

## **Soccer Recollections in Myanmar, by Ashirvad**

Before the match in Myanmar, we met at the hotel lobby to have our picture taken with Guru. Someone had bought a uniform for the whole team, and it looked very official. Guru started talking to us and mentioned that if we lost the match he would be very happy. He told us that, to the locals, we were like a selection of international stars, and if they beat us it would be something that would give them unbelievable joy, and they would forever remember that day.

But Guru also said that we should play hard and seriously, and above all fair. He didn't want to hear that we hurt them in any way. Guru said that some of the players had to work the next day at the hotel and other places and if they were hurt it would create a lot of difficulties for them.

The game was at the village soccer field. It was a very simple dirt field, near the centre of the village. It was surrounded by houses and shops. When we arrived at the field, there were hundreds of people waiting there already! It felt like the whole village had come to watch the match. There were lots of children, women

and elderly people. The local team also came properly dressed, in a nice uniform. There were 3 referees, which was something few of us ever had a chance to experience while playing soccer.



Once the match started, we quickly realised that the locals were more skilled than we were. They were short and skinny, and extremely fast. They also played together as a team better than we did. However, it felt as though they were afraid of hitting us or committing

any fouls, to the point that during many plays our team could almost push our way through without serious opposition. We ended up scoring, mostly because of this.

In the end, the local team won the match. We did put in a sincere effort, but the locals were clearly superior. When the final whistle was blown, the whole crowd exploded in cheers. Our team was very happy too, since we knew Guru's requests were all fulfilled. The next moments were very sweet. The villagers surrounded us, and we were sharing their joy and friendliness for a long time. A lot was communicated without words; language was not a barrier to the expression of our feelings. Many pictures were taken with both teams posing together. A disciple (Prabhakar, if I am not mistaken) bought sweets which were distributed amongst the children, making them even happier. He got swamped by the kids, and at some point had them over his shoulders, arms and legs!

As we came back, we felt as though we were in Heaven. It was a magical experience. Guru was very

happy when he heard the stories later on at the function.