

# MY HERO

BY **MONA CHIN** (FAN & WIFE OF POON FOOK LOKE)

**I**T'S BEEN 50 YEARS, HALF A CENTURY! IT FEELS LIKE AN ETERNITY, BUT IT REMAINS FRESH IN OUR MINDS. TO THIS DAY, THE COUNTRY REMEMBERS THE EUPHORIA OF THAT EVENT AND CONTINUES TO SAVOUR THE GLORY, LIKE SOME BALM THAT BRINGS GREAT SATISFACTION.

To live it. To breathe it, to talk about it. Never wanting to let the memories fade.

I was very fortunate to have experienced the 1975 World Cup as it was played, and privileged to know the team and officials as well. So I had a front and back seat, so to speak. I only came to be introduced to the game because of Fook Loke. He became and still is my hockey hero. I am always mesmerised to watch him play.

The 75 World Cup was the perfect stage for him to display his skill and dexterity. And his performance catapulted him to fame. Fook Loke was described by Patrick Rowley in the World Hockey magazine as “that human dynamo of a centre forward”.

My cousin Azmi Merican would proudly proclaim: “He’s the Kevin Keegan of hockey. Pass him the ball and he’ll take care of the rest.”

An illustrious hockey career followed. He went on to play more World Cups, Olympics, Asian All Stars, Europe XI and World XI, and the larger family, including our children Niki and



Misha, are immensely proud of his achievements.

In years to come, he would ingrain in our son Niki that the sport goes beyond physical capabilities. It is to be played with much thought – studying the opponents’ weaknesses and formulating a winning strategy “live” to create opportunities to score. A goal cannot happen by chance; you have to make it happen.

No athlete, however gifted, can excel without his team’s support, and great credit goes to the entire team for the sterling outcome in 1975.

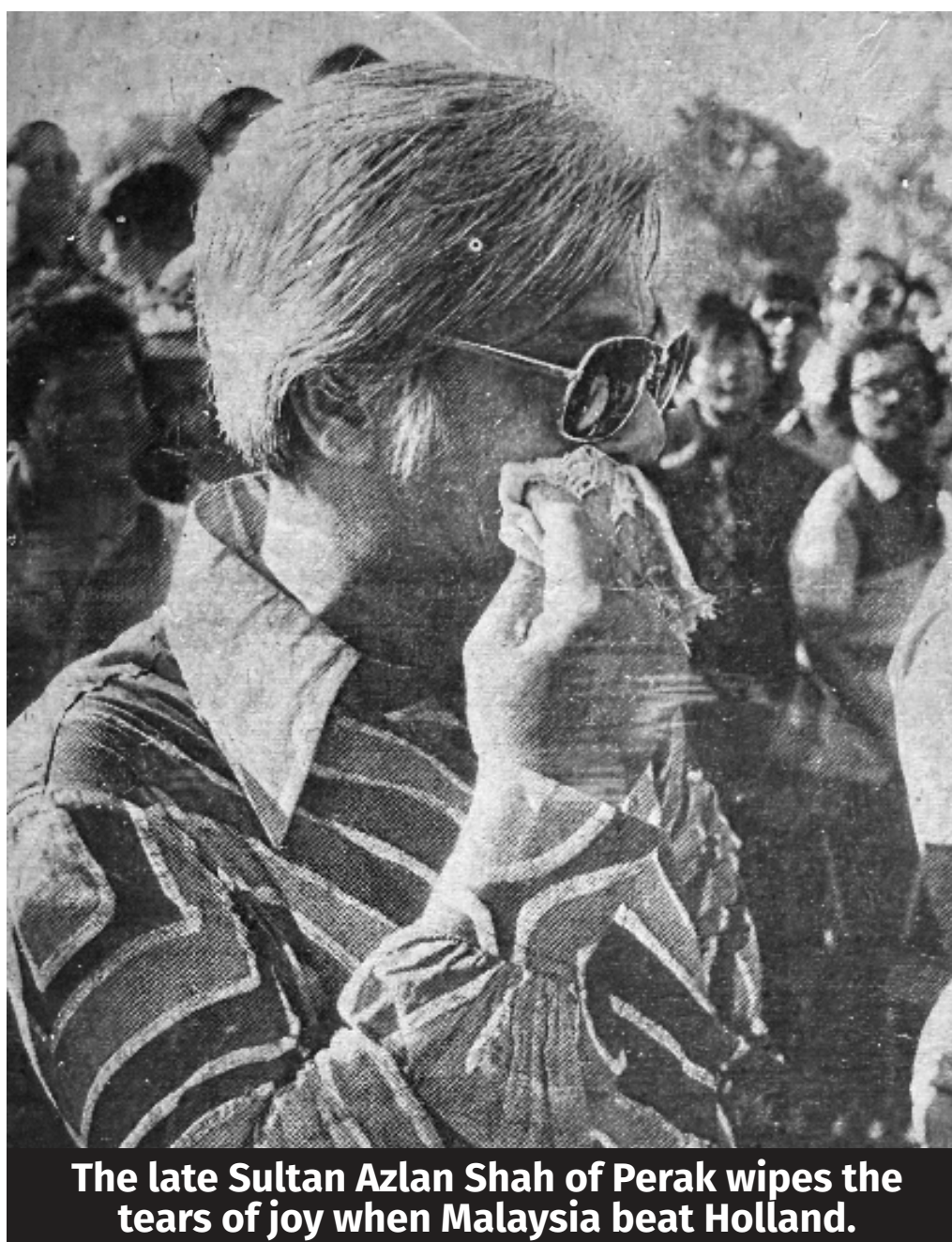
The team holds a special place in my memories. We had known one another since the Seap and Tehran Asian games before the 75 World Cup from my days in athletics. I enjoyed the camaraderie during the 75 World Cup and through the many more international tournaments to come over the next decade.

The team was there at our wedding in March 1983 and later at our son Niki’s wedding in 2019 as honoured guests. Major Len Oliveira was the best man at our wedding, fresh out from the jungle in the nick of time.

Our biggest takeaway from the 75 World Cup is that we forged absolutely lasting and cherished friendships with many hockey players, officials and fans from within the country and around the world lasting decades. Everywhere we went at home and abroad, if we were recognised, we were always accorded the warmest greeting and interaction. Be it at airports, restaurants, hospitals, literally everywhere.

Malaysian fans are also the most heartwarming. They still approach Fook Loke with their fervour and adoration for photos and a chat. After so many years, it’s really so touching.

Once someone even left a note at the cashier counter after paying for our meal. The note simply said, “to honour a hockey hero”. To all our friends and Malaysians out there, we honour you



The late Sultan Azlan Shah of Perak wipes the tears of joy when Malaysia beat Holland.

too for giving us the warmth of your affection, the unstinting support and the memories.

From the record, you are certainly no fine weather friend, as thousands braved the heaviest downpours to support the team. I remember that you came in droves wherever the team played. Your frenzy when Malaysia scored was akin to a Brazilian samba festival. One gets emotional just reminiscing. I still feel so moved to recall those moments to this day. I also truly believe we would not have achieved the near impossible if not for homeground support.

The 1975 team was also endearing to Malaysians as it comprised a good racial mix. The fact that the team achieved so much without any monetary gain or inducement renders the achievement so much more commendable. They really played solely for the glory of the nation.

A very recent experience during the Chinese New Year in February 2025 convinces me of the indelible pride the hockey fans carry. An elderly gentleman approached me while we were watching a lion dance performance at a Mall and asked if that was Poon Fook Loke, the hockey hero.

When I said yes, he quickly whipped out his phone and asked for a picture with Fook Loke and proceeded to tell his grandson that this is a hockey star who played in the World Cup and Olympics. His pride was so evident. He lived it, and he literally owned it.

It was so heartwarming that the 75 World Cup experience had such an immersive impact on so many people. He was so passionate about transferring that pride to his grandson – a great story to be told and relived.

Fifty years on, we are rekindling that light to pass it on to the next and future generations. To have hope and to dream big. For Fook Loke, a small-town boy, hockey launched him to international fame, and it also helped to open his mind to successfully achieve what he aspired for professionally and on a personal level.

To our three grandchildren – Kimi, Sebastian and Miles – we hope your grandpa’s legacy will inspire you as you listen to the captivating stories of the 1975 World Cup and beyond and browse his treasured hockey scrapbooks.

In closing, we must remember the man who brought the 75 World Cup to Malaysia, the late Sultan of Perak, Raja Azlan Shah. Tuanku had so much love and passion for the game that we acknowledge Tuanku as the Father of Malaysian hockey. It is, therefore, so fitting and appropriate that the memories of 75 do not fade as they are indelibly linked to Tuanku’s memory.

I write this with much affection and gratitude to all hockey fans and friends in the country and abroad. Hockey has been so ingrained into every facet of our family life from the time I met Fook Loke. Thank you for being part of the storyline that is woven into the fabric of our lives and brought unparalleled richness.



After Malaysia’s 3-1 victory over Poland.