Solo. See "Sajidiman, Soekamto, Mayjen (Purn), Bc Hk" in *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 204–206.

<sup>103</sup> See "Daftar Nama-nama Pengurus Besar PBSI Periode 1951-1997," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, pp. 385–393. Sutrisno went on, of course, to become vice president of Indonesia in the period 1993–1998.

<sup>104</sup> "Sumaryono, Kol (CPM)," in Sa, *Apa & Siapa*, p. 284.

<sup>105</sup> See "Rudy Hartono, Susi Susanti, dan Kawan-kawan ke LBH," *Republika*, June 6, 1998. To add to the painful irony of these events, it happened that they took place while Indonesia's top players, including some of ethnic Chinese origin, were representing Indonesia in the Thomas and Uber Cup competitions in Hong Kong.

<sup>106</sup> I do not intend to diminish the significance of the May riots. The events of that month in many ways illustrated how Indonesian society had been perverted during the New Order period. And criticism of the riots and murders was widespread. But I believe that for many, and perhaps most, Indonesians, the matter was seen chiefly in ethnic rather than systemic terms.

## Conclusions

The study, albeit preliminary, shows that badminton—and sport generally, perhaps—deserves closer attention by students of Indonesian social history than has been the case thus far. In badminton, Indonesians found a competitive sport in which, for most of the past half century, their athletes could figure as world champions. Closer examination of the meaning of badminton to Indonesians is necessary for confirmation, but evidence from this study suggests that the game was important in the way it reinforced a sense of Indonesian national identity and worth in the world.

The capacity of sport to bring together a diverse population is well established in other national contexts. This was perhaps easier to do in the case of badminton in independent Indonesia because, unlike football, the national interclub competition is not contested or promoted in ways that excite ethnic, regional, or religious rivalries. There are no riots at interclub badminton games; Indonesian crowds reserve their anger for international matches, where their targets are usually opposition teams.

Badminton has been an activity in which virtually all Indonesians could take part, yet it has been dominated, at the top level, by players of ethnic Chinese background. Aside from business, ethnic Chinese have, of course, played important roles in other aspects of Indonesian society, including the arts and education. This study suggests, though, that their role in badminton was at least as significant and visible as in those other areas, and certainly brought them to national prominence much more consistently. The irony here is that even as they were contributing to a sense of Indonesian national identity, ethnic Chinese players were being excluded from citizenship or marginalized in other ways by the nation. The paradox of being a national sporting hero, on the one hand, but not being able to secure proof of citizenship, on the other, can hardly have been lost on any of the players discussed above.

For most of the period under review, badminton in Indonesia also benefited from the fact that the game was not dominated by Europeans (except Danes) or North Americans. This meant that there was less money available for players and administrators, but it probably also meant that talented Indonesian players were not attracted away from the country by the lure of a better living elsewhere. Only very recently has this become a problem for Indonesia, and then primarily thanks to the attractions of a neighboring country, Singapore, rather than a European or North American one. But the most serious challenge to their dominance that Indonesia and Indonesian players currently face will not come from competitors won over by the big money of Europe; it will come from the Chinese, who are developing a well-resourced and politically informed (and perhaps politically driven) badminton program to match the quality of the dominant teams they have fielded in so many other international sports.