

UN Meditation-Flames – Early Days, and Soccer at Games Day, by Mohan

In the early 1970s many boys who had participated in team sports in their younger days were looking for some sport that we could play together. I don't remember how the idea of a soccer team first arose, but it found a lot of enthusiasm within a dozen or so young disciple boys. However it arose, it received immediate encouragement from Guru, who had been a soccer star at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in India. That encouragement really lit a fire under us.

I had never played soccer, but in my senior year at the University of Connecticut I had to walk past the soccer fields on my way home. It turned out that UCONN had one of the top soccer teams in the nation and frequently figured in the playoffs for the national championship. I used to catch every home game and was amazed at the skills and fitness levels of our team. We started playing pickup games in the backyard of our disciple house for fun.

Out of college I joined the United Nations, where I learned they had a small soccer league. I suggested that we might like to field a team containing many UN staff and join the league. The managers of the UN league welcomed the possibility. Our team was excited that, apart from practising regularly, we could now play matches. When Guru heard that we could play in the UN league, he was very happy. He gave our team its name: the *Meditation-Flames*. We had a spiritual name!

The UN soccer league was happy because it consisted of only three teams. Now, with a fourth team, there could be more games and a knock-out tournament at the end. There was a Latin America team, a team Europe, and a team from Russia. This was in the mid-1970s, at the height of the Cold War. We were a team comprised mainly of American guys and we were going to play the Russians! Guru and many disciples used to come watch us play.

We practised every morning at the Jamaica High School track, where Guru took his morning exercise in



those days. One day he joined us on the field and told us how much joy he was getting while we were playing. He told us stories from when he played for the soccer team at the Ashram in his youth. It was fascinating to learn of Guru's early soccer experiences. He said he played right wing and was a good goal scorer. He recalled sometimes being carried off the field by his teammates in jubilation for having scored the winning goal.

Guru encouraged us to play cleanly and never try to foul any player on the opposing team. He told a story about the one time he ever fouled a player during a match. He felt so bad that after the match he walked barefoot to the player's house to apologise.

In his teens Guru loved soccer and played it every day. Unlike us, growing up in India, Guru and his teammates played barefoot. When you strike the ball, you do so with your instep, either the inside or outside of your foot. Sadly, one day Guru somehow kicked the ball incorrectly and broke his toe, so he couldn't play for two years.

From time to time Guru would coach us on what we should do on offense, defense and midfield play. Once he even tried to teach us some deceptive dribbling and shooting tricks to help us score goals. His attention and concern made us feel wonderful, and it was amazing that Guru's oneness with our play gave him such joy.

Soccer at Games Day

How excited we were to learn that the disciples in the UK had formed a soccer team and Guru had given them the name *Chinmoy Lions*. Not only that, but during the August celebrations we would have a match with them during Games Day. Games Day that year was held at Westhill High School in Stamford, Connecticut.

The day was perfect—warm and sunny. Our two teams lined up at the start of the match and meditated. I don't remember too much about the back-and-forth of the match, but I do recall that the British boys had more technical skills than we did. Nevertheless, because we played more often as a team, we were more organised and it was a close match (I think we won, but I may be wrong).

What I clearly recall was that just as we approached half-time, the sky became pitch black and the wind suddenly picked up. As the whistle blew for the end of the half, the sky opened up and it started raining cats and dogs. Everyone dashed into the school gymnasium, where we were forced to stay for a good half-hour. At that point, just as the sky had previously darkened so quickly, it magically cleared up and the sun burst forth. Once again it was a gorgeous day. The UN Meditation-Flames returned to the field first and, while we were waiting for the Lions to get organised, one of our players noticed that there was a big puddle about 20 feet long on the sideline near where we were standing. I forget who was first, but one of our players

took a running start and then dove into the puddle, sliding through the wet grass until he came out the other end of the puddle. We all looked at each other and knew exactly what we all wanted to do. We lined up and took turns running and sliding through the puddle and wet grass for about 15 minutes.

I think it's interesting to note that when Guru talks about America, he always mentions its childlike heart. Well, the Meditation-Flames certainly demonstrated this attribute that day. It's also worth noting the reaction of the Chinmoy Lions. They stood off to one side and just watched us incredulously thinking, "What will these crazy blokes do next!"