

Football Stories, by Adarsha (including a poem)



Chinmoy Lions and UN Meditation-Flames with Guru at Jamaica High School tennis court. Adarsha is directly to the left of Guru.

Chinmoy Lions—Not Sri Chinmoy Lions

It came about like this. In stages. Firstly, all the boys in the Glasgow Centre played football in the 1970s. Just as they had since childhood. It was a facet of growing up, how we made—or lost—friends. You can tell

everything about a person by his approach to the game; the way he tackles, dribbles with the ball or threads a pass. Is he aggressive, patient, cunning, courageous, unselfish on the pitch? Does he cheat! A football game then was a rite of passage that showed the mark of the man.

There are lots of parks in Glasgow and every Sunday (and maybe Saturday, too, when we met for Selfless Service) we would have a 'kickabout'. Maybe five or six of us.

When we read that Swami Vivekananda had encouraged Indian boys to play football rather than read the Vedas, the context of the quote was immaterial to us. Playing football now, unexpectedly, had a spiritual legitimacy.

Finally, when Guru visited Scotland he had played with us—demonstrating some of the silky skills he learned in the Ashram—and that removed any possible doubt that football and Guru's spiritual path went together. Silencing the naysayers (some of the girls).

With that seal of approval, we felt it was time to move on to the next level. We never had eleven players in the Centre. At least not all at one time. But we determined to form a team. A team with a uniform. A uniform with numbers on the back. We would have had names, too, but nobody did that back then.

To a disinterested outsider (most of the girls), the fact that we didn't have eleven players or indeed anyone to play against might have called the project into question, but we were undaunted. Our feet may have been on the pitch, but our eyes were fixed on the stars.

An important issue was the team colours. Blue and gold might have seemed the obvious combination, but then again blue and white were the Scottish colours and still quite spiritual. The Scottish blue was very dark, though—so perhaps not. Finally, we went with a light blue jersey, white shorts and light blue and white socks. A fusion of national and spiritual sentiment.

We bought the uniforms and the numbers but had to rely on the girls to sew the numbers on to the shirts.

The goalkeeper's jersey was yellow, so in a way, we squared the blue, white and gold conundrum.

The next important milestone was not training, finding enough players to fill the jerseys or arranging matches. It was showing Guru the fruits of our inspiration. Naturally we had planned all of this in the run-up to one of Guru's visits, so we didn't have long to wait.

Guru came to Glasgow again in 1976 to give a talk at Third Eye Centre. (There is a video of this talk on Kedar Video.)

Since disciples ran and worked in the Centre, Guru considered it to be a divine enterprise, so after the talk we had a function in the cafe. Guru was in good humour after what had been a busy event. Around 250 people squeezed into the Gallery to hear his talk and listen to him play music. The question and answer session had been lively but respectful.

At a certain point in the function, the boys (including a few from the London Centre to make up the numbers) slipped away and changed into our uniforms. I

remember my number was '10' (like Denis Law)*. We then re-joined the function coming in through a door behind Guru. We jogged round the cafe and finished up right in front of his chair. The front row of six hunkered down, the back row of five standing straight, arms folded; me with the ball at my feet.

Up to that moment everything had gone exactly to plan, but now the plan was out of our hands. We waited for Guru to react. Because of our rather showy entrance, everyone in the room had fallen silent and all eyes were on Guru.

Guru never disappoints. Everything has spiritual weight when presented to the Master, and Guru never disappoints.

Guru took in the sight, looked at each of us individually with a big smile, then he became animated, excited, more excited than the team. I wish I had a transcript of what was said, but none was made. I remember, though, that almost his first comment was to give us a spiritual name. "Your name will be Chinmoy Lions. Chinmoy Lions—not Sri Chinmoy Lions, but Chinmoy

Lions.” He also said that I should be Captain and Janaka Vice-Captain and talked about his football experiences. He was insistent that we play as a team at Games Day during August Celebrations.

I was very moved by the time Guru finished, almost in tears. It was such a simple thing we had done, but Guru’s response was overwhelming.

He galvanised us. Going forward from that night, we drafted in disciples from near and far to make up our numbers. We found ways to arrange matches against other spiritual groups in Glasgow and London and we produced newsletters to inspire would-be players. These had match reports and footballing tips as well as stirring editorials encouraging new players to come forward. And more often than not we hoisted Guru’s Victory-Banner high when we played—with only a couple of defeats.

We did go to New York and play (and win) the football tournament on that Games Day and for a couple of years afterwards. Glory’s thrill!

But to everything there is a season. The success was fleeting. But then, this experience wasn't really about football—no matter how much that game still animates me—but about those sweet bonds that tie us eternally to a Guru who can take our little ideas and make great spiritual opportunities of them.

Chinmoy Lions live! I can still feel that Number 10 shirt on my back, even now.

*Denis Law - Manchester United and Scotland.
European Player of the Year 1964

Guru Referees - England v Scotland

This would have been in 1973 or 1974. About two or three years before Chinmoy Lions was founded.

Guru planned a trip to England and Wales and a vanload of Scots drove down to London to see him. There was a weekend event (proto-Joy Weekend) in London and then some of us travelled with Guru across southern England and Wales and finished up in Swansea.

On the day after we arrived there was a picnic in a park, near where Guru was staying. Knowing how much Guru liked football, the suggestion was made that we should play a game. This quickly escalated into calls for a full international, as the two sides seemed fairly evenly matched.

Of course we wanted Guru to play, but, while he was happy to see this international match-up take place, Guru said he would rather referee than take part.

In all there were only about thirty or forty disciples in

London and the game was a very low-key affair—jackets for goalposts and perhaps eight or nine a side. I think it's fair to say that most of the players just wanted to be seen by Guru. It was just something to do. But for me and one or two others it was, of course, a deadly serious matter.

Since no one else was interested, I became the 'captain' of the Scottish team and I picked the side and gave the team talk—a talk in which I exhorted my teammates not to eat lunch before the game. A winning strategy, I felt.

Before starting the match, Guru called the two captains together to shake hands and I discovered that the English captain was a disciple who had just moved back to London from New York. Once the match started, Guru spent his time walking up and down the edge of the field taking in the styles (or the lack thereof) of all the different players on view.

Now, the way an informal game like this is set up, all the good players—or, at least, the players who think they are any good—play in forward positions and the

less good players shore up what passes for the defence.

Since the English captain elected to play in goal, this meant that he was either extremely selfless or not very good. Shortly after the kick-off, he dropped an easy shot from one of my team. And I started to think that the answer was—not very good. However, he barked orders and told players to move around the field and did a very good job of bossing his teammates, so he was certainly committed.

Then, I noticed that this captain had a major drawback as a goalkeeper—he couldn't kick the ball from hand. Every time he had the ball he would pretend to kick it upfield and then roll the ball out to one of his players. My opinion of him then changed from 'not very good' to 'completely useless'—and that gave me a lot of confidence.

Inevitably the feint-and-roll-out trick backfired. The ball was rolled out to a guy who was probably meditating on Guru. I was on it like the proverbial wolf on the fold. I intercepted the ball and ran towards the

English goal. It was an easy shot for the opening goal. I just slipped it passed him and punched the air.

England 0 Scotland 1

But before I could receive plaudits from my teammates, the voice of the English goalkeeper was heard loud and clear: “Bad luck, just past the post.” I couldn’t believe my ears. Post? What post! There was only a bundle of jackets and the ball passed a metre (at least) inside them.

Perfidious Albion. In an instant all the numberless injustices perpetrated by the English on the Scots flashed through my mind. This couldn’t be; I had to appeal to a higher power.

Now this higher power, at that precise moment, wasn’t my Guru, he wasn’t the Lord of the Universe, he wasn’t the Avatar of the Era. He was the referee, and therefore the legitimate object of my protestations!

This was a radical decision on my part. It has to be understood that I had never spoken to Guru. Never

initiated a conversation. Guru had rarely spoken to me and when he had, I had answered in words of one syllable or just smiled. But this was football!

I ran straight to Guru and managed to stop myself only about two feet away from him. I was mad (probably in all senses of the word). I screamed at Guru, “That was a goal, it was A GOAL, it was miles inside the ‘post’! It was a GREAT SHOT! It was a G-O-O-O-O-O-AL!” Looking back, at that precise moment in time I fear I may have lacked a little decorum.

Now fortunately, Guru had prepared himself for this moment over many lifetimes, destroying ignorance, killing asuras, surpassing the Cosmic Gods. He was more than ready for this outburst. He smiled his imperturbable smile. Then he said—loud enough for the English goalkeeper to hear him—‘Yes, it was a goal’.

England 0 Scotland 1 (confirmed)

I ran back, ecstatic, to my teammates. However, I had miscalculated the effect of my actions on them. None

of them wanted to make eye-contact and one of them whispered to me, “You know that you were shouting at Guru.”

But I was unaffected. Justice was done—and if the Heavens had fallen it was on the English goalie, not me.

I was delighted and showed it by scoring a completely uncontentionous second goal. Eventually we ran out winners 4-3. Losing a couple of goals late on as more and more of my players slipped away for some lunch caused me deep regret that I hadn’t covered more options during my team talk.

Looking back, I can’t imagine how I had the nerve to speak to Guru like that. I hold on to the fact that I was being completely sincere in expressing my feelings and—well—it was a football match.

Whenever I think about it, though, I can’t help but shudder—just before I smile.

The Venezuelan Epiphany

As I climbed over the wall, ready to drop down into the hotel driveway, there was Guru smiling at me. He nodded his head a little as well. I was sure he knew how I felt.

Glory's Thrill.

After two or three Celebrations of vanquishing all before us, Chinmoy Lions were overtaken in ability and, more importantly, in goal-scoring prowess by the Meditation-Flames. Guru formed the team in October 1976 in New York. I should have seen this coming. Meditation-Flames played in the UN league and had sharpened up their skills, their fitness and their teamwork playing good teams, with players from every continent on Earth. More importantly, they had Guru as coach.

On the other hand, Chinmoy Lions scrabbled around playing the odd bounce match between Celebrations and even then we struggled to play more than five or six a side. We were stuck.

So it was no surprise that we had to settle for second-best. Except, of course, it was hard to take, though, because football was our birthright. The passing game was invented in Scotland and most of our players came from Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The nadir for me was a match on Games Day in 1978 or '79. We were losing five-nil and playing without any passion. With ten minutes left, Guru came on and played for us against the Meditation-Flames. We played twelve against eleven and, even though no one could tackle Guru and he had a free run on the right wing, we never looked like we would be scoring a goal.

As football players we might have treated this as a temporary setback. Re-grouped. Doubled-down and fought back. But—actually—there was a bigger problem than Meditation-Flames.

Running.

As soon as players started to train for long-distance runs, playing football was shunned. When you are in

your teens and early twenties, it is easy to shrug off niggling football injuries. But once you reach your late twenties and early thirties, the game isn't worth the candle, for serious runners. So, I found myself carrying the torch for football more or less on my own.

Encouraged by Guru, the former Lions took up running at a prodigious rate. There was still the odd bounce game and the tournament at Games Day and, of course, the Christmas Trip—but running had become the Gold Standard for spiritual exercise and football was yesterday's news.

I wasn't much of a runner. Good over sprints, I had no gumption and could never build up the stamina to register decent times at middle or long distance. That's not to say that I didn't try.

I ran two miles a day for a whole year—but unconventionally.

I worked a lot at night managing events at Third Eye Centre and sometimes I also had to be in early the next day. So, I hit on the idea of going out for runs after I

had finished work, which meant at about 11:40 at night. I ran for about five miles (to be on the safe side) and got back home at 12:20 or thereabouts. This meant I had run two miles on one day and two miles the following day. So by running four times in eight days I was able to claim to have run two miles a day.

I decided it was probably in my best interest not to explain this in detail to Guru.

But, really, what I wanted to do was play football. Give me a ball and I could run after it forever.

My first attempt was to persuade Third Eye Centre that they needed a football team to promote the activities. I came up with the name Third Eye Centaurs and managed to organise a few games with a team made up of my staff and, ironically, some disciples who were, for a short time, nostalgic for the game. That team didn't last long and the Arts Centre got a poor return for the money laid out on uniforms.

However, one of my staff became aware of my desire to keep playing. He had already organised a Saturday

team that played in the University League and he invited me to join.

I jumped at the chance.

Finally, I was part of a team in a league with regular fixtures and referees. We played at grounds all over the city. It seemed to rain during every match. On one occasion we couldn't start the match because there was an iron bed frame in the centre circle, a quarter of a mile from the nearest road. It took six of us to move it.

Our goalkeeper was nicknamed 'The Cat'—not because he was particularly agile, but because he seemed to be asleep every time the opposition mounted an attack.

The name of my team was the Ultramontanes because it had started life as the Catholic Society team. Other teams chose more interesting names.

My Father: Did you win this week?

Me: No, we lost three-nil to Two Other Guys.

My Father: You lost to two guys!! What happened?

Me: That's their name—there are eleven of them.

My Father: Why do they call themselves Two Other Guys?

Me: So people like us can have this pointless conversation.

I loved it. It was a hard slog, but gradually I improved and got up to speed with the rest of the team. The best we managed was to avoid relegation by the skin of our teeth, but it was more than enough. I was fulfilling my footballing ambitions.

Almost.

The Christmas trip that year was in Venezuela and I joined it after playing for four or five months. At one of the hotels, there was a football pitch on the other side of the driveway from the hotel entrance. You could only see it from the upper floors as there was a wall at

ground level, about six feet high. Early on in our stay, around twenty of us climbed over that wall for a game.

This game was unlike any disciple game I had played in before. I was in command. All those rainy Glasgow afternoons suddenly bore fruit. In defence, in midfield, on the wing, I was just that fraction of a second faster than the opposing players, weaving my way through their ranks and delivering passes to my teammates with a flourish. By chance, the disciple who was captain of the Meditation-Flames was playing opposite me. He was a very good player and had been crucial to the success in the UN League. But on this day, I was able to win our head-to-head battles with a bit to spare.

I was a god among mortals—or perhaps just a slightly better player than I had been previously in these encounters.

The coup de grace came when I scored with my ‘trick’. Every attacking player has a trick or two—good players have a lot more than that. My trick had only worked once or twice before. In essence it went like this: I

would run at the full back but slow down as I got near him. This meant that he would stop and block me by standing in front of me. When this happened, normally, his stance would be wide so that he could run with me regardless of whether I went to his right or left. I would then poke the ball through his legs (a nutmeg, in the parlance) and accelerate past him, hoping there were few yards between me and the goalkeeper. Then, without looking up, I would flick the ball into the far corner of the net before the goalkeeper could rush out to narrow the angle.

Like everything else that day, it worked like a charm as I knew in my bones it would.

For me that match could have gone on forever.

When the game finished we started climbing back over the wall but—just in time—the players realised that Guru had taken up a spot on the other side and was seated, talking to disciples, directly below us. We hastily moved further down the wall and then dropped down outside the hotel entrance. Guru was amused at the sight of all these boys appearing as if from

nowhere and he watched us come over the wall with some interest.

As I was about to drop onto the tarmac, Guru smiled and nodded at me. I swear he knew how I had played. It was the way I had always imagined playing when Guru first gave us the name Chinmoy Lions. I remembered the pride I felt then.

For me, football had come full circle.

“Goal”, a poem by Adarsha

The explosion of joy
when the ball
arcs in
under
the crossbar
beyond the flailing arm
is a spark of that
Eternal Delight
Kindling—but not yet caught alight
in the heart of mankind.

(from the author, Adarsha: “This poem literally came to me in a dream.”)