

» SPORTS IN SCHOOLS

Tchoukball takes off

Two years after its introduction, sport has a growing following in schools

BY CHRISTOPHER ONG

IT HAS an unusual name, and an unusual way of scoring.

But tchoukball, where players bounce a ball against a trampoline-like rebound frame to notch points, is a sport quickly growing in popularity in Singapore schools.

From five schools two years ago, tchoukball – pronounced “chuke-ball” – is now played by 25 schools.

Bendemeer Secondary, Unity Secondary, River Valley High and Victoria Junior College are just some institutions to have joined pioneers Ping Yi Secondary in taking up the sport, which is similar to handball.

Muhammad Rezal Ramli, president of the two-year-old Tchoukball Association of Singapore (TBAS), is encouraged by the sport's quick growth.

And with help from the Singapore Sports Council's Sports Education Programme – which will see the SSC match, up to \$10,000, whatever amount a school manag-

es to raise for its Learn To Play Tchoukball programme – he is optimistic that the numbers will continue increasing.

Said Rezal, who is also the teacher-in-charge of tchoukball at Ping Yi: “It's always difficult to get people to invest resources into a sport that is not well-known.

“But it's a good game. It's easy to learn the basics. You just need to be able to catch the ball.”

One need only look at his school to see what commitment to the sport can bring.

Ping Yi boasts five national players and has even tasted victory on the national stage, winning in the K. Shanmugam Cup, an open tournament.

Little wonder that tchoukball was made a co-curricular activity (CCA) at the school last year. Kheng Cheng School is the only other school to offer it as a CCA.

Said Timothy Tan, Ping Yi's 16-year-old captain and a national player: “It's new and interesting. What other sport uses rebounding as a way of scoring goals?”

“When you start, it can be difficult. But, once you master the tricks, you just keep wanting more.”

It is also a sport which promotes fair play.

Said Rezal: “There's no contact in the sport, so you can't foul someone to stop them from scoring.



ST PHOTO: JEAN LOO

IN FULL FLIGHT: Ping Yi Secondary School's tchoukball team is practising hard with the inter-school B and C Division titles in mind. The school, one of 25 to play the sport, was the first in Singapore to introduce it as a co-curricular activity.

“That's why I prefer it to sports like soccer, where someone can foul and injure you while you try to score.”

Rezal picked it up at a community centre in 2003 when Julio Calegari, the International Tchoukball Federation's director of international development, was in town to promote it.

Fascinated, Rezal set up the TBAS in 2006.

That year, the TBAS organised an inter-school C Division Tchoukball competition, featuring five schools, including Ping Yi.

Although the Ping Yi boys' team finished second in 2006, they took home the B Division title last year.

“The success has made the game attractive for the other lads,” said Rezal. “For instance, when we trained at the school's pa-

rade square, the other students would be around to watch them.” Timothy became a mini-celebrity in school when he was featured on Kids Central last year.

A combination of titles and the presence of national players have seen 16 more boys and 11 more girls taking up the sport at Ping Yi. It now boasts more than 40 students playing the game.

Among the newcomers is Farah Liyana Razali, 16.

What is tchoukball?

TCHOUKBALL is a non-contact sport played on a 40m by 20m court, slightly bigger than a standard basketball court.

In this seven-a-side game, players can score at both ends, earning points by throwing a ball against 90cm by 90cm trampolines, also known as frames.

These frames are placed at either ends of the court, within a semi-circle called the “D”.

The attacking team can make a maximum of three passes before shooting. To score, the ball has to rebound off the frame and land outside the “D”.

The attacking team fail to score if the ball is caught by one of the opposing players.

The defending team earn a point if, in shooting, the attacker misses the frame, or if the ball goes out of play. The defence can also gain points if the ball hits the shooter or if the ball fails to rebound out of the “D”.

In the 1970s, Swiss biologist Dr Hermann Brandt started the sport in a bid to create a team sport without the serious injuries that plagued other such games.

It is now played in countries such as Taiwan, Britain, India, Japan, the United States and Hong Kong.

She said: “When I told my friends about it, they said the name ‘tchoukball’ sounds weird.

“But it makes them curious and want to find out more about it.”

Added Benjamin Peh, 14: “When I first saw Mr Rezal training the team, the game looked so stylish to me!”

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