



BOWLING'S ARISTOCRAT

22 APRIL 1943 — 10 AUGUST 2023

BY GEORGE DAS

Four shadowy figures were crouching over a drain. The heavy downpour had subsided but rain clouds still hung menacingly above.

My friend and colleague, the late Tony Francis was going to introduce me to Allan Hooi, the 1970 and 1971 Asian Masters bowling champion.

I rode pillion on Tony's Vespa to Intan Bowling Centre in Kuala Lumpur where I was to meet Allan Hooi. This was sometime in 1973.

Wondering what we were doing at the back of the bowling alley, Tony would jokingly tell me: "Alan is busy with another sport."

Another sport! I was curious at what the four people were looking down into the drain. Tony beckoned me towards the drain. Peering into the drain, I saw four paperboats being swept by the gushing rainwater.

Still puzzled, Tony pointed to the paperboats and I saw that they were each numbered from 1 to 4.

One of the four raised his hand to acknowledge Tony's presence and I was nowhere close to figure out what these paperboats and meeting Allan Hooi was all about.

There was a cry of "victory" from one of the four and that's when I realised that it was a race just like how we used to play when we were children in the years gone by.

This guy in short pants walked up to Tony and shook hands. Tony turned to me and said "Meet Allan."

And that's how I got introduced to Allan Hooi for the first time ... beside a drain, behind Intan Bowling Centre.

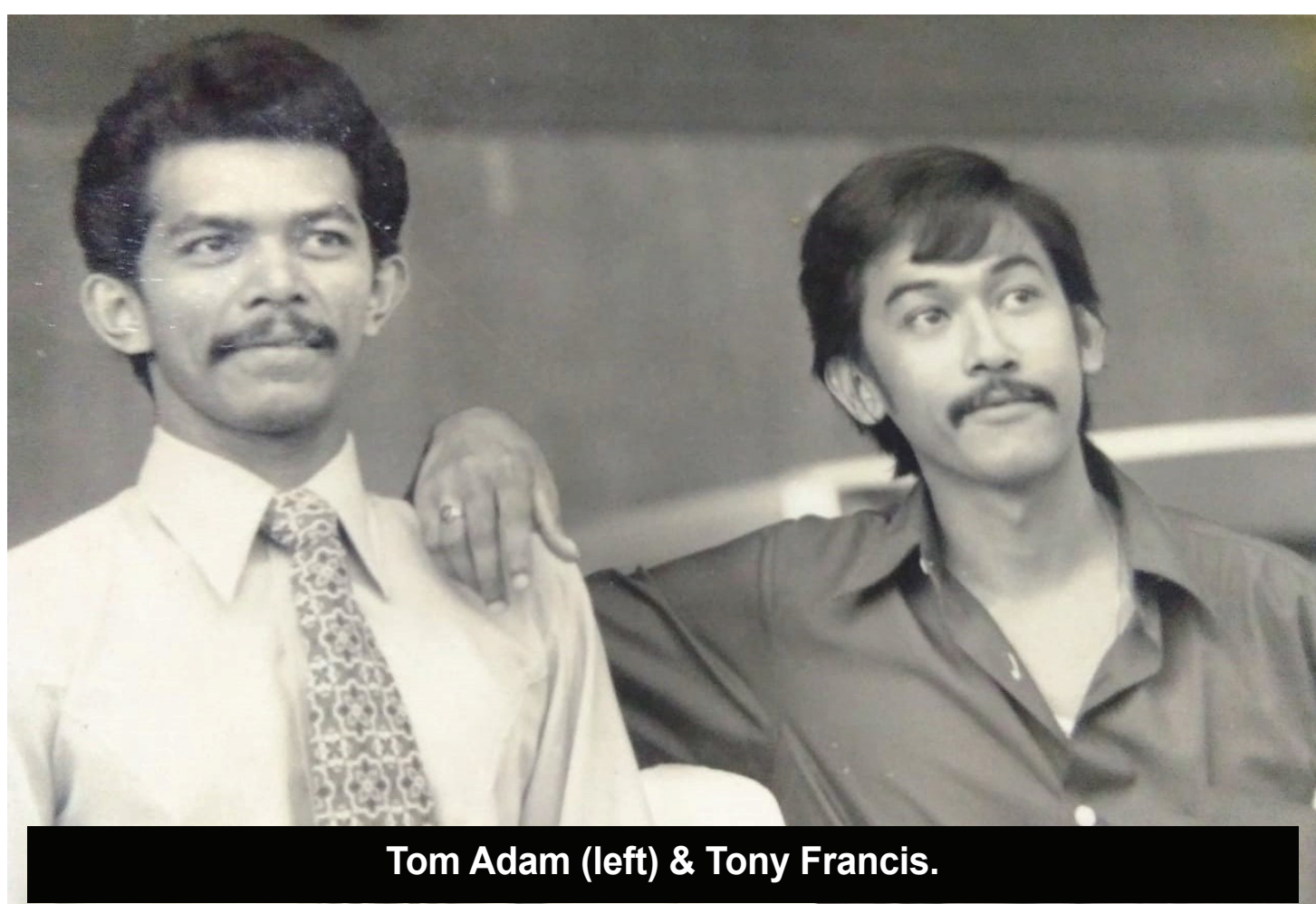
That was not all, I was told later, the paperboat incident was just not any child's play. Allan and his friends were competing for financial rewards.

Horse racing was another love Allan and Tony Francis shared. Horses, paperboats were just a past-time for Allan. His real passion was bowling. A sport he picked up while studying in the United Kingdom when it was in its infancy around 1960.

This was a sport he was mad about and when Jackie's Bowl (later renamed Intan Bowling Centre in 1970) was set up in 1967, Alan was one of the first to test the lanes.

Tom Adam, then Jackie's Bowl assistant pro, still remembers this lone bowler who would come by every morning to practice.

"He trained everyday for four hours or more. He liked the mornings as the lanes would have been just oiled." Adam recalled.



Tom Adam (left) & Tony Francis.

Adam, like Tony Francis had a close relationship with Allan. He was selective when it came to friendship. They were a close-knit trio until I came into the circle. Then there were four!

According to Adam, lanes three and four were his favourite. He would get Adam to prepare the lanes under different conditions — long oiled, medium oiled and short oiled — to test his bowling skills.