

ASTAR Scrabble Challenge International 2011

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by Toh Weibin

The ASTAR Scrabble Challenge International (or in short, ASCI) is one tournament I look forward to each year – it allows me to meet and catch up with my peers from Malaysia and Thailand, many of whom I sparred with in the WYSCs of 2006 and 2007. At the same time, it gives me the opportunity to observe the younger generation mature into seasoned players, a process which I feel is important in developing and maintaining a vibrant Scrabble scene. Those were the reasons why I'd been noting ASCI down on my calendar since I first played in it in 2009.

This year's competition, though, proved to be rather different from the previous years – most noticeably, the number of players ballooned past my expectations. A whopping 238 participants played in the Interschool category, while the 62 players in the Intervarsity division confirmed that this tournament would be one of the biggest events on the Malaysian Scrabble calendar this year.

The increments would also come in terms of the standard of play. The Intervarsity division saw many top players competing for the top prize of RM 4,500, including Pichai Limprasert, who had recently played in the Premier Division of Causeway 2010; Hubert Wee, 7th in WSC 2007; Thacha Kooriwat, Alastair Richards and Liew Kian Boon, 1st, 2nd and 5th respectively in Causeway Masters Division 2010. The Interschool Division boasted many stellar performers from WYSC 2010, including Preedee Khongthanarat (2nd), William Kang (3rd) and Vinnith Ramamurti (7th). The winner of the ASCI's Interschool division in 2010, Scott Chung, was back to defend his title. Even as the defending champion of the Intervarsity division, I must say I was fully prepared to see someone else claim the title this year.



A game played in the Intervarsity category

Luck, though, would have it another way. Despite not getting a very good rest prior to the tournament, I was able to chalk up big wins against several opponents on the first day, mostly with very good draws. At the end of the first day, I was placed 4th, behind Pichai, Alastair and Hubert, all with 6 out of 7 wins. This kept me in the running and I hoped to continue my good run the next day. Supper with our two generous hosts Martin and Henry, the Thais and the Singaporeans was restorative to say the least. We discovered that over the course of the day, Hubert lost to Pichai, Pichai lost to Thacha, Thacha lost to me and I lost to Hubert. What a coincidence that we were all now having a meal at the same table!



Hubert Wee (SIN) playing against Pichai Limprasert (THA)

My first game the next day against Nutt Treepoonsuk from Thailand was another good one where I managed to rack up 283 points in 5 turns playing DENTURE (76), MAI(N)sTAY (81) and OEDIPAL (72). The next game was where the repeats started, and I managed to win narrowly against Pichai, taking the sure win and letting him bingo out. Game 10 against Thacha was quite exciting – I had taken the early lead with GEMINAL (76) in move 2, only to see my lead being eroded away with his consecutive bingos of TITRATE(D) (80) and OBJURED (97). Thankfully, I had two consecutive bingos of my own, DIPLOMAT (76) and REPOTt(IN)G (64), and later added salt to the wound with RANGIOr(A) (77).

My three wins out of three before lunch on day 2 put me on pole position one game ahead of the field. I had not-too-distant memories of myself losing my last two games at Causeway and another recent tournament, and was determined not to repeat history at this competition. As it was, my two games against Hubert were both nailbiters – while missing a bingo in the first cost me the game, I played well enough in the second to secure the victory and the title with 10 wins. At the Interschool division, Preedee pipped Scott by just over 100 spread in the standings to win the RM 4,000 prize with 11 wins out of 12. Congratulations to all winners!



Preedee Khongthanasat (right), winner of the Interschool division

Some interesting words played during the tournament include FALDERAL (meaning nonsense), TIMARIOT (a Turkish militiaman, anagrams to IMITATOR), CALIPH (a Muslim leader), TURACOUS (an African bird), DEPEOPLE (to reduce the population of), BEJESUIT (to initiate into Jesuitism), SKIATRON (a cathode-ray tube) and NAYWORDS (a catchword). Kudos to Martin, Mr. Sundaraj and Cheah, who had the tournament running with minimal disruptions despite the large number of players. Overall, I feel the organising team did a very good job this year – I certainly hope to come back again in 2012!