A Matter of LIFE AND DEATH

46th SMA-Goldplus Universal Inter-Hospital Soccer Tournament

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"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I can assure you. It is much more important than that."

This quote by Bill Shankly, the late Scot and Liverpool manager, epitomises the love for this beautiful game shared by millions of us. It also explains why, in the dying embers of the pandemic, we braved risks and wasted no time in hosting the 46th SMA-Goldplus Universal Inter-Hospital 8-a-side Soccer Tournament.

At nightfall on Sunday, 31 July 2022, eight teams trooped to the full-size pitches of The Cage at Turf City. Cooler temperatures after dusk were projected to make playing less exhausting and more enjoyable for the players, who were lacking in fitness after the enforced sedentary lifestyle in the past two years of restricted group sports.

After three hotly contested group matches on the slightly smaller pitch 4, Group A was topped by SingHealth 1, followed by Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in second place, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in third, and Private Practice 2 at the floor. The stark figures of the score table belie the ferocity of the matches and the narrowest of victories attained.

Private Practice 2, the most geriatric of the teams on paper, was two goals up with an experienced surgical Dr Winston Woon penalty and a cleverly crafted Dr Ibkaar counterattack against tournament favourite SingHealth 1. Teetering on the edge of collapse, SingHealth 1 threw in Drs Amirul, Bernard and Chen Min Wei, and in a muscular all-out assault against a defiant defence marshalled by Dr Chng Nai Wee and Dr Leow Khang Leng, they shot in three close-range goals in rapid-fire succession to prevail.

With SAF – a co-tournament favourite – slotted in the same group, the match-up between SAF and SingHealth 1 was considered the de facto final. Commandeered by Dr Jesse, the boys in green with their youthful and energetic running were snuffed out by the experience of SingHealth 1, who were to be challenged by the winners of Group B.

In Group B, Private Practice 1, stacked with relatively younger players such as Drs Adib, Lau Hung Tuan and Ganesh Ramalingam with footballing pedigree, was favoured to win. The rest of the teams prepared a counterattacking surprise, much to the dismay of the legendary goalkeeper Dr Lloyd Soong.

Though they camped in the opponents' half of the pitch for most of the time, Private Practice 1 failed to capitalise and win a game. Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH), with its motley crew of tangy orange-clad talented individuals inspired by its former commando Dr Jegathesan, and National University Hospital (NUH), a hardworking closely knit team in deep blue motivated by Dr William Kristanto, emerged first and second respectively, with SingHealth 2 pipping Private Practice 1 for third place.

In the final match, SingHealth 1 outscored TTSH, ascending as the champions of 2022. TTSH conceded a goal, followed by another penalty, and had a man sent off in those brief but eternal moments of frenetic play.

In the contemporaneous third and fourth placing match, SAF overcame NUH. Dr Jesse added the Top Scorer accolade to his honours.

The trophies and medals were presented by Dr Gregory Leong of sponsor Goldplus Universal, to the rapturous cheers of COVID-19-fatigued players once again rejuvenated in the zone of soccer.

The schema and dynamics of soccer teams are analogously echoed in that of clinical teams. What makes a soccer team successful on the field is what makes clinical teams purposeful in the hospital.

To the late Bill Shankly, we, the participants of the 2022 Tournament, salute you for your glorious insight. ◆

Legend

1. An artful header

2. The teams taking a breather, watching their colleagues on the field

3. A decisive strike and a daring intercept

4. Our glittering medals

5. Singhealth 1, the worthy champions of 2022