

THE NANJINGER

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By Misha Maruma

The Game Where You Kick A Ball

There is a saying in Chinese: “英国男人爱足球比老婆多”. English guys love football more than their wife.

While I do love football, I am not married so it is difficult for me say whether this statement is true. But an encounter I had a few weeks ago put this idea into sharp perspective.

I was in a bar with some friends when an American guy on the table next to me leant over and asked: “Do you know where I can play football?”

Having lived in China for a number of years I had to clarify; soccer or American football?

My table neighbour must have heard my British accent because he meant football, as in the game where you kick a ball (hence football), as opposed to American football, where throwing an oval shaped object around a park is also considered “football”.

Anyway, I have to admit I left him disappointed.

Unfortunately, as reported in this column before, the International football leagues have not been running for the past couple of

years. The main reason is the lack of an organiser. Yet, as my bar conversation indicates, there is obviously an appetite for football in Nanjing.

So to help anyone who may want to have a kickabout here are some suggestions:

Nanjing University sports field

Pretty much every day of the week you can go along to the outdoor 4G astroturf football pitch and join in a game of football. You will find here Chinese students playing small games in groups of 10 to 16 people.

Simply take along your sports gear and ask to join in a game. Most of the groups are happy to let a foreigner join in. It helps if you can speak a little Chinese, but the language of football is of course international.

Nanjing International School in Xianlin

Every Wednesday at the indoor sports hall at NIS there are up to 20 people playing. Mainly made up of NIS teachers or parents of the kids, the standard is pretty high.


It is usually foreigners that partake with countries such as Spain, the UK, America and Germany represented. The group usually gathers from 6:30pm and plays until around 8:30pm. The format tends to be six-a-side.

NIS World Cup

This annual event at Nanjing International School is a chance for the different expat groups to play football in an organized event. Last year the event was held in early May.

The competition is made up of eight teams in two groups. Last year Group A included Team GB, Los Latinos, French-Italians and China, while Group B comprised USA, Germany, South Korea and Australia.

Two teams from each group qualify for the semi-finals. Last year the final was played between Team GB and French-Italians with Team GB winning 1-0. The event will be held again this year in May.

If you are interested in playing football at any of these events, or are interested in helping to organise the International football leagues, contact the Nanjinger for more information. 

Jiangsu Sainty

The recent AFC Asian Cup gave pessimistic Chinese soccer fans something to cheer about. The national team exceeded all expectations and qualified from their group to enter the knockout stages of the tournament, losing to eventual champions Australia.

Out of the 23-man Chinese squad there were six players from Nanjing's very own Chinese Super League team, Jiangsu Guoxin-Sainty, until last season just



known as Jiangsu Sainty. The club was founded in April 1958 under the name of Jiangsu Provincial Team. In 1963, Jiangsu suffered relegation to the second tier, but in 1973 the club was again promoted to the elite division.

However, it was to prove a false dawn as the team fell into the Chinese Jia League in 1978. After a 14-year wait, Jiangsu clinched the second division title and returned

back to the top tier.

On 7th January, 2000 the club gained sponsorship from the Jiangsu Sainty International Group and adopted its current name. In 2005, the club relocated to the Nanjing Olympic Sports Centre, which has seating for 62,000 supporters. In fact Jiangsu have some of the highest attendance figures in the Chinese Super League.

Despite this, Sainty have never really tasted major success. In the 2012 season, Jiangsu achieved its highest league placing to date as the team finished runners-up. This gave the club a chance to play in the Asian Champions League

where they did well, but the extra games affected their league form and they finished a disappointing 13th out of 16 teams.

Last year saw the team come back somewhat in the league. They finished in 8th position on 37 points. To put this into perspective, the league champions Guangzhou Evergrande-Taobao finished with 70 points. Sainty still have some way to go to be com-

peting with the best teams.

Nevertheless, Sainty have some of the best fans in the league. If you should ever go to a game, expect a raucous set of "Ultra" fans in the lower tier behind the home goal. Spurred on by a master of ceremonies shouting into a megaphone, the passionate home fans always cheer on their team.

If you also want to join in with the team's official song, the lyrics are as follows:

舜天一起战斗
Shuntian yiqi zhandou

舜天一起战斗
Shuntian yiqi zhandou

蓝色我的梦想
Lanse wo de mengxiang

蓝色我的信仰
Lanse wo de xinyang

The translation goes as follows:

Sainty, together we'll fight
Sainty, together we'll fight
Blue is my dream
Blue is my faith

The blue reference is of course referring to the fact that the team's home kit is blue. When the team play away from home they play in a white strip.

Sainty will play at the Olympic Stadium every other Saturday. The first game of the season is on 8th March against Shanghai SIPG, managed by former England football coach Sven-Göran Eriksson. Tickets are ¥50. 