

A GOAL FOR CHARITY

By Dr Chng Nai Wee

For the first time in history, SMA sent a team to compete in the Down Syndrome Association Veterans Charity Cup 2013. This soccer competition, organised by Sembawang Soccer Club in conjunction with the Singapore Indian Association, is an annual celebrated tournament fixture. Players who were 40 years of age as of this year were eligible to form a nine-a-side team, and three rolling substitutes were permitted. All tournament proceeds went to the Down Syndrome Association of Singapore.

Many doctors who were accomplished soccer players in their younger glory days were summoned to the Indian Association's fields at Bendemeer on 25 August 2013 for this year's tournament. The SMA team was composed of Kong Chee Seng, Philip Tseng, Ganesh Ramalingam, Chia Yih Woei, Ooi Lai Hock, Michael Tan, Tony Lim, Ho Choon Hou, Gary Chee, Lai Yew Tah, Bhanu Sharma and myself. Our red jerseys, inspired by the Spanish national football team's jerseys, were kindly provided by Michael.

In total, there were 24 competing teams, which were then divided into six groups of four. First, each group played a round-robin tournament. The top two teams in each group then advanced to the next round, and were progressively knocked out until a winner emerged. Each game lasted for about 18 minutes, without the teams changing sides. There was a good representation of teams from various sectors in Singapore, ranging from the Central Business District Wanderers that comprised executives working in Shenton Way and Marina Bay, to the British Club which consisted of expatriates. Many former professional soccer players and national players, including household names such as Terry Pathmanathan and Abdul Malek, also participated.

The SMA team played in three intra-group games, narrowly losing each game by the scoreline of 0-1 despite some commendable and valiant play.

Our first game was against the Ang Mo Kio Old Boys in their yellow and black shirts. A through ball from their experienced midfield players found their striker, who then turned the ball in past our goalkeeper Yew Tah. In our defence, Yew Tah had little to do until that moment. After the first goal was scored, we became too passive and cautious as we were uncertain how to play such a tight

One for the cameras!
 Back row, L to R: Chng Nai Wee, Tony Lim, Ganesh Ramalingam, Philip Tseng, Gary Chee and Kong Chee Seng
 Front row, L to R: Ho Choon Hou, Ooi Lai Hock, Chia Yih Woei, Bhanu Sharma and Lai Yew Tah



Photo: Xavier Joseph (Sembawang Soccer Club)

game where the single odd goal could potentially decide the outcome of the match. Thankfully, we changed our mindset and raised our tempo of play to create scoring chances at the opponent's goalmouth. A teasingly low cross from the left from me found Gary, who was running into space on the right. The latter lashed out a low drive but it was blocked by a desperate and tenacious defence.

We played our second match against the Hibernian Legends, a well-established team of mainly Caucasian expatriates stationed in Singapore. We were more aggressive in this game as we could not afford to lose if we wanted to progress further in the tournament. It was an even match with plenty of box-to-box action across the large grass pitch as both sides tried to break the deadlock. Lai Hock, Philip and Bhanu indulged in some short-passing interplay as they tried to move the ball from the back to the opponent's box. Both sides knew that a single win, which would translate to three points on the scoreboard, would be a giant step for any team to advance into the second round. A goal from the Hibernians was disallowed for marginal offside, and we collectively breathed a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, a speculative punt from a Hibernian's play soared to the left high top corner of the net and we were downed by a solitary goal yet again.

In our third game, we were pitted against Khalsa Association, which played under the name YSA. By this time, we could no longer progress into the second round, but we were still aiming for a win. Among the three

opponents SMA faced on the field, this was the weakest team on paper. Ganesh made a speculative strike from a long distance that narrowly shaved the goalpost, and created numerous chances for Tony, Yih Woei and Gary to score. Chee Seng and Choon Hou were steadfast as rocks in the SMA defence, and it was only because we were too committed into pushing our waves of attack forward in numbers in search of a goal that we leaked an opposing goal from a rare counter-attack against the run of play.

The SMA team was left at the bottom of our group, but the other three teams were tied at the top, sharing first spot with similar goal differences and points. The organisers then decided on a round robin penalty shootout, and the Hibernians were knocked out. The eventual champions were the Singapore Recreation Club 9s. The event raised more than \$30,000 for the Down Syndrome Association.

The SMA team had a great time on the pitch, and an even better time catching up with everyone. We will definitely participate in the tournament next year, and come back stronger and better. **SMA**



Dr Chng Nai Wee is an ophthalmologist at Eagle Eye Centre, practising at Mount Alvernia and the Parkway Group of Hospitals. He keeps fit by playing 11-a-side soccer at the various fields across Singapore in happy defiance of his age.