9 Disintegration
The Triangle Offense

Parallel Circuits

In an intense battle with the "Japanese military," the Chinese army "trampled all over enemy territory."[1] The year? 1934. This alternate reality where China triumphed and Japan failed, which is a perfect inflection of the 1930s, did not come from the imagination of a science fiction author. It came from the pen of a sportswriter who was describing, in rather colorful terms, the Chinese victory over Japan at the final soccer game of the Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games. The author, as well as his Chinese compatriots who read his column, likely knew that the triumph on the field was only an illusion and that the true battles for the very existence of the Games and for the very existence of China were set to take place in the boardrooms the next day and on actual battlefields in years to come, but that didn't detract from this moment of blind jubilation when the sports field served as the salve that reality could not to provide.

In the Asian sporting world, 1934 was a year of some significance. The matches of the Far Eastern Championship Games were intense, but the boardroom bouts put those matches to shame.[2] Before athletes took to the fields at the final Far Eastern Championship Games in Manila in May, Japanese Amateur Athletic Association representatives made barnstorming boardroom tours through Manila and Shanghai. In fact, the Japanese delegates landed in Shanghai at the same moment that athletes from across China had gathered for the trials for the Games.[3] Negotiators above, athletes below. The narrative in this section bounces back-and-forth between these groups. In some ways, the Tenth and final Far

[1] Gan Bun Cho (Yan Wenchu 顏文初), "Zuqiu jinbiao 足球錦標 [The Soccer Title]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 33.

[2] For more on the 1934 Games, see Grant K. Goodman, "Japan, the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Olympics of 1934," in *The East Asian Olympiads, 1934–2008: Building Bodies and Nations in Japan, Korea, and China*, ed. William M. Tsutsui and Michael Baskett (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2011), 23–33.

[3] Zhou Zudao 周祖道, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui jiyao 第十届遠東運動會紀要 [Summary of the Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Minsheng zhoukan* 民聲週刊 *[Minsheng Weekly]* 1, no. 2 (1934): 50.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

Eastern Championship Games initially unfolded like a repeat of the coalescence of 1921, but unlike the earlier iteration, politics ended up overwhelming sportive good will.

The Japanese barnstorming boardroom tour began when a representative of the Japan Amateur Athletic Federation arrived in Manila in January 1934 to lobby for the admission of the puppet state of Manchukuo, which Japan had created after invading northeastern China in 1931, to the Far Eastern Athletic Association.[4] The acceptance of Manchukuo into the organization would have provided some semblance of international recognition for the new state, which Japan desperately needed after its failure to achieve any such recognition from the League of Nations in the preceding years. The Manchurian Incident, as Japan's invasion is often called, would eventually precipitate Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations and the Far Eastern Athletic Association, but we are getting ahead of ourselves.

In Manila, Yamamoto Tadaoki (山本忠興), the Japanese Far Eastern Athletic Association representative, met with Springfield alum Regino R. Ylanan, the secretary treasurer of the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, and Jorge B. Vargas, the vice-president of the same organization. Later, in March, Yamamoto laid out the stakes of their meetings in stark terms, saying, "Manchukuo must be admitted; otherwise no Japanese athlete [will] be sent to Manila next May."[5] The first round of the heavyweight boardroom bout had set the stage for the ensuing rounds. However, in Shanghai on April 9, in the highly anticipated second round of the barnstorming boardroom tour, Japan's lead negotiator Hiranuma Ryōzō (平沼亮三) unexpectedly clinched his opponent, ending the round prematurely. Was he throwing the match?

Enter player three. Chinese negotiators refused to sit idly by while Japan attempted to legitimize their landgrab. In fact, Chinese representatives threatened a boycott of their own if Manchukuo joined into the Far Eastern Athletic Association, applying pressure on the Philippines to ignore Japanese overtures. And their pressure worked, at least momentarily, as Japan temporarily abandoned their boycott threat. Defending the Philippine decision to side with China in refusing to allow Manchukuo to join the organization, Vargas reported, "In view of the existing rules . . . the Philippines had to take the action taken in

[4] For a chronology of key events, see Goodman, "Japan, the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Olympics of 1934," 23–33. According to some reports, Japan began lobbying for the entry of Manchukuo as early as October of 1933. See Zhou Zudao, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui jiyao," 49.

[5] *Tribune* (Manila), March 22, 1934, quoted in Goodman, "Japan, the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Olympics of 1934," 26.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

Shanghai."[6] Meanwhile, according to Chinese reports, while the Japanese "galloped quickly, and their strength can't be ridiculed," China eventually triumphed over the "enemy's rampant strength."[7] Oops, we accidentally slipped back to the soccer match, which took place a month after the Shanghai negotiations. Let us linger there for a moment before returning to the boardrooms.

After torching the Philippines 2 to 0 earlier in the tournament, China defeated Japan 4 to 3 in a grueling match, resulting in yet another trophy in their soccer war chest.[8] Of the Chinese teams that took to the fields in Manila for the Far Eastern Championship Games in May, perhaps none carried more swagger than the group of famous footballers from Hong Kong. The Philippines, despite sustained efforts to improve their national soccer team, including inviting several elite Chinese soccer squads to the archipelago in 1932 and 1933, was clearly out of its league.[9] The soccer field favored China, as did the early boardroom negotiations. Jumping back to the negotiating table in Shanghai a month prior, it appeared that Filipino negotiators had occupied an equally tenuous position.

The Philippines was caught between a rock and a hard place in the Manchukuo negotiations because the government had already raised and allocated vast sums for the Games, and if either Japan or China had followed through with their threats to withdraw, they would have absorbed huge fiscal and reputational losses.[10] So, the fact that the Philippines stuck to its guns in siding with China during the Shanghai meeting appeared like a noble and potentially costly gesture. But perhaps, as pundits would later speculate, this audacity was merely theater, as Japan and the Philippines had already struck a secret deal on Manchukuo.[11]

[6] *Japan Advertiser*, April 12, 1934, quoted in Goodman, "Japan, the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Olympics of 1934," 28. For more on the Philippine position in Shanghai, see "Yuandong xiaoxi: di shijie yuandong yundonghui tekan zai 遠東消息：第十届遠東運動會特刊載 [Far Eastern News: The Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games Special Report]," *Zhejiang tiyu yuekan* 浙江體育月刊 *[Zhejiang Sports Monthly]* 10 (1934): 79.

[7] Gan Bun Cho, "Zuqiu jinbiao," 32. [8] Ibid., 25.

[9] "Chinese Play 3rd Tilt Today," *The Tribune*, February 2, 1932; "Visiting Eleven Cops Its 4th Game in a Row," *The Tribune*, February 5, 1932; and Chen Jinjiang 陳錦江, "Zhengfei ji 征菲記 [Tour of the Philippines]," *Donghua tiyu zhoukan* 動畫體育周刊 *[Tung Hwa Sports Digest]* 1, no. 2 (1933): 8–9 and 16–19.

[10] Yun Chen reported the investment at 1 million pesos. Yun Chen 雲塵, "Yuandong yundonghui zhi guoqu yu xianzai 遠東運動會之過去與現在 [The Past and the Present of the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Beichen Zazhi* 北辰雜志 *[Beichen Magazine]* 59 (1934): 4.

[11] A. V. H. Hartendorp, "Stupidity – Nothing More or Less," *Philippine Magazine* 31, no. 6 (1934): 237; and William Z. L. Sung (Shen Siliang 沈嗣良), "Chuxi Yuanyunhui ge daibiao tanhua 出席遠運會各代表談話 [Discussion by Representatives of the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 9.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

According to newspaper reports after the Games, in exchange for Japan's attendance in Manila, Filipino negotiators had agreed to stand with Japan on the issue of Manchukuo at the final round of the boardroom bout, which was scheduled to coincide with the conclusion of the competitions.[12] Before that boardroom finale took place, however, thanks to Japan's acquiescence in Shanghai, the athletes finally took to the fields for the competitions, while the negotiators took a break from the boardroom to tour the banquet halls and implement their charm offensives.

The Charm Offensives

Instead of borrowing a coast guard ship like the Philippine team had done in 1921, Chinese athletes and coaches disembarked for the Philippines on the *President McKinley* – one of the Dollar Steamships that we encountered in Chapter 2.[13] After arriving in Manila six days later but still before the start of the Games, Chinese coaches, athletes, and delegates prepared for the critical pre-competition ceremony circuit, which required charisma, tact, and subtlety. The vice-president of the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation Jorge Vargas laid out the stakes of the banquets, declaring, "We do not lose sight of the fact that complete success shall not be attained if [the Games] fail to foster friendly feeling with the other nations participating in the meet."[14] Fortunately for China, seasoned diplomat Chengting Thomas Wang, who headed the Chinese delegation, and famous swimmer Yeung Sau-king (Yang Xiuqiong 楊秀瓊), who headed the Chinese swim team, led the charge.

With champagne glasses clinking and laughter reverberating through elegant halls, everything seemed to be falling into place for China. According to reports, when the shining star of China's athletic world, Yeung Sau-king, entered the Great Harmony Club, "it felt like the entire party increased in vigor."[15] Although the Bank of China director and head of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines, Alfonso Sycip (Xue Fenshi 薛芬士), whom we encountered briefly in the previous chapter, gave a gracious toast, and Chengting Thomas Wang followed with a honed diplomatic speech, the "Chinese Mermaid," as Yeung became known, stole the show, wowing the over 600 athletes, journalists,

[12] Ibid. [13] Zhou Zudao, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui jiyao," 50.
[14] Vargas, "Vargas Appeals for Cooperation and Patronage," 11.
[15] Gan Bun Cho (Yan Wenchu 顏文初), "Yuandong huizhong san da yanhui ji 遠東會中三大讌會紀 [Record of Three Banquets at the Far Eastern Games]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 77.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

and well-to-do politicians and businesspeople in attendance on the sixth floor of the China Banking Corporation building.[16]

Several days later, on May 16, 1934, at 5:15 PM, Yeung Sau-king slipped into the waters of the newly constructed Philippine aquatic center to compete in the fifty-meter freestyle final.[17] According to reports, the "competition between Chinese and Filipino athletes was extremely fierce."[18] Dispelling any potential anxieties of readers back home, one Chinese reporter described how the "expeditionary women's force (遠征之娘子軍)," or the Chinese swim team, left the "local Filipino women's team in their wakes."[19] But for Yeung Sau-king and her fellow swimmers, victory in the pool was the easy part, and her new Chinese record of 36.93 seconds almost seemed like an afterthought.[20] As observed in Chapter 7, female athletes carried an extra burden as both competitors and symbols of femininity, and they felt it necessary to develop "numerous and often competing strategies to cope with the dissonance between masculine sport and feminine womanhood," as sports historian Susan Cahn explains.[21]

A strong physical performance in the pool, which set athletes apart from their Carnival Queen sisters, necessitated an exaggerated performance of femininity in the banquet circuit to assuage fickle male reporters and onlookers. Back at the opening ceremony four days before, Yeung Sau-king and her compatriots had weathered unabashed male ogling.[22] Gan Bun Cho (Yan Wenchu 顏文初), one such ogler who appears elsewhere in this book, directed his gaze at the Chinese women athletes who followed the flag bearers in the procession at the opening ceremony, writing, "For our healthy, strong, and beautiful female athletes, their facial features, skin, and muscles were all exceedingly exemplary."[23]

Male Filipino pundits, for their part, shared Gan's obsession, especially when discussing Filipina swimmers. One commentator, for instance,

[16] For more on Yeung Sau-king, see Gao, *Sporting Gender*, 166–207; Morris, "The Me in the Mirror," 107–125; and Hsiao-Pei Yen, "Body Politics, Modernity and National Salvation: The Modern Girl and the New Life Movement," *Asian Studies Review* 29 (2005): 180.

[17] For more on the construction of this and other stadiums for the games, see Gan Bun Cho (Yan Wenchu 顏文初), "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui kaimu shengkuang 第十届遠東運動會開幕盛況 [The Spectacular Opening Ceremony of the Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 22.

[18] "Nüzi youyong biaoyan 女子游泳表演 [Women's Swimming Performance]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 64.

[19] Ibid. [20] "Nüzi youyong biaoyan," 64.

[21] Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women's Sport* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 4.

[22] For more on ogling in sports, see Morris, "Me in the Mirror," 111.

[23] Gan Bun Cho, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui kaimu shengkuang," 22.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

described how the "tanksplashers who are educated enough not to be ashamed to appear before the public" were a "novelty to see."[24] Meanwhile, Filipino lawmakers infused the ceremony with the pomp of a country on the verge of independence, raising the performative responsibilities of female and male athletes alike. The opening ceremony featured school children singing the national anthem in a brand-new stadium with flags flying and crowds cheering.[25] On this international stage, the "proper" gendered performance was paramount. With this in mind, Gan assured his readers in China that Filipino and American spectators allocated appropriate applause to Chinese representatives.[26]

Back at the pool, the Filipino athlete some called the "king of the pool," male swimmer Teófilo Yldefonso, who was the first Filipino to win an Olympic medal, anchored the Filipino men's swimming team.[27] As in years past, he secured the gold in the 200-meter breaststroke at the Games. Yldefonso no doubt garnered the respect of the home audience, but the Japanese men carried away the hardware for most of the men's aquatic events, "breaking all existing records of the Far East except the 200-meter breaststroke."[28] Filipino women didn't fare much better than their male compatriots. Although they came in a close second in the 50-meter and 100-meter freestyle competitions, they simply couldn't keep up with Chinese stars Liu Guizhen (劉桂珍) and Yeung Sau-king.

Before the Filipino "king of the pool" added another medal to his collection at the Games, back during the banquet circuit several days earlier, the Filipino "king of the banquet," Senate President and soon-to-be Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon had stepped up to the podium to impress all with his elocution.[29] At yet another banquet at the Pan-Pacific Association of China on Calle Herran, Quezon no doubt earned the respect of attendees, but the chair of the Japanese Amateur Athletic Federation, Hiranuma Ryōzō, left his own indelible mark by

[24] F. N. Carl, "Watch Our Girls!" in *Tenth Far Eastern Olympiad* (Manila: The Sports Review, 1934), 64.
[25] Gan Bun Cho, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui kaimu shengkuang," 22–24.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Pedro D. Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," *Philippine Magazine* 31, no. 6 (1934): 233. For more on Teófilo Yldefonso and Philippine Olympic records, see John Grasso, Bill Mallon, and Jeroen Heijmans, *Historical Dictionary of the Olympic Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 473–474.
[28] Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 233.
[29] For Quezon's invitation and thank-you letter, see, Gregorio Nieva, letter to Manuel L. Quezon, May 10, 1934, series 7, box 77, Pres. Manuel Luis Quezon Papers, National Library of the Philippines; and Hawada, letter to Manuel L. Quezon, May 14, 1934, series 7, box 77, Pres. Manuel Luis Quezon Papers, National Library of the Philippines. See also Manuel L. Quezon, "President Quezon Greets Olympians," in *Tenth Far Eastern Olympiad* (Manila: The Sports Review, 1934), 9.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

delivering his speech entirely in Japanese to a confused audience.[30] However, it was Chengting Thomas Wang – who had been outclassed by Yeung Sau-king at the previous banquet but settled into his element in this more formal evening banquet – who blew everyone away, stating, "after the Philippines gains independence and you [Quezon] are elected the first president, we will have the opportunity to all meet together again in the Malacañang" – the presidential palace of the Philippines.[31] Charm accomplished.

The pool and the party flowed together. The ceremony and the competition became one. Wang, or the social "merman," as one might call him, swam through the ceremony circuit with the grace of a fish, charming his hosts and capturing hearts. Meanwhile, Yeung outclassed her Filipino competitors in the pool and even put Wang to shame in the banquet circuit, charming her hosts and satisfying oglers. While the Filipino old hats Quezon and Yldefonso still demanded respect with their long and storied careers, it became clear to attendees that the Chinese visitors were the stars of this show. Unfortunately for the "Chinese mermaid" and the "Chinese merman," however, the basketball court and the boardroom, which would decide the fate of the Far Eastern Games and Far Eastern Athletic Association respectively, were the turf of the "Filipino Islanders," and the visitors became fish out of water.

The Triangle Offense

Chapter 7 began with a stunning Chinese basketball triumph in 1921, so it is only fitting that Chapter 9 ends with a controversial Philippine victory that mirrored a far more controversial Philippine boardroom betrayal in 1934. The new Philippine basketball team featured breakout stars, including Jacinto Ciria Cruz, who would also lead the team in Berlin two years later; Bibiano Ouano, the "foremost basketball center in the Islands"; and old timers, like Mariano Filomeno, who had competed for the Islanders in every Far Eastern Championship Games since 1923.[32] But China had its own bevy of stars with Wang Yuzeng (王玉增), Tang Baokun (唐寶堃), and team captain Chen Shikun (陳實坤) leading the

[30] Gan Bun Cho, "Yuandong huizhong san da yanhui ji," 77. Ryōzō did the same thing at the opening ceremony; see, Gan Bun Cho "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui kaimu shengkuang," 24.

[31] Gan Bun Cho, "Yuandong huizhong san da yanhui ji," 77. The Malacañang is the presidential palace in the Philippines where the president currently resides and where the governor-general used to reside.

[32] Bocobo and Celis, *Legends and Heroes*, 57 and 72; Ignacio F. Lim, "The Turn of the Tide," in *Tenth Far Eastern Olympiad* (Manila: The Sports Review, 1934), 86; and Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 234.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

way.[33] These superstars led China and the Philippines to separate victories over Japan to start the competition, setting the stage for their first head to head match.[34]

According to a Filipino reporter, the first game between China and the Philippines took place in front of the "biggest crowd known in the history of the sport in the Far East."[35] A Chinese reporter explained that an extra seven to eight hundred ticketless spectators squeezed into the overflowing stadium, causing police to lose control of the crowd.[36] Needless to say, spectators and journalists were psyched for this heavyweight matchup. But while the metaphysical stage was set for the competition between the Philippines and China, the physical stage was not. Delayed construction funds, which poured out only four months before the start of the Games, prevented the builders from pouring out the concrete for the basketball stadium.[37] As a result, Chinese and Filipino players met on a temporary wooden court setup on the open-air tennis court, which had just hosted a tennis match a few hours before.[38]

Meanwhile, after the board meetings of the Far Eastern Athletic Association in Shanghai in April, and after the ceremony circuit at the start of the Games in Manila, the stage was also set for the final boardroom bash in Manila, but the question of Manchukuo continued to hang over the deliberations like a storm cloud over an uncovered basketball court. The Chinese and Philippine diplomatic delegations, just like their star-studded basketball teams, carried a plethora of diplomatic all-stars. Chengting Thomas Wang of banquet-circuit fame and William Z. L. Sung (Shen Siliang 沈嗣良), Secretary of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation, led the charge for China. On the other side, Senate President Manuel L. Quezon, also from the prestigious banquet circuit, and Jorge B. Vargas, Vice-President of the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, headed up the Philippine delegation. Springfield College alumni and fellow

[33] Zhou Zudao, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui jiyao, 51.
[34] "Lanqiu jinbiao 籃球錦標 [The Basketball Title]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 40.
[35] Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 234.
[36] "Zhongfei lanqiu zhankuang 中菲籃球戰況 [Sino–Philippine Basketball Battle Situation]," *Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui tekan* 第十届遠東運動會特刊 [Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games Special Magazine], 31.
[37] Gan Bun Cho, "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui kaimu shengkuang," 22. The money was released in June of 1933 and construction began on a new soccer stadium, swimming complex, basketball arena, and tennis stadium in January.
[38] Yun Chen, "Yuandong yundonghui zhi guoqu yu xianzai," 4. For an aerial image of the courts and a schedule of matches, see "Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui zong zhixubiao 第十届遠東運動會總秩序表 [General Program of the Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui tekan* 第十届遠東運動會特刊 [Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games Special Magazine], 6.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010



Figure 9.1 Springfield Reunion at the Japan Far Eastern Championship Games, 1931

boardroom delegates Regino Ylanan, Hoh Gunsun, and John Mo played critical, hands-on roles in the negotiations as well (Figure 9.1).[39]

Three days earlier, on the basketball/tennis court, uncooperative weather interrupted the Chinese and Filipino basketball stars. At halftime, with the Philippines up 26 to 12, the weather gods intervened, ordering a monsoon storm over the uncovered wooden court.[40] The head coach of the Philippine team, Alfredo del Rosario, swayed by the halftime score, lobbied to finish the game, waterlogged court be damned, while Chinese delegate William Z. L. Sung called for postponement given the unsafe conditions.[41] The referees initially awarded victory to the Islanders in the

[39] For the rosters of attendees, see Regino R. Ylanan, ed., *Official Rule and Handbook, 1936–1937* (Manila: Philippine Amateur Athletic Association, 1937), 6–7; and "Ri jiesan Yuandong yundonghui zhi jingguo 日解散遠東運動會之經過 [How Japan Dismantled the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui tekan* 第十届遠東運動會特刊 [Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games Special Magazine], 47.

[40] "Zhongfei lanqiu zhankuang," 31.

[41] "Lanqiu jinbiao," 41. According to the rules adopted before the Games commenced, if rain fell before a basketball game, the game would be moved indoors to the University of Santo Tomas, but if it rained during a game then the game would be rescheduled.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

abbreviated match before Far Eastern Athletic Association officials intervened to overturn their decision and reschedule the game. The frustrated coaches and players then returned to their drawing boards to draft new game plans that accounted for key missing players. China had lost star Wang Yuzeng and the Philippines had lost Bibiano Ouano to injury during the game.[42]

Back at the meetings, China and the Philippines also proceeded without star diplomats Chengting Thomas Wang and Manuel L. Quezon, who both called in sick.[43] Perhaps this was no coincidence, as the first board meeting ended in an impasse and the second meeting, which reportedly had an "exceedingly intense atmosphere," dragged on for four hours, only ending when the Chinese delegation walked out in frustration.[44] After failing to reach a decision on Manchukuo, with China refusing to recognize the new member for obvious reasons, the Japanese delegation began to broach the possibility of disbanding the Far Eastern Athletic Federation altogether and replacing it with a new organization to circumvent China's protests.[45] To this proposal, William Z. L. Sung vented his frustration, complaining that Japan "wanted to seduce the Philippines into recognizing the false organization."[46] The temperature of the room increased, as it is wont to do on a summer day in Manila.

Back at the basketball court, after the actual storm had passed, the Islanders continued their winning streak with a less controversial defeat of China in the second round on May 18. Addressing the defeat, one Chinese commentator, in a column rife with racialized imagery, wrote, "in the second half the Philippine offense increased in speed and intensity, [with players] advancing in all directions like monkeys."[47] With more

[42] "Lanqiu jinbiao," 41; "Far Eastern Games in Manila," *The North-China Herald* [Zilin xingqi zhoukan 字林星期周刊], May 23, 1934, 277–278; and Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 234. Wang Yuzeng was only out for this game, whereas Ouano was out for the series with a broken wrist.

[43] William Z. L. Sung, "Chuxi Yuanyunhui ge daibiao tanhua," 9. Another journalist described how some Chinese athletes also got sick due to the unfamiliar food and climate in the Philippines. See Zhou Jiaqi 周家騏, "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo 遠東運動會談座 [Discussion on the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Huamei* 華美 *[Hwa Mei Weekly]* 1, no. 3 (1934): 4.

[44] "Ri jiesan Yuandong yundonghui," 47. See also Sung, "Chuxi Yuanyunhui," 9.

[45] Goodman, "Japan, the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Olympics of 1934," 30.

[46] William Z. L. Sung (Shen Siliang 沈嗣良), "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo 遠東運動會談座 [Discussion on the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Huamei* 華美 *[Hwa Mei Weekly]* 1, no. 3 (1934): 2. In more gendered language, he also purportedly said, "it seems that the Philippines are pretty well tied to Japan's apron strings." See "Result of Manila Games Quarrels," *The North-China Herald* [Zilin xingqi zhoukan 字林星期周刊], May 30, 1934, 318.

[47] "Zhongfei lanqiu zhankuang 中菲之戰詳記 [Detailed Record of the Sino–Philippine Battle]," *Di shi jie Yuandong yundonghui tekan* 第十届遠東運動會特刊 [Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games Special Magazine], 31.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

poise and introspection, Springfield alum Thomas H. Suvoong, who served as the assistant coach of the Chinese athletic delegation, explained that inexperience playing in the tropics hampered the otherwise gallant Chinese performance.[48] After this routine Philippine victory, however, something shocking happened on the basketball courts. The Islanders fell to the Japanese team that they had soundly defeated days before, stunning the crowds in Manila.[49]

An even more shocking event in the boardroom stunned newspaper readers in Manila and around the world a few days later. The Philippines also succumbed to Japan at the negotiation table. Hiranuma Ryōzō and the Japanese delegation, on May 21, their planned day of departure, scheduled a last-minute board meeting to decide the fate of the Far Eastern Athletic Association. According to conflicting reports, representatives from Japan and the Philippines tried and failed to reach a member of the Chinese delegation to inform them of the meeting.[50] With no Chinese representative present, Japan and the Philippines proceeded as a committee of two. Together, they agreed to disband the Far Eastern Athletic Association and replace it with a brand-new organization, the Amateur Athletic Association of the Orient, with Manchukuo as a member. They also scheduled a new athletic competition for Tokyo in 1938.[51] Fresh off the boat back in China, William Z. L. Sung reportedly called this "nothing less than a farce."[52]

The final basketball match between China and the Philippines had likewise been rescheduled to May 20, but unlike the last-minute board meeting, Chinese players actually received the memo and took to the court. The result for China was similar, however, as the Philippines pulled away with the victory, forty-four to thirty-three. Chinese observers cried foul, complaining that the four early fouls on star Tang Baokun, which sidelined him just like his boardroom compatriots, reflected a larger pattern of unfair officiating by the refs.[53] On the court and in the boardroom, things began to fall apart for China, but boardroom negotiators still held out hope for a last-minute intervention from the

[48] Thomas Suvoong (Shu Hong 舒鴻), "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo 遠東運動會談座 [Discussion on the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Huamei* 華美 *[Hwa Mei Weekly]* 1, no. 3 (1934): 5. Fellow Springfield alum S. Y. Tung (Dong Shouyi 董守義) was the basketball coach at the Far Eastern Championship Games. See Zhou Zudao, "Di shijie Yuandong yundonghui jiyao," 151.

[49] "Lanqiu jinbiao," 43.

[50] "Result of the Manila Games Quarrels," 318; and Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 256. William Z. L. Sung testified that the Chinese negotiators never received word of the meeting. See Sung, "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo," 2.

[51] Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 256.

[52] Sung, "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo," 2.

[53] "Lanqiu jinbiao," 45.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

boardroom referee, Manuel Quezon. Was it possible that, as with the overturning of the referee's decision in the first rain-shortened Sino–Philippine basketball match, the powers above would intervene and reestablish order and fairness in the final round of the boardroom bout?

The absent Manuel Quezon became the man of the hour, and his silence on the negotiations allowed Chinese and Japanese representatives, just like sports talking heads interpreting the silence of an athlete on a social media purge today, to play the speculation game. William Z. L. Sung reported that he had sent an appeal to Quezon, noting that the senate president was the "only person who clearly understood the situation."[54] Japanese representatives of the Japanese Amateur Athletic Federation, on the other hand, apparently believed that Quezon was on their side because they sent a congratulatory telegram to the recovering statesman, writing "most hearty thanks" for "your supreme decision" on admitting Manchukuo.[55]

In the end, the silence remained unbroken. Manuel Quezon and the government of the Philippines, which had informally recognized Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime in 1927 before almost any other country with a semi-official visit, as outlined in Chapter 6, ended up providing a similar recognition to Manchukuo in 1934, thereby becoming "the first government, outside of Japan, to recognize that Manchukuo was not a part of China."[56] In other words, unlike the first basketball match when officials intervened at the eleventh hour to restore some semblance of fairness for Chinese athletes, Quezon offered no such intervention for Chinese delegates in their boardroom bout.

Reflecting back on the Games as a whole, one Filipino pundit lamented, "Years ago, we could beat the Japanese in almost any game and at any time . . . but today, for the Filipinos to win over the Japanese in any sport is for an hippopotamus to pass through the eye of a needle."[57] Despite their continued supremacy in basketball and a surprise victory over Japan in baseball, Filipino athletes on the whole underperformed. In the track and field events, for instance, which the Philippines had previously dominated, Japan left with an overwhelming victory, fifty-one points to nineteen points.[58] For the Philippines, the decision to side with Japan in boardroom negotiations was not a proud one, but it was a practical one. And pundits naturally disagreed.

[54] William Z. L. Sung, "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo," 2.
[55] Nippon Delegation, radiogram telegram to Manuel L. Quezon, May 22, 1934, series 7, box 77, Pres. Manuel Luis Quezon Papers, National Library of the Philippines.
[56] *Philippines Free Press*, May 1934, quoted in Goodman, "Athletics as Politics," 31.
[57] Lim, "The Turn of the Tide," 86.
[58] Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 233.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

Commentators from the Philippines and China skewered members of the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation for their perceived capitulation to Japan. The influential editor of the *Philippine Magazine*, for instance, called the action "a piece of unmatchable stupidity."[59] Springfield alum Hoh Gunsun, who knew several of his Filipino counterparts from the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation from their Springfield days, similarly pulled no punches, uppercutting the Philippine delegation by condescendingly inquiring how they could sell out their autonomy to Japan if their goal was to prove that they could defend their independence from Japan.[60] Hoh, showing familiarity with the political situation in the archipelago, located a weak spot for the Philippines because, just like in 1921, Filipinos had independence on their minds due to the recent passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, which established a framework for Philippine independence. With Japan waiting in the wings, however, many were questioning the wisdom of cutting ties with the United States.

Lead negotiator for the Philippines, Jorge Vargas, who had stood firm on the Manchukuo question in Shanghai, attempted to deflect some of the criticism with discursive gymnastics, writing, "we have nothing but the highest esteem and respect for our Chinese friends and we wish to assure them that our position has been dictated only by an impartial desire to adhere strictly to the language of the Constitution."[61] Unfortunately for Vargas, gymnastics was not one of the recognized sports of the Far Eastern Championship Games. One Filipino commentator, who went by the name Putakte, or wasp, quipped, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to send our athletes to Shanghai and Secretary Vargas to Tokyo to represent the Philippines in 1938?"[62]

On the other hand, back in China, Springfield alumnus John Mo, who had served as the head coach of the Chinese athletic delegation, struck a diplomatic tone by avoiding the controversy of the boardroom altogether, instead highlighting the accomplishments and failures of athletes on the field.[63] When sports become inexorably tied up in politics, the

[59] Hartendorp, "Stupidity – Nothing More or Less," 237.

[60] Hoh Gunsun (Hao Gengsheng 郝更生) et al., "Yuandong yundonghui tanzuo 遠東運動會談座 [Discussion on the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Huamei* 華美 *[Hwa Mei Weekly]* 1, no. 3 (1934): 3. For more on Hoh Gunsun's role in the deliberations, see also Feng Youzhen 冯有真, "Di shijie yuandong yundonghui jixiang 第十届远东运动会记详 [Record of the Tenth Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Shishi yuebao* 时事月报 *[Current Events]* 11, no. 1 (1934): 41.

[61] Jorge Vargas, quoted in Villanueva, "The Xth Far Eastern Championship Games," 256.

[62] Putakte, "With Charity to All," *Philippine Magazine* 31, no. 6 (1934): 238.

[63] John Mo (Ma Yuehan 馬約翰), "Chuxi yuanyunhui ge daibiao tanhua 出席遠運會各代表談話 [Discussion by Representatives of the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 9.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

wise coach knows how to channel their inner Houdini. Diplomat Chengting Thomas Wang, meanwhile, also sounded a positive note upon his return to China, saying, "Our country and the Philippines maintain extremely friendly relations, and though the Philippines has been duped by Japan, they will soon realize and regret this decision."[64] When negotiations appear unreconcilable, the wise diplomat likewise knows how to leave open a side door.

Two sweltering weeks under the Manila summer sun were merely the trailer for the calamities of the next decade. Though the events of the weeks faded into the pages of history, the lessons echoed through the ages like the reverberations of a well-struck baseball in a hushed stadium. It would be impossible for the Philippines to remain neutral in the conflict between China and Japan in sports disputes and in war. The athletes themselves would learn that lesson, of course, as most of them ended up serving during the war, trading jerseys for a different kind of uniform, meeting their old foes on a different type of battlefield.[65] It also provided a lesson that perhaps all of us should heed: beware when using war metaphors in sports because those metaphors might come back to haunt you.

Part IV Conclusion, Game Over

Before the 1934 Games took place, a commentator in an obscure Chinese journal, perhaps with the early boardroom bouts in mind, wondered aloud whether the Far Eastern Championship Games would die of natural causes before the 1938 meeting in Tokyo.[66] History ended up confirming the author's suspicions as the controversial Games never took place due to the Second Sino–Japanese War. It was an inglorious end to an organization that had brought together athletes, coaches, and organizers from the Japan–China–Philippines sports triangle multiple times over the course of two decades.

After the war, however, the Springfield crew were at it again. Regino Ylanan, Candido Bartolome, and Gunsun Hoh met in Manila in June of

[64] Chengting Thomas Wang (Wang Zhengting 王正廷), "Chuxi yuanyunhui ge daibiao tanhua 出席遠運會各代表談話 [Discussion by Representatives of the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Qinfen tiyu yuebao* 勤奮體育月報 *[Chin Fen Sports Monthly]* 1, no. 9 (1934): 8.

[65] For a brief history of Springfield alumni Serafin Aquino, Pedro Ablan, and Geronimo Suva, and their role in World War II, see "Class of 1920," August 10, 1945, Springfield College Archives; and *The 50th Reunion of the Class of 1921*, June 4, 1971, Springfield: Springfield College.

[66] Mao 茂, "Yi zhou shishi pingshu: Yuandong yundonghui siwang 一週時事評述：遠東運動會死亡 [Comments on Current Affairs This Week: Death of the Far Eastern Championship Games]," *Huzhu* 互助 *[Mutual Assistance]* 1, no. 7 (1934): 167.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010

1948 to reestablish the Far Eastern Athletic Association.[67] They agreed to formalize the arrangement at the London Olympics later that year, but when the Olympics came around, they adjusted their plans, agreeing instead to join the new Asian Games Federation, trading the sports triangle for a broader regional conglomeration. The Games would be reborn as the Asian Games in 1951 under the patronage of a new shining star in the Asian banquet circuit, Indian president Jawaharlal Nehru.[68] At the new Games, some things remained the same, like Filipino domination in basketball, but the larger more decentralized event had a different feel than the intimate triangle of old.[69]

Sports bridged many divides in Asia. It linked athletes, coaches, and educators from China, the Philippine, and Japan, making visible the intense world of contact that crossed over area studies boundaries. Sports also linked together two critical sporting events in 1921 and 1934, which represented a peak and a nadir, though by no means the totality, of the broader Sino–Philippine link. The Springfield College interregnum offered a captivating contingency that enhanced the connections established during the Far Eastern Championship Games and the drama of its dissolution. Sports exposed the extensive entanglements between politics and society, as boardroom antics spilled into the arenas below, and as former athletes moved to the boardrooms above.

In the end, it is important to recognize the awesome power of sports. In a 1930 article about Filipino national hero José Rizal that appeared in a Chinese research journal, the writer noted that, if readers "just take a look at their [Filipinos'] record from the previous Far Eastern Championship Games, those who don't know much about the character of Filipinos, can surmise that they are arduously working to improve their circumstances."[70] In other words, this Chinese author, in an article designed to teach about Philippine history and society, used sports as the common language to engage the reader. You might not know about this fellow called Bill Clinton, but you must have heard about the legend that is Michael Jordan?

[67] Ylanan and Ylanan, *Physical Education and Sports*, 137.

[68] Huebner, *Pan-Asian Sports*, 102–124. Guru Dutt Sondhi and Anthony S. de Mello played more important roles in the foundation of the games, but President Nehru brought his star power.

[69] For more on Philippine basketball success in the 1950s, see Bocobo and Celis, *Legends and Heroes*, 20.

[70] Chen Zongshan 陳宗山, "Feilübin de guofu – Lisha 菲律賓的國父 – 李沙 [Father of the Philippines – Rizal]," *Nanyang yanjiu* 南洋研究 *[The Nanyang Research]* 3, no. 2 (1930): 85.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 14 Nov 2026 at 11:34:38, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009359207.010