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BATS & BALLS

By Misha Maruma

What of Ducks and Cricket?

Just who are the Nanjing Disco Ducks and how are they involved in sport in Nanjing? To find out the answer to this question I went to join them for an afternoon of playing the original gentleman's sport, cricket.

A conglomeration of two teams, the Nanjing Disco Ducks comprise the Nongmin and the Bogans. The two teams play cricket against each other every Sunday at Nanjing Normal University. The participants are a diverse range of nationalities ranging from cricket playing nations to countries more associated with winter sports. It is also fair to say that this is a ramshackle lot.

The day I went to meet the teams and join in for my first experience of cricket in China the sun was shining brightly; it is a perfect day for cricket. I arrive at Nanjing Normal University's main gate and make my way through the university following what I hope is a fellow player. As we arrive at the playing field I discover that he luckily plays for the team I will be representing; the Bogans.

The Nanjing Disco Ducks have an increasing presence in the Nanjing sports scene. Nanjing cricket stalwart, Hamish Stevens, regales me with tales of back in 2008 when the Nongmin Cricket Club would play on a tennis court. What is certain is that serious cricket began in Nanjing in June 2009 with the advent of the first Nanjing 6's tournament.

A tournament where teams of six players compete in two innings of five overs, the Nanjing 6's began as a tour for the Shanghai Bashers Cricket Club. They wanted to play cricket outside of Shanghai and assisted with getting cricket in Nanjing organised. The Bashers helped arrange the cricket

gear (pads, bats etc.) and showed some of the Nanjing originals how to organise tournaments. Craig Haines, Tony Herbert and Azam Chattha were instrumental in setting up the Nongmin Cricket Club and Hamish, Jimmy Bice, Daz Major and Craig Berry were the brains and brawn behind the Bogans Cricket club.

After the first Nanjing 6's tournament, things began to snowball. The Nongmin and the Bogans starting to play each other on a regular basis, meeting every Sunday. As the Nanjing Disco Ducks' profile was raised so interest was sparked from outside organisations. The Nanjing International School (NIS) started to host the cricket at their ground and put it on the roster at their annual charity sports tournament. The Pfrang Association, an charity that raises money to provide education to underprivileged children in Jiangsu province, backs the tournament



every August. Organised by Andy Kay from NIS, this has helped to boost the profile of cricket in Nanjing.

As well as the Nanjing 6's tournament, the Ducks play in the Shanghai 6's and Xiamen 6's tournaments; chances for the club to take their members on tour and celebrate their love of cricket. The Xiamen tournament is an end of year party for the club where they can spend some time on the beach before the cold, dark winter sets in and the cricket gear is packed away for another year. **NU**

Jiangsu Sainty-2, Thailand Buriram-0

Jiangsu Sainty recorded their first win in the AFC Champions League with a resounding 2-0 over Buriram of Thailand on 2nd April. On a largely dull night the game sparked to life just before half time.

With a crowd of 35,700, almost ten thousand less than the first game against Vegalta Sendai of Japan, the home support was less fervent. However, as half time approached Sainty's dominance finally broke the Buriram resistance.

The home fans went wild in the 42nd minute as captain Lu Bofei drilled the ball into the bottom corner of the net. As the stadium was basking in the first ever goal scored by Jiangsu at home in the Asian Champions League, a flowing move was finished with a brilliant headed goal by Sun Ke, sparking scenes of wild rapture. Those two minutes were worth the 80RMB entrance fee alone.

The contest petered out in the second half as Sainty controlled the game and Buriram failed to assert themselves on the match; the half time procession of soldiers entering the stadium and posting themselves around the pitch at one metre intervals providing more entertainment than the second half could muster.

Hardcore fans were coaxed into sporadic chants in support of Jaingsu goaded by megaphone wielding MCs while drums banged a repetitive beat as the game played out in midfield. In the end, jubilant and proud supporters cheered as Sainty registered their first home win in the Asian Champions League. **NU**

The Shanghai Lu Hustlers

Pool has become increasingly popular over the years partially due to Hollywood movies such as *The Hustler* and *The Colour of Money*. These movies depicted pool as a game where the unknown were able to cultivate a reputation among their peers by using skill to entertain and frustrate in equal measure.

As well as being a game of great skill, pool also draws on a player's mental capabilities. When the tension is high can you make that simple pot? Pool crosses the divide of age too. It is a sport

that pits young against old, negating athleticism and therefore relying on a player's skill with a cue and tactical nous.

There are many and varied pool venues in Nanjing; one standout worthy of mention being Tony's Bar that offers a full size table in a dedicated upstairs area. Yet if it is competition you seek then Bluesky should be your venue of choice. Every Wednesday evening is "Killer Pool" that a one shot fight to the death; a hustler's dream, while there is also the Pool Championship for those who

think they are the next Eddie Felson or Vincent Lauria.

If you are a fan of the green baize then this monthly tournament takes place on the last Saturday of the month, the next being on 25th May. Put your name down, pay your fee and you have a chance to see your name on the pool wall, becoming in the process a part of Nanjing history.

In preparation for the next event, The Nanjinger will bring you an exclusive report of the Bluesky Pool Championship from April. **NU**