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Not your typical rugby schools

Bedok Town and Junyuan are not secondary schools one automatically associates with rugby.

But their students, along with those from some 20 other schools, are playing the gentlemen's sport, once the sole domain of boys from Raffles Institution, Anglo-Chinese School and St Andrews Secondary.

Related link: They have smaller budgets, fewer coaches and no decades-long rugby tradition but their fighting spirit is no less strong.



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Take Junyuan Secondary School which introduced the sport a decade ago. Last Friday, its under-17 team won the title for the lower- rung plate division for the second year in a row.

It was placed ahead of schools like Evergreen and Montfort. In previous years, it beat schools with a longer rugby history like ACS (Barker) and St Joseph's Institution.

Junyuan's coach, Mr Slemat Rakisan, said the school, in Tampines Street 84, faces challenges typical of neighbourhood schools.

Unlike ACS or St Andrews whose feeder primary schools have rugby teams, his boys are new to the game. Being a mixed school, it has a smaller pool of boys to choose from. The boys struggle with studies and may be grounded from training.

Mr Slemat, 51, was the only coach for four years until an old boy Yazid Muhammad Rosli, 24, joined as assistant coach this year.

St Andrews has seven coaches, and RI, four.

While other schools go to Hong Kong and Perth for bonding and friendly matches, Mr Slemat takes his students to Kuala Lumpur once a year.

On weekends, some of the boys work at fast-food restaurants to supplement their family's income. But they meet for touch rugby on their own to refine their moves.

One proof of their pride is their request to wear Canterbury rugby jerseys this year in place of their made-in-Malaysia attire. They paid for the branded jerseys themselves, at \$65 a piece.

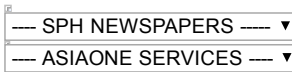
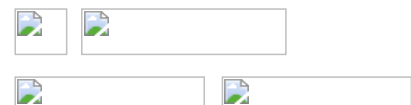
Another sign of pride: At least 10 old boys, now in the institutes of technical education and polytechnics, return to coach their juniors twice a week.

Mr Slemat, who first played rugby when he was 11 at St Andrew's Primary, is looking to raise Junyuan's standards.

One hope lies in finding new blood from Junyuan Primary which formed a rugby team this year.

Goh Chin Lian

This article was first published in [The Straits Times](#).



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