

# THE NANJINGER

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# BATS & BALLS

By Misha Maruma

## Bluesky Pool Championship

**P**ool is a game of skill. There may be elements of luck to the sport that some people see as a pub game, but don't be fooled. For some players luck itself is an art. I went to the Bluesky Pool Championship in April to play the best in Nanjing and to see if I possessed that particular sporting trait; luck.

The Bluesky Pool Championship is one of the longest running competitions in Nanjing. Played every month since 2002 in Nanjing's oldest western bar, the competition used to be foreign dominated, but recently there has been an emergence of Chinese players participating.

So what's the big attraction? The ¥50 entrance fee certainly adds to the stakes and every winner since its inception has been added to the "pool wall". So, in addition to the prestige of being immortalised into Nanjing folklore there is a cash incentive too.

On the day I go there are 13 players. After the money is collected by Laurie, Bluesky's Australian boss, the draw is made. The first

three drawn out receive a bye to the next round and the other 10 are paired into five play-offs. As this is my first time I am hoping for a decent draw, but I'm up first and against the previous month's champion and one third of the Chinese contingent, Martin. It seems that I have not after all perfected the art of luck. I put up a good fight, but with a chance to

win I sink the white ball and Martin cleans up. A slow start for the defending champion and dejection for me.

For the rest of the night I am reduced to the role of spectator. This proves equally as enjoyable as taking part; watching the regulars in full flow and the friendly atmosphere between everyone is genuinely fun. The people who come regularly are part of a community and this adds to the excitement as the games move quickly from one to the next.

As the evening progresses the tension begins to rise. The bar



*starts to fill up with Saturday night revellers who add to the spectators giving the competitors an audience to entertain.*

*Ken versus Martin goes to the wire, Ken missing a succession of blacks to let Martin sneak through again setting up an all Chinese semi-final and therefore meaning that the Middle Kingdom will be represented in the final for a second month in a row. The unknown Wang Xing is defeated as Martin's form starts to improve with a devastating six ball victory.*

*The second semi-final is played between two Nanjing stalwarts who know each other well. Andy and Solomon play out a close game as two previous champions slugging it out for a place in the final. Andy eventually wins giving him a chance to avenge his heavy defeat against Martin in March.*

*A best of three final sets it apart from the other rounds. Andy starts well winning the first game by five balls and eventually finishing Martin off in style to confirm a comprehensive win, the previous month's defeat to the young upstart being well and truly forgotten.*

*With the victory confirmed and the winnings collected the players adjourn to the bar for a celebratory drink. The winner banks around ¥500 with the runner-up doubling their initial stake. It is fair to say that I had a good time and that I will be back next month to take part again and hopefully make it past the first round. In the meantime I need to be working on my technique as well as learning the art of luck. *

## **Jiangsu Sainty exit Asian cup**

**J**iangsu Sainty bowed out of the AFC Champions league in cruel fashion on 1st May. Going into the last round of games Sainty were bottom of their group having lost at home in the previous round to FC Seoul.

*The 2-0 defeat in the Olympic stadium against Seoul on 24th April had all but sealed Jiangsu's fate in their first ever foray into pan-Asian cup competition. A draw in the game between Buriram of Thailand and Vegalta Sendai of Japan left a glimmer of hope that Sainty could progress though, if results went their way in the final round of games.*

*With Seoul already qualified a win for Jiangsu against Sendai in Japan and a win for Seoul at home to Buriram would have seen Sainty finish in second place. Unfortu-*

*nately it was not to be.*

*Sainty, trailing the Japanese by one goal, turned the game on its head in the second half and subsequently scored the winner with 30 minutes of the match to go. At this stage it was a draw in Korea meaning Jiangsu were heading out of the competition. But a late goal by Seoul put Sainty on course for an unlikely passage into the knock out stages. A late equaliser by Buriram crushed Sainty's hopes; they thus exited the competition.*

*A famous victory in Japan meant that Jiangsu fans could hold their heads high by finishing above their Japanese rivals. Attention now turns to the league campaign. With a few more performances like the one in Japan, Sainty can look forward to some more exciting games playing the best teams across Asia next season. *

## **Aussie Rules Football**

**I**f you are interested in taking part in a new sport then Australian rules football is for you. Well organised by a core group of Australians this is a really good way to meet new friends and keep fit for both boys and girls.

*Join the group every Tuesday from 5pm at the Nanjing Arts Institute. Enter through the south gate on Caochangmen road and follow the signs to the Oval. Learn some basic skills and drills and then take part in a game.*

*No matter from where you hail or whether you have played before. All you need do is show up with plenty of enthusiasm. Be you a novice, amateur or expert Aussie Rules needs you! *