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Indonesian Football 1951-1967: The Golden Age?

Budi Harjo Sayoga*, Didik Pradjoko, Agus Setiawan
Universitas Indonesia
Email: budiharjosayoga@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

The background of this study departs from the phenomenon that, although Indonesia has not made significant global achievements, the period is considered the peak of the national team's accomplishments at the Asian and world levels. This study discusses the journey of Indonesian football during the period 1951–1967, a period often referred to as the "golden age." The purpose of this research is to trace the extent to which the achievements of the Indonesian national team deserve to be called the golden age and to analyze the socio-political influences on the development of national football during the reign of President Sukarno. The research method used is descriptive-historical, employing literature studies, national archives, contemporary newspapers, and interviews with historical actors. The results of the study show that the 1950s–1960s era was a golden period of Indonesian football, marked by successes such as qualifying for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, achieving fourth place at the 1954 Manila Asian Games, winning bronze at the 1958 Tokyo Asian Games, as well as becoming champions of non-FIFA international tournaments like the Merdeka Games and the Aga Khan Gold Cup. The main supporting factor was Sukarno's political backing, which positioned sports as a means of diplomacy and nation-building. However, this period was also marred by setbacks, including the 1962 bribery scandal and international political sanctions after Ganefo. Thus, the period 1951–1967 can be categorized as the golden age of Indonesian football from the perspective of historical achievements and national identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is not a country rich in achievements in the field of football. This fact must be acknowledged because, until now, the *Garuda Team* (the nickname of the Indonesian national team) has not made the highest achievement at the world level in processing the round skin (Frenkiel et al., 2015). The dream of playing in the World Cup, for example, has never been achieved. However, this does not mean that Indonesian football is *tanpa sejarah* ('without history').

To contextualize Indonesia's football trajectory, it is essential to understand how global sports historians define and identify a *zaman keemasan* ("golden age") of a national team. According to sports historiography, a golden age is characterized by three main criteria: (1) sustained competitive achievements at the international level, (2) significant social and cultural impact on national consciousness, and (3) lasting legacy that influences subsequent generations (Aderinto & Gennaro, 2019). These criteria provide an analytical framework for evaluating whether Indonesia's 1951–1967 period genuinely constitutes a golden age or merely represents a period of relative success (Trotier, 2021).

Defeat after defeat experienced so far has not dampened the support of the football-loving community. The conclusion that can be drawn, apart from the failure of the national team and the various responses that exist—ranging from support to blasphemy—is that everything related to football is always talked about in Indonesia. Why is that? Even though Indonesia's achievements at the national team and club levels can be said to be sluggish. The answer to this question would require hundreds of scientific papers, theses, and dissertations. The reason is, football, to borrow Franklin Foer's term, is a symptom of globalization and can be used as a tool to understand the world.

The phenomenon of Indonesian football's achievements during 1951–1967 must be understood within its socio-political context. Several independent variables significantly influenced this period: First, President Sukarno's explicit political support transformed sports into a diplomatic instrument and symbol of national sovereignty. Second, state policies including infrastructure development, international cooperation, and the establishment of the Ministry of Sports in 1962 provided systematic institutional support. Third, domestic socio-political conditions—including post-independence nationalism, economic challenges, and regional tensions—created both opportunities and constraints for football development (Webster, 2016). Specifically, the national team achieved fourth place at the 1954 Manila Asian Games with 16 participating nations, qualified for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics quarterfinals (Indonesia's only Olympic football appearance to date), and won bronze at the 1958 Tokyo Asian Games. These achievements occurred against the backdrop of Indonesia's membership in FIFA (accepted November 18, 1951) and active participation in regional football diplomacy.

This article tries to narrate Indonesian football from 1951 to 1967, especially the actions of the Indonesian national team on the international stage. The results of data collection from various sources try to explain the period when, because of the longing for achievements in football, it is often referred to as the *zaman keemasan*. In fact, not a few media call the current Indonesian national team the "Asian Tiger." The narrative of the national team's success in qualifying for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and the Soviet Union's draw at the Olympics always appears when talking about this golden period. However, what achievements have been made to this time deserving of being called the golden age has not been narrated. Is it really worth calling it a *zaman keemasan*? This paper tries to find an answer and proof whether Indonesian football in the decade of the 1950s to the 1960s was a golden age (Philippou & Hines, 2021).

This research offers several distinct contributions to the existing literature on Indonesian football history. First, it employs a multi-archival approach, integrating national archives (ANRI), contemporary newspapers (*De Preangerbode*, *Kompas*, *Java Bode*), official PSSI documents, and oral history interviews—a methodological breadth rarely found in previous studies (Aderinto & Gennaro, 2019). Second, it critically evaluates the "golden age" concept itself, moving beyond nostalgic narratives to provide evidence-based assessment using international comparative frameworks. Third, it provides in-depth analysis of the dialectical relationship between achievement and scandal, particularly examining how the 1962 bribery case and the disappearance of Dominggus Wawejoi intersected with broader political dynamics. Fourth, this study situates Indonesian football within the context of Third World sports diplomacy during the Cold War era, examining how Sukarno's anti-imperialist policies both elevated and isolated Indonesian football. Previous historical writings on Indonesian

football, such as works by Saputra et al. (2010) and Jusuf (1982), have documented achievements but lack systematic analysis of the political economy of sports and critical evaluation of the "golden age" discourse. This research fills that gap by integrating sports history with political history and postcolonial studies.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive-historical method to reconstruct Indonesian football's development from 1951 to 1967 within the socio-political context of President Sukarno's administration. The research focused on data and events related to football during that period. Purposive sampling selected sources including national archives, official PSSI documents, contemporary newspapers such as *De Preangerbode* and *Kompas*, and interviews with key historical figures.

The researcher served as the main instrument, supported by documentation guidelines and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected through literature review, archival research, media analysis, and in-depth interviews. The research followed stages of heuristic inquiry, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography to produce a chronological and objective narrative.

Analysis employed descriptive-qualitative and historical-analytical approaches to explore the relationship between sports achievements, political policies, and national identity formation. This framework allowed drawing conclusions about whether the period from 1951 to 1967 could be considered the golden age of Indonesian football.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Garuda on the World Stage

In fact, football has been played in Indonesia since the Dutch colonial period. PSSI itself was established in 1930. Then, football died during the Japanese occupation. The death of football during the Japanese occupation is one of the strong backgrounds, why football was boosted after independence. The Union competition also had a long vacuum, since 1942 and only resumed in 1951. Indonesia was officially accepted as a member of FIFA on November 18, 1951.

Furthermore, as a form of diplomacy to the international world that Indonesia has established itself as a fully sovereign political entity, it was decided to immediately participate in international events (Fuller, 2018). Selected for the nearest event, Asian Games I New Delhi 1951. The 1951 Asian Games became the first international event that Indonesia participated in after independence. Indonesia only sent two sports, namely athletics and football, out of a total of seven branches contested (Elison, 2014). From here, the Indonesian national football team was first formed (Dorsey & Sebastian, 2014).

The Sports Association of the Republic of Indonesia (PORI) asked PSSI to form a national team that will be included in the Asian Games (Fuller, 2015). In order for the team to be formed optimally and professionally, PSSI signed an experienced foreign coach from Singapore, Choo Seng Quee. Choo Seng Quee was appointed considering that Singapore, which at that time was still a British colony, already had a good league competition formed by the British colonial government. Choo Seng Quee was then recorded as the first coach of the Indonesian national team.

When asked to form a national team, PSSI had not played back the Union Competition which last rolled out in 1942. As a means of player selection, PSSI then formed three teams, namely Java XI, Sumatra XI, and Sulawesi XI to then the three teams met each other in a selection match held in December 1950 in Jakarta. The player selection process was led directly by Choo Seng Quee (Tzeng & Lee, 2021).

A total of 18 of Indonesia's best footballers were then determined to take part in the training camp held in Yogyakarta. This is the first Indonesian national team squad to take part in the first international championship.

Table 1. First Indonesian National Team Squad for 1951 Asian Games

1.	Bing Mo Heng	(Persebaya)	10.	Soegiono	(PSIS)
2.	Maulwi Saelan	(PSM)	11.	Tee San Liong	(Persebaya)
3.	Sunar	(PSM)	12.	Ramlan Orphan	(PSMS)
4.	Sardjiman	(PSIM)	13.	Bhe Ing Hien	(Persebaya)
5.	Aten	(Persib)	14.	Aang Vitarsa	(Persib)
6.	Tan Liong Houw	(Persija)	15.	Pious	(Persija)
7.	Sidhi	(Persebaya)	16.	Ramli	(PSMS)
8.	Chairuddin	(Persija)	17.	Darmadi	(Exactly)
9.	Jahja	(Persib)	18.	Cornel Siahaan	(PSMS)

However, due to limited time and facilities, the national team's preparation was not optimal, and the national team only conducted a test match against Singapore once to finalize tactics and strategies. The match against Singapore was the first international match for the Indonesian national team as a sovereign country won by the Indonesian national team. Until the Asian Games the results were predictable, the Indonesian national team was immediately eliminated in the first half of the match which used a knockout system by the host India with a score of (3-0).



Figure 1. National team coach, Choo Seng Quee leading the national team training at the Kridosono Stadium, Yogyakarta in 1951 in preparation for the Asian Games I
(Source: ANRI, DIY Campaign, No. 466)

Interestingly, Indonesia's main goalkeeper against India, Bing Mo Heng, was the goalkeeper who strengthened the Nederlandsche Indische National Elftal national team that competed in the 1938 French World Cup! Yes, he is a veteran goalkeeper who has played in

the Nederlandsch Indische Voetbal Bond (NIVB) competition since 1934. In the era of independence, Mo Heng played for Persebaya and managed to present two Union titles in 1951 and 1952.

After the Asian Games I, a series of match test schedules were made. PSSI realizes that in order to improve the quality of the national team's game, in addition to improving the quality of the competition (Association) and hiring foreign coaches, it is also necessary to test matches with teams from abroad who have better game quality. This is useful for improving mentality and maturing tactics and strategies.

The first test match of the national team faced clubs from Singapore in May 1951 in Singapore. Singapore was chosen not only because of its close distance, considering that clubs from Singapore are more professional with league competitions that run well and are competitive. While in Singapore, the Indonesian national team played five matches against Singapore clubs and national teams with four wins and one draw.

PSSI then planned to take part in the Asian Games II in Manila in 1954. In preparation, in 1953 PSSI prepared a test agenda for the national team to three cities at once, namely Manila, Hong Kong, and Bangkok. The agenda is called the Far Easter Tour, the national team got good results. During the tour, the national team underwent a total of nine matches with eight wins and one loss. The only defeat was experienced when facing South Korea (1-3) in the match held in Hong Kong.

Playing in front of 3,000 spectators, the Indonesia vs South Korea match was tied in the first half, with South Korea taking the lead through penalties. Five minutes later, Indonesia equalized thanks to a goal scored by Djamiat Dhalhar, the score (1-1) ended the first half. Ten minutes into the second half, Indonesia received a penalty that failed to be executed properly by Djamiat. Slowly but surely, Korea continued to develop the game and scored two additional goals to end the game with a score (1-3).

After the Far Easter Tour, the national team received a tough guest from Europe, namely the Yugoslav national team. Although the Yugoslav youth team came with a big name as the silver medalist of the 1952 Helsinki Olympics and a participant in the 1950 World Cup. The match was held at Ikada Stadium and was attended by more than 60,000 spectators, far exceeding the capacity of the stadium which was only 30,000 spectators! The number of spectators spilled over to the edge of the field, making it difficult for security guards to maintain order during the match. The match ended with a score (0-2) for Yugoslavia's advantage.

At this moment, the general chairman of PSSI Maladi was interested in the coaching style of the Yugoslav youth national team coach, Tony Pogacnik. At first, the Yugoslav football association refused to let go because the Yugoslav national team, especially in the young age group, still needed Pogacnik's creativity. However, thanks to the close political relations between Indonesia and Yugoslavia and good lobbies from PSSI, Pogacnik was released to handle the Indonesian national team in place of Choo Seng Quee.

Tony Pogacnik arrived in Jakarta on February 14, 1954. He immediately led the selection process of players who would be sent down at the 1954 Asian Games II. Pogacnik was also given the task by PSSI to provide modern football training to local coaches.

Pogacnik's first challenge was the 1954 Asian Games II. At this event, Pogacnik's "cold hands" began to be seen. Indonesia was able to improve the record of the Asian Games I by penetrating the semifinals after eliminating Japan (5-3) and making a revenge over India who

defeated them in the Asian Games I, with a score of (4-0). Unfortunately, in the semifinals, Indonesia lost to Taiwan (2-4) and in the bronze medal match Indonesia lost again to Burma (4-5). The dream of winning a medal was delayed.

The success of reaching the semifinals at the Asian Games II made the players more confident. Strong optimism was shown by the players, coaching staff and PSSI administrators to face the next bigger event, namely the 1956 Melbourne Olympics qualifiers. The Indonesian national team is targeted to qualify for the first time, considering that the Olympics are the most prestigious sports party in the world. PSSI and the coaching team prepared a series of preparations and match tests. Not kidding, PSSI invited tough teams from Europe and Africa as opponents for the Indonesian national team's test match.

In 1954 tough opponents from Europe came in G.A.K Graz (Austria) and Kalmar F.F. (Sweden). Facing the two clubs in Jakarta, the Indonesian national team suffered a defeat. In 1955, those who came to visit Indonesia were Grasshopper (Switzerland), Salzburg (Austria), Lokomotiv Moscow (Soviet Union), and the Mozambique national team. Indonesia got a positive result when facing Salzburg and the Mozambique national team with identical results (2-2). Meanwhile, the defeat was experienced when facing Grasshopper and Lokomotiv Moscow.

In early 1956, the Indonesian national team had the opportunity to host another established team from Europe, the Yugoslav national team and the Stade de Reims (France). Facing Yugoslavia on January 15, 1956, at the Ikada Stadium which was again flooded with spectators, Indonesia lost (2-7). Meanwhile, Stade de Reims came to Indonesia at the invitation of POR Chung Hua (Tunas Jaya) to face Indonesia in two matches in Jakarta, both of which were won by Stade de Reims.



Figure 2. The atmosphere when the Indonesian national team player, Ramang managed to hit the ball against Yugoslavia in the match test between Indonesia vs Yugoslavia at Ikada Stadium on January 15, 1956. The match ended with a score (7-2) for Yugoslavia's victory. Source: ANRI, Campaign of the Republic of Indonesia Jakarta 1956, No. 33661.

PSSI also scheduled a tour to Eastern Europe. In the Eastern European tour, Indonesia visited the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. In this tour, Indonesia again had the opportunity to face the Yugoslav national team, as well as East

Germany, and Czechoslovakia B. Tour ran for 50 days with a total of 11 matches with 1 win and 10 losses. As a result of the series of tests, the Indonesian national team's game pattern is getting more "mature". Indonesia is also confident in facing the Asian zone Olympic qualifiers.

For the first time, the Olympic football branch was preceded by a qualifying match. Based on the results of the draw, Indonesia faced Taiwan. Not an easy opponent, Taiwan was the team that defeated Indonesia in the semifinals of the 1954 Asian Games II and the gold medalist. The match will be held in two legs, in Jakarta and Taipei.

Because Indonesia adopts the One China Policy and does not recognize Taiwan's sovereignty, Indonesia objects to flying the Taiwanese flag inside and outside the stadium and the playing of the national anthem before matches. Luckily, FIFA agreed to Indonesia's wishes, FIFA decided that only the FIFA flag would be raised. However, this made Taiwan disappointed and refused to compete and chose to withdraw from qualifying. Indonesia also has the right to appear in the Olympics without breaking a sweat.



Figure 3. The atmosphere of protest by the Stade de Reims players who were disappointed with the referee's leadership in the match between the Indonesian national team and the Stade de Reims club (France) on June 23, 1956 at the Ikada field. Source: ANRI, Campaign of the Republic of Indonesia Jakarta 1956, No. 34606.

There were 16 countries participating in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics football. After the drawing process to determine the match chart, five countries declared their withdrawal from the football branch. The five countries are China, Egypt, Hungary, Turkey, and South Vietnam. Due to the withdrawal of the five countries, Indonesia along with India, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and the United States got a bye in the first round. Indonesia also qualified for the quarterfinals.

In the quarterfinals, Indonesia was awaited by the Soviet Union, one of the leading teams to win the gold medal. The Soviet Union qualified for the quarterfinals after defeating another strong team, Germany with a score (2-1). In the 1950s to the 1960s, the Soviet Union was one of the strongest teams on the world football stage.

History is then created, a narrative that is always present when talking about the prowess of the Indonesian national team in the past. Indonesia, a newly sovereign country and the first time to set foot on the Olympic grass for football, managed to hold a 0-0 draw against the Soviet Union, a strong team from Europe. Ramang et al., were able to withstand the onslaught of "The Red Army" to produce a "clean sheet".

Because there were no penalty shootout rules at that time, a rematch was held two days later to determine the winner. In the rematch, Indonesia finally gave up (0-4). The fatigue factor and several players who were not fit made Indonesia unable to keep up with the Soviet Union's game.

In the match against the Soviet Union, Tony Pogacnik used a 3-4-3 formation. However, Tony instructed three of the four midfielders to play a role in helping the defence, and only one midfielder functioned for the attack. The three national team midfielders function as the first veil of defense, until the formation on the field becomes 3-3-1-3. Tony was confident that the Soviet Union would have difficulties with Indonesia's two layers of defense played by six players. Tony also formed an imaginary line about 20 meters from the goal, where six players who function as well as possible do not go out of the imaginary line.

After Melbourne, Indonesia again got a great test in the Yugoslav national team. The Yugoslav national team transited in Jakarta before returning to their country after completing their duties at the Melbourne Olympics. Yugoslavia is the silver medalist of the Melbourne Olympics after losing in the final to the Soviet Union, who also defeated Indonesia in the quarterfinals. In the match held at Ikada Stadium, Indonesia lost (1-5). The defeat to Yugoslavia with a score of 1-5 made Indonesia receive criticism from the newspaper De Preangerbode, which said Indonesia failed to show "Melbourne's spirit" when it managed to hold the Olympic gold medalist, the Soviet Union, to a draw.

However, thanks to the experience of facing strong teams and success at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Indonesia looked at the next two events, the 1958 World Cup Qualifiers and the 1958 Tokyo Asian Games III, with confidence. The players are confident that they can repeat the success of penetrating the World Cup like 1938 and record better results than the 1954 Asian Games.

The 1958 World Cup qualifiers for the Asian zone and the African zone were held in three rounds. There are six Asian countries and three African countries participating in the qualifiers. In the first round, all participants were divided into four groups. The four champion countries of each group will face each other in the second round which is played home and away. Furthermore, each winner in the second round will face off in the third round. The winner of the third round has the right to appear in the 1958 World Cup to be held in Sweden.

In the first round, Indonesia was in group I along with China and Taiwan. However, Taiwan once again withdrew from qualifying. So Indonesia only faced China in a match that was held home and away. The first match was held in Jakarta on May 12, 1957. The match was held at the Ikada stadium and was attended by 50,000 spectators. In the first half, the match was balanced and tended to be hard, luckily the referee Cesare Ionni from Italy led the match decisively. The first half ended with a score of glasses (0-0). Entering the second half, Indonesia managed to score two goals in the 3rd and 35th minutes by the national team's mainstay striker, Ramang. Indonesia also closed the match with an advantage (2-0) so that a draw in the second meeting in Beijing was enough to lead Indonesia to the second round.

The second match in Beijing was held on June 2, 1954. Eager to turn the tide, China played with determination. Indonesia does not want to lose, strong defense as demonstrated during the match in Jakarta is tried to be applied. At the end of the match, China managed to outperform Indonesia with a score of (4-3). Three Indonesian goals were scored by Phoa Sian

Liong, Ramang and Aang Witarsa. The poor and sandy field conditions made it difficult for Indonesia to develop the game.

Because they beat each other, the third match was held in a neutral place to determine the winner. The third match was held in Rangoon, Burma on June 23, 1957. This time, Indonesian goalkeeper, Maulwi Saelan became a hero with brilliant saves. Indonesia also made several attacks that endangered the Chinese goal, but none of them could be converted into goals. Until extra time of 2 x 15 minutes, no goals were created. The match ended with an equally strong score (0-0). Indonesia came out as the winner because they scored more goals. Indonesia also qualified for the second round.

The problem then arose when entering the second round, Indonesia had to deal with Israel. Indonesia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel as a form of solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle. At this time, Indonesia was also in dispute with the Dutch over West Irian, and Indonesia needed support from Arab countries. Arab countries oppose any form of relations with Israel. If Indonesia allows the match to be held in Jakarta and Indonesia also plays in Tel Aviv, it is feared that it will affect the support of Arab countries.

Indonesia asked FIFA that the match be held in a third country or in other words in a neutral place. In a letter submitted to FIFA, Indonesia proposed that the match be held in Hong Kong, Singapore, Rome, or Belgrade, which according to the match was planned to be held in October 1957. PSSI Vice Chairman, Kosasih Purwanegara was appointed to lobby FIFA and Israel.

Israel insisted that the match should still be held in Tel Aviv. Until the deadline set by FIFA on September 20, 1957, the compromise between Indonesia and Israel did not reach a common point. In this case, Indonesia's position is clearly unfavorable. After the deadline passed, the decision was returned to FIFA where FIFA decided that Indonesia lost the w.o. and Israel qualified for the third round.

Uniquely, Israel's passage to the second round was also without a match, after Turkey, who was its opponent in the first round, also refused to compete. Israel qualified for the third round to face Sudan. The dream of repeating the success of qualifying for the 1938 World Cup disappeared, not because of losing on the field but because of political affairs!

The players were aware that they should not be dissolved in disappointment with the results in the World Cup qualifiers, and intended to rise in the next event that was no less spectacular, the 1958 Asian Games III. In preparation for the Asian Games, Indonesia again welcomed the arrival of tough teams from Europe as opponents of the test. The teams that visited Indonesia at the end of 1957 and 1958 were S.C. Wacker (Austria), the Bulgarian national team, Red Star Bratislava (Czechoslovakia), and Spartak Moscow (Soviet Union).

Despite the defeat, the series of tests further matured the tactics and strategies of Pogacnik's men. The results were also seen, Indonesia, which was in group C of the Asian Games III Tokyo 1958 with Burma and India, managed to defeat all its opponents and came out as the group champion. In the quarterfinals, Indonesia again won with a convincing score over the Philippines (5-2) to advance to the semifinals.

Taiwan is still a nightmare for Indonesia. In the semifinal match that was tight, Indonesia had to surrender (0-1). Indonesia's dream of winning a gold medal disappeared. The disappointment was immediately cured after Indonesia managed to win the bronze medal through a landslide victory (4-1) over India. This is the first medal won by the Indonesian

national team at an official international event and the only medal that has been won by the Indonesian national football team throughout its participation in the Asian Games to date. This success is even more complete after Indonesia managed to win the Asian Games host election in the next four years. Located in Tokyo, Jakarta managed to win the bid for the 1962 Asian Games IV over Karachi.

In addition to Taiwan, India was also a formidable opponent for Indonesia in the 1950s-1960s. Evidently, even though Indonesia managed to win a landslide victory in the bronze medal race at the 1958 Asian Games. India managed to make a comeback and bury Indonesia's dream to qualify for the Olympics again. In two home and away matches in the 1960 Rome Olympics qualifiers, Indonesia always suffered defeats with scores (2-4) and (0-2).

Realizing that the quality and determination of the team had begun to decline, Tony Pogacnik then refreshed the national team squad by adding new names. Names such as John Simon, Bob Hippy, Andjiek Alinurdin, and Wowo Sunaryo began to decorate the national team squad to replace senior names such as M. Rasjid, Ramlan Yatim, Ramang, and Djamiat Dhalhar. This refreshment aims to make the national team's game empowered again.

The squad containing a combination of senior and junior players was also prepared to face the 1962 Asian Games IV Jakarta. Preparations for the match test agenda were prepared very seriously. Because the target of this national team is not a joke, a gold medal. In terms of implementation, preparations were also carried out with the help of the Soviet Union, both funds and experts. Jakarta is dressed up to welcome the participants of the biggest sports party in Asia.

Evidently, in addition to being successful in organizing, Indonesia is also successful in achievements. The sports party which was held on August 24-September 4, 1962, placed Indonesia in second place in the final standings, below the overall champion Japan. This is the best performance of the Indonesian contingent at the Asian Games so far. However, the success of Indonesian athletes who are able to place themselves in second place in the standings cannot be followed by the football branch.

After winning the bronze medal at the previous Asian Games in Tokyo 1958, public trust in the national football team increased. The public believes that Indonesia will win a gold medal in football, especially since the Asian Games this time will be held at home. All preparations were made so that public expectations were realized.

In the period from 1961 to early 1962, Indonesia was recorded to have conducted tests with Japan, Torpedo Moscow (Soviet Union), Malmo (Sweden), Yugoslav Selection, Petrolul (Romania), Thailand, Spartak Moscow (Soviet Union), South Korea, and Singapore. All matches were held in Jakarta, except for the matches with Japan (in Kuala Lumpur) and Singapore (in Singapore). As part of the preparations, Indonesia also participated in the Merdeka Games Malaysia tournament, the Aga Khan Gold Cup Pakistan, and the South Vietnam Independence Cup which at that time were quite prestigious tournaments. The results were also quite good, Indonesia defeated Japan and Singapore with identical scores (2-0), and managed to become champions in the Merdeka Games Malaysia and the Aga Khan Gold Cup Pakistan, both held in the same year, 1961.



Figure 4. The spectators filled the Ikada Stadium to provide support to the Indonesian national team when facing Yugoslavia, January 15, 1956. The explosion of spectators at football matches is a common sight both in national team matches and in Union competitions even since colonial times. Source: ANRI, Campaign of the Republic of Indonesia Jakarta 1956, No. 33660.

Public trust was rising, and the dream of Indonesia's national football team winning its first Asian Games gold medal seemed within reach. However, that hope was shattered by the "Senayan Scandal," a bribery and score-fixing tragedy involving a bookie, exposed just six months before the 1962 Asian Games. An investigation led to the removal of 16 players, including 10 mainstays, from the training camp. Coach Tony Pogacnik was forced to rebuild the team hastily with new players from domestic clubs and the U-20 squad, but the hastily formed team failed to even advance from the group stage, losing decisively to Malaysia.

Determined to rise from this slump, the national team amazingly managed to defend its title at the 1962 Malaysian Merdeka Games, sweeping all five matches. Yet, the shadow of the scandal lingered. A year later, at the 1963 Ganefo, the team again failed in the first round. A further blow came with Indonesia's ban from the 1964 Tokyo Olympics due to a political feud with the International Olympic Committee, making the 1956 Melbourne Olympics the nation's only football appearance at the Games to date.

Under new coach Endang Witarsa, the national team looked toward the 1966 Asian Games in Bangkok. A renewed squad featuring fresh talents embarked on an ambitious preparation tour across Europe, facing clubs like Feyenoord and Werder Bremen, and also won the 1966 Aga Khan Gold Cup in Pakistan. This fostered high optimism, which seemed justified when the team topped its initial group in Bangkok.

Unfortunately, the dream was deferred once more. In the second group stage, Indonesia fell to Iran and drew with Burma, failing to qualify for the semifinals. This pattern of near-success continued in the 1968 Asian Cup qualifiers, where Indonesia could not advance despite a strong start, ultimately losing to Japan and host Taiwan. Thus, despite significant rebuilding and effort, the golden aspiration remained just out of grasp.

The Vanished Dominggus Wawejoi

After the expiration of the contract in 1964, the position of head coach of the Indonesian national team changed. Tony Pogacnik was replaced by drg. Endang Witarsa, a former football

player who later became a coach and led Persija to win the 1964 United competition. Persija players adorn the national team squad made by Endang Witarsa. Apart from being the former "captain" of Persija, Persija was also the champion of the 1964 United competition. Players such as Sucipto Suntoro, Yudo Hadianto, Hadi Mulyadi, Surya Lesmana, Sinyo Aliandoe, Didik Kasmara, and Dominggus Wawejoi were called to wear the garuda symbol on their chests.

Dominggus Wawejoi is a Papuan-born player. He was the first batch in the Training Center (TC) program for junior players in Salatiga in 1963. This TC later changed its name to the Salatiga Education and Training Center (Diklat). One year of studying at TC Salatiga, this player who was positioned as an attacker was recruited by Persija which was then architected by Endang Witarsa. In his first season defending Persija, he had already tasted the 1964 United title. His tandem in the attacking line with Sucipto Suntoro and Didik Kasmara succeeded in giving birth to Persija's second title in the independence era.

After Endang Witarsa was appointed as the coach of the national team, he was one of the Persija players who was also called to defend the Garuda banner. Dominggus became the first Papuan player to wear the Indonesian national team uniform. Indeed, when he defended the national team, it was a time when Indonesia-Netherlands politics were heating up over the West Irian dispute. Indonesia through the Tri Komando Rakyat (Trikora) operation succeeded in forcing the Netherlands to agree to the 1962 New York Agreement and hand over the interim government of West Irian to the United Nation Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA).

At such a time as this, Dominggus was called to strengthen the garuda. However, Dominggus' call-up to the national team was not for political reasons, but purely because of his ability to process the ball on the field. After all, the coach Endang Witarsa, who got the nickname 'football doctor' because of his educational background as a dentist, is known as a fierce coach and not easily dictated, so Dominggus' call-up to the national team was purely his choice.

Endang Witarsa then led the national team on a European tour in May-June 1965 to East Germany, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Hungary. The series of tests included against Feyenoord Rotterdam and Werder Bremen. From here, the excitement then erupted. The day after the match against Feyenoord that ended (1-6), the national team striker, Dominggus was picked up by someone named Kees Van der Werf from the lodging after being allowed by the leader of the group. But after that, Dominggus did not reappear at the inn. After waiting for a while until the time came for the national team to continue its journey to West Germany, Dominggus did not come (Besnier, 2015).

Later it was found out that the one who picked up Dominggus, Kees Van der Werf was a coach who found his talent in the city of Hollandia (now Jayapura). Dominggus actually had enough time to go back and join the group. The authorities in Rotterdam also seem to be covering up Dominggus' whereabouts.

For this incident, on July 27, 1965, PSSI fired Dominggus from the national team and Persija players. Dominggus is considered to have violated the principles and objectives of PSSI and harmed the good name of the nation and state. Later it was found out that Dominggus had become a Dutch citizen and had a career there.

Political Influence of President Sukarno

"We are a great nation" or "independent" (standing on our own feet) are jargons that Sukarno often shouted that are rooted in all aspects of the nation's life including football. At that time, the achievements of Indonesian football on the green field were directly proportional to Sukarno's political maneuvers on the world stage (Trotier, 2022).

"Well, we all have to be knights. You, you, you, you, we are all knights to defend the Republic of Indonesia, to defend the Indonesian nation, to raise this Indonesian nation so that it becomes a nation that can truly become a beacon of the whole world."

Sukarno himself through his eternal revolution wanted Indonesia to become a great country, a country respected by other nations, and a country that was on par with Western countries that were already established, including in terms of sports (Quah, 2025). Sukarno often shouted sentences that burned the spirit and nationalism of the Indonesian nation at every opportunity. After Maladi's election as the general chairman of PSSI at the PSSI reincarnation congress in 1950, it brought Sukarno closer to the world of football considering that Maladi had the same views and vision about Indonesia.



Figure 5. President Sukarno made an honorary kick in the first international match of the Indonesian national team in the test match against Singapore on February 21, 1951, at the Bataviasche Voetbal Club (BVC) field.

Source: ANRI, Campaign of the Republic of Indonesia Jakarta 1951, No. 2035.

It was during this period that the achievements of Indonesian football can be said to be proud. Not a few national teams and elite clubs from Europe came to Indonesia. For example, Lokomotiv Moscow (Soviet Union), Salzburg (Austria), Kalmar FF (Sweden), Stade de Reims (France), Red Star Bratislava (Czechoslovakia), Zenit Leningrad (now Zenit Saint Petersburg, Soviet Union), Bulgarian, Yugoslavia, and East German national teams. The arrival of these elite teams is certainly one of the factors thanks to the image of Indonesia built by Sukarno in the international arena.

To further improve the image of the Indonesian nation in the eyes of the world, President Sukarno also wants to bring the largest multi-event championship in Asia, the Asian Games to Jakarta. In the 1958 Tokyo election, Indonesia managed to outperform Pakistan. Immediately after this success, Jakarta put on makeup. Major projects were built in Jakarta in welcoming the Asian Games so that Jakarta becomes a magnificent and beautiful city in the eyes of the participants. Hotel Indonesia, Jalan M.H. Thamrin, Jalan Sudirman, Semanggi Bridge,

Welcome Statue, Senayan Sports Complex, will soon be built to welcome the 1962 Asian Games IV (Hübner, 2012).

Sukarno wanted Indonesia not only to succeed in organizing, but also succeeding in sports achievements.

"In our efforts to form a nation, nation building, then as I said earlier is so that we have a big country, which is respected by the world, and I said that sports are located in one of these nation building fields, so it is obvious that if we want to become a nation that is respected by other nations in the world, we want to have a country whose citizens are respected by the world, So this achievement field is a field that we really pay attention to."

However, the holding of the Asian Games in Jakarta has other consequences. Indonesia received sanctions from the IOC due to Indonesia's refusal to issue visas for the Israeli and Taiwanese contingents so that the two countries could not participate in the Asian Games. Because of this, the IOC withdrew as the guardian body of the Jakarta Asian Games and prohibited the raising of the IOC flag among the flags of the participants (Grix & Houlihan, 2014).

Because of these sanctions, Sukarno assumed that the IOC had been influenced by old establish forces and Indonesia declared its exit from the IOC. Therefore, Indonesia will lead a new sports movement for countries that oppose the old establish force. The new sports movement was named Games of the New Emerging Forces (Ganefo) (Creak, 2017: Field, 2014).

President Sukarno then issued an order to the Minister of Sports so that Indonesia's sports achievements in the shortest possible time should be improved to the highest international level (Ma'mun, 2019). The order was manifested in a formal form through Presidential Decree (Keppres) number 131 of 1962 concerning the establishment of the Ministry of Sports for the implementation of new Indonesian human development through sports in the spirit of Indonesian nation building. The Presidential Decree was then strengthened by the issuance of Presidential Decree number 263 of 1963 concerning the order to the Minister of Sports to improve Indonesia's sports achievements in the shortest time to achieve a high position in the international world. The command was then outlined in a sports development plan known as the "Ten Year Plan for Sports".

After that, Indonesia was excluded from the world football stage. There is no field to compete. Until then there was a return flow of political life in Indonesia. A dark record of the nation's history that began with the killing of six generals and one army adjutant in Lubang Buaya on the night of September 30, 1965. This event resulted in Sukarno losing his position, replaced by Suharto with his New Order. The purge was carried out, all of Sukarno's confidants were removed from office. PSSI is also a part, Chairman Maulwi Saelan is a prisoner. He was replaced by Kosasih Purwanegara.

Table 2. Results of the Indonesian National Team in the 1951-1967 International Championship

Year	Championship	Result
	FIFA and IOC Championships	
1951	Asian Games I New Delhi	First Round
1954	Asian Games II Manila	Semifinals (4th place)

1956	Olympiad XVI Melbourne	Quarterfinals
1957	1958 World Cup Sweden	Second Round of Qualifying 3rd Place (Bronze)
1958	Asian Games III Tokyo	Qualifying Round
1960	Olimpiade XVII Rome	First Round
1962	Asian Games IV Jakarta	Second Round
1966	Asian Games V Bangkok	Qualifying Round
1967	1968 Asian Cup Iran	
Non-FIFA and Non-IOC Championships		
1957	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	2nd Place
1958	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	First Round
1960	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	3rd Place
1961	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	1st Place
1961	*Aga Khan Gold Cup* di Pakistan	1st Place
1961	*South Vietnam Independence Cup*	First Round
1962	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	1st Place
1963	Ganefo I	Quarterfinals
1965	Ganefo II	Qualifying Round
1966	*Aga Khan Gold Cup* di Pakistan	1st Place
1967	*Merdeka Games* Malaysia	First Round

Indonesian football from the 1950s to the 1960s was an anomaly. In the midst of the frenzy of uncertain social, political, and economic conditions, football gives it a different color. The number of separatist movements in the regions, the fall of the cabinet, and the deteriorating economic conditions did not have much effect on the existence of national football. That is if we look at the United Competition which continues to roll constantly, the enthusiasm of the public in watching the match, and the routine of the Indonesian national team participating in international championships. Indonesian football is like giving a different "something" to the community that is not affected by circumstances. In Indonesian football there is a special "spirit" in each individual involved both as players, administrators, and fans. This is what makes national football continue to roll in the midst of all limitations.

The political influence of President Sukarno also influenced the development of national football. Sukarno, who had the ideal of raising the dignity of the Indonesian nation in the international arena, tried to be a 'coach' for Indonesia's development in all fields including sports. Not surprisingly, Sukarno's influence spread to the roots, including football stakeholders. The government's political policies also gave birth to many works in the field of sports, both physical works (construction of buildings and sports facilities, including the Gelora Karno sports complex) to the organization of international events (Asian Games IV Jakarta 1962 and Ganefo 1963). It can be said that Sukarno used all 'stages' to show Indonesia's existence on the world stage, including the sports stage.

Indonesian football in the 1950s and 1960s was also an effective integration tool in the midst of conditions that led to the disintegration of the nation. The emergence of several separatist movements in the region due to dissatisfaction with the condition of the nation and the central government's policies in Jakarta, has brought Indonesia to a precarious condition. However, the organization of the Union Competition which brings together teams between regions strengthens solidarity between players, administrators and fans. The barriers of primordialism were eroded by the existence of the Union Competition which brought together

the Union teams from various regions. In its development, the Union Competition encourages the birth of national awareness.

Even so, the Indonesian national team is inhabited by multicultural players (Fuller & Junaedi, 2018). Players such as Ramang, Maulwi Saelan, and Sinyo Aliandoe represent ethnic Indonesians from the eastern region. Meanwhile, Ramlan Yatim, Rasjid, Sucipto Suntoro represented the western region of Indonesia, and Latif Haris Tanoto (Tan Liong Houw), Januar Pribadi (Phaw Sian Liong), and Surya Lesmana (Liem Soey Liang) represented the Chinese ethnicity. Meanwhile, Djamiat Dhalhar, Soegiono, Yudo Hadianto, et al represented the Javanese ethnicity. All are united to fight to raise the name of Indonesia through football.

If measured in terms of achievements and achievements, Indonesian football in the 1950-1960s era should indeed be called a golden age. Just look, in official FIFA and IOC competitions, the Indonesian national team was able to carve out achievements that have not been repeated until now. The achievement of qualifying for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics to reach the quarterfinals and hold a draw against a strong team from the Soviet Union. Qualifying for the semifinals of the Asian Games (Asian Games II 1954) and winning bronze (Asian Games III 1958) and qualifying for the second round of the 1958 World Cup Qualifiers are achievements that have been successfully carved in the 1950-1960 era. Not to mention the achievement of champions in non-FIFA and non-IOC championships that were quite prestigious at the time, such as the Merdeka Games Malaysia and the Aga Khan Gold Cup Pakistan.

However, it should be underlined that these achievements are accompanied by notes. The achievements in the 1954 and 1958 Asian Games as well as the 1958 Asian Zone World Cup Qualifiers were carried out in an era where football competition, especially in Asia, was not as competitive as it is now. From the 1950s to the 1960s, many Asian countries gained independence and many still wallows with weak economic conditions and horizontal conflicts. Simply put, Indonesia competes at the Asian level when many Asian countries have not thought about football.

The question arises, Indonesia actually also experiences relatively the same conditions, but why is the condition of Indonesian football better than many Asian countries? To get the answer, we must go back, to the Dutch colonial period. Shortly after it was introduced by the Dutch, the Bumiputra community seemed to be 'fascinated' by this game. No wonder this 11 vs 11 game was then so attached to the hearts of the people of the Dutch East Indies. In the early 20th century, this game began to be played everywhere, both plantation areas, military tanks, and villages. Football clubs began to grow, especially in the big cities. Many football matches and tournaments are held that bring these clubs together. To accommodate and organize more professional competitions, NIVB, the parent football organization owned by the Dutch people, was formed.

Since the implementation of ethical political policies, it has encouraged the creation of national awareness among the Bumiputras. Driven by educated Bumiputras, the community began to realize that in order for their "bargaining value" to be stronger, they had to unite and gather. Even for football fans, they began to establish their own football associations. Until to fight against NIVB discrimination, they then agreed to establish the parent organization of Bumiputra football, PSSI in 1930. PSSI is the first sports organization founded by Bumiputera, not tennis or athletics, but football!

The Chinese also have a parent organization that accommodates Chinese bonds, HNVB which was established in 1927. Each parent organization runs a competition that brings together their respective bonds and clubs. Every match is always filled with spectators. It can be imagined; how lively and passionate football has been since that time. Just imagine, there are three parent football organizations that run their respective competition wheels. Football has such an important and inherent 'value' for the people of the Dutch East Indies, both Europeans, Bumiputera, and Chinese.

The 'legacy' then shaped the appearance of Indonesian football, especially in the 1950s to 1960s. Football was so popular with the Indonesian people, in the difficult times of colonialism, where every association was always suspected and supervised by the colonial government, they were able to run the Union competition which began in 1931 periodically. Not surprisingly, the United Nations competition was able to resume after the recognition of sovereignty in 1951 and continue to run regularly without much being affected by economic conditions and political tensions. Every football match, in the local and national categories, is always lively and flooded with spectators. Of course, this has an impact on the national team. Thanks to the establishment of the national competition and the militancy of the fans, a competitive national team was born.

In addition to Indonesia, the strong teams in the Asian region in the 1950s-1960s era were Burma, China, Taiwan, India, and South Korea. In contrast to the decade that followed, when football had become the most popular game in the world, at the same time many Asian countries began to gain economic stability and political stability. Asian countries began to get serious and compete to develop the game of football. The competition has also become very competitive, which has caused established countries of previous era football such as Indonesia, Burma, Taiwan, China, and India to begin to shift. It was replaced by Japan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Uzbekistan, and plus Australia which became a member of the AFC.

Looking at the football competition in Asia today, it is practically only South Korea that has been consistent and continues to be competitive since the 1950s until now. Now even South Korea has transformed into one of the main football powerhouses in the Asian region. This condition is really very unfortunate. Even though Indonesia has had very good provisions in football since the beginning of the 20th century, provisions that many other Asian countries do not have. While many Asian countries are starting to get serious about developing football, at the same time football fans in Indonesia lack the will and ability to improve the quality of national football. So Indonesian football is starting to lag behind. Let alone speaking on the world stage, the Asian region alone is helpless. But hope must always be there. Let's pray that one day Indonesia will qualify for the World Cup. Purely as Indonesia, not the Dutch East Indies.

CONCLUSION

The period from 1951 to 1967 marked the golden age of Indonesian football, highlighted by the national team’s peak achievements such as qualifying for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, drawing against the Soviet Union, finishing fourth at the 1954 Asian Games, and winning bronze at the 1958 Tokyo Asian Games. These successes were closely linked to President Sukarno’s political policies that leveraged sports as a tool for diplomacy and nation-building, supported by state investment in infrastructure, international cooperation, and hosting major

events like the 1962 Asian Games and 1963 Ganefo Games. However, this era of glory declined following the 1962 bribery scandal and Indonesia's post-Ganefo political isolation. This period illustrates the deep connections between sporting achievements, political developments, and the shaping of national identity in Indonesia's football history. Future research could explore the long-term impact of these political events on Indonesian football's development and its relationship with broader social and cultural changes.

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