

“Winning in the evening; losing in the morning; The lion seized all the seats! That's what the children are singing in the street around here,” said Dr. Saw Naing, an independent candidate who ran in the general election on Sunday for a Lower House seat representing South Okkalapa Township in Rangoon.

The lion is symbol of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which claims to have won more than 80 percent of the national vote and is backed by Burma's ruling junta.

But on Monday evening, after all the votes were counted in South Okkalapa constituency, it appeared that the independent gladiator had defeated the lion.

It was an apparent upset at the polls. Earlier that day, Saw Naing had been told that USDP candidate Aung Kyaw Moe had won the seat. However, after all the votes were counted, the Township Election Commission (EC) called him by telephone and told him the astonishing news that he had won a seat for the Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly) after beating Aung Kyaw Moe by just six votes.

“The EC called me and said I had to come in and sign a form declaring that I was the winner,” Saw Naing told The Irrawaddy. “There were many witnesses present when I signed. It was a great moment for me and for my supporters.”

Unfortunately for the 42-year-old dentist who works for several NGOs in his local community, the moment didn't last long. On Wednesday night, state television announced that, after a recount, the winner in South Okkalapa Township was Aung Kyaw Moe.

“We were devastated,” said Saw Naing. “I asked the chairman of the Township EC how the situation could have changed. He told me that he personally had nothing to do with it and that he did not know that a recount had taken place.”

Saw Naing now says he is seeking legal advice from Nyan Win, a lawyer who is also a National League for Democracy leader.

‘I have never heard of such a situation anywhere else in the world where the authorities chop and change the election results so much,’ said Saw Naing.

Meanwhile, in Sangchaung Township in Rangoon, National Democratic Front (NDF) candidate Soe Win also thought he had won his constituency; his supporters had monitored the vote-count and he had been declared the winner.

However, the following day, EC officials told him the ballots would have to be recounted because so many of them had been invalid.

Needless to say, the recount took place behind closed doors and the USDP emerged the victor.