



13 JUN, 2025

## Nostalgic memories

The Star, Malaysia



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FIFTY years have passed since Kuala Lumpur hosted the 3rd Hockey World Cup from March 1 to 15, 1975. Although the dates were chosen for the expected dry season, frequent evening rains forced several matches to be rescheduled to the mornings to keep the tournament on track.

While studying at Tunku Abdul Rahman College and using the Catholic High School premises in the afternoons, I often watched morning games at the Tenaga Nasional Berhad grounds in Jalan Pantai. One unforgettable moment was the simple yet striking opening ceremony on March 1 at Merdeka Stadium – especially the Netherlands squad, who marched with vibrant orange umbrellas.

Before taking their positions on the field, the Netherlands squad cleverly folded their

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vibrant orange umbrellas and arranged them to form the letters K and L – a striking tribute to Kuala Lumpur that delighted the crowd and showcased their creativity. The opening ceremony was followed by the curtain-raiser match between host nation Malaysia and New Zealand.

Malaysia was drawn into Pool A alongside Pakistan, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland and New Zealand, while Pool B featured India, Australia, West Germany, England, Argentina and Ghana. All matches were played on natural grass – artificial turf had yet to make its debut in the sport.

It was a proud moment to see R. Pathmarajah from my home state of Pahang playing on the left flank for Malaysia – naturally, my cousin Rajan and I were cheering him on. The opening

match ended in a scoreless draw – a solid start for the host nation.

The most unforgettable match was Malaysia's 2-1 victory over defending champions the Netherlands at the TNB ground – a morning thriller witnessed by a record crowd of 12,000. Captain Sri Shanmuganathan sealed the win with a short corner goal just a minute before the final whistle. Malaysia secured second place in their group and a well-earned spot in the semi-finals.

Due to bad weather, the semi-finals were rescheduled to the morning and played at Merdeka Stadium before a crowd of 40,000. Malaysia fought valiantly but narrowly lost 2-1 to India – a bittersweet end to a courageous World Cup campaign that made the nation proud.

On Saturday March 15, India faced archrival Pakistan in a sunlit final at a packed Merdeka Stadium.

Malaysia's own G. Vijayanathan, then the world's top umpire, officiated alongside France's Alan Renaud – a proud moment for the country. In a gripping match, India edged out Pakistan 2-1 to claim the title.

It was a truly unforgettable 15 days of world-class hockey in 1975 – a sporting spectacle still vivid in my memory, even after half a century. I feel fortunate to have witnessed it firsthand.

The brilliance of our men's hockey team in 1975, along with the football team's Olympic qualification in Munich in 1972, remain among Malaysia's proudest sporting moments.

In hindsight, had today's teams carried the same spirit and cohesion, we might still be a formidable force – rather than merely reliving past glories.

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