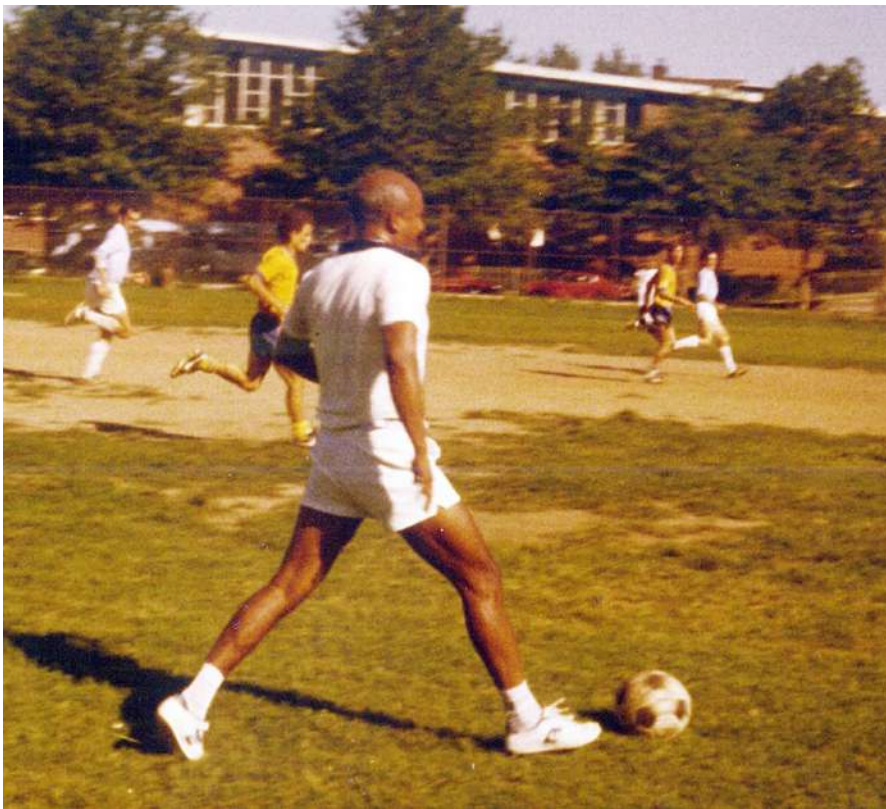


## Football Stories, by Projjwal

### Guru Plays Football in NY - 1977



The first time I saw Guru play football was at Jamaica High School Track in NY, August 1977. The boys were playing seriously among themselves when Guru decided to join. He walked on the field and played

on right wing position. I remember that the boys would pass to Guru and he would run down the wing with the ball—of course nobody dared to tackle Guru—and from the sideline he made a high pass to the box, where one of the boys headed into the goal. That happened 2 or 3 times in a matter of a few minutes and the team got in the lead. Guru was extremely fit and fast, and he played extremely well.

## Watching Football with Guru - South Africa, 1996



We were in South Africa during the Africa Cup of Nations in January 1996. During one of the matches—I do not remember which nations were playing—the disciples organised a big Peace Run celebration before the game. After the reception Guru wanted to stay and watch the game, so he sat down with some of the boys in good seats in the audience. We were sitting very close to Guru—I was right behind Guru—and Guru was watching the whole atmosphere with great interest. The noise, the dances, the singing of the locals were all

very loud and colourful. When the game began, Guru started drawing birds in a small notebook and just looked up occasionally, although he was very much intrigued by and involved in the game. The game was very good and serious. Guru also would very often shout and scream when the game got exciting—mainly when there was a foul by a player. Guru then would look up and, with the full authority of a football expert, just shout "Penalty, penalty!" That happened a few times. Considering that a penalty is the biggest punishment in a football game, Guru seemed to show more of his justice-aspect than his compassion-aspect. Guru did not stay until the end, but it was yet another unforgettable football experience with Guru and some lucky boys.

### **On the Football Field with Guru – Brazil, 1999-2000**

Guru's Christmas Trip to Brazil, **the** football country, included lots of football. The disciple boys played a lot! In Curitiba we played on a small, fenced-in dirt field that was squeezed in between 2 buildings—maybe five on five. It started raining heavily and the field become one big puddle. A great game! During the evening function Guru asked about it and I remember

mentioning to him that Hiyamallar had scored 6 goals. Guru was very happy (as was Hiyamallar!) and I think Guru felt that his football boys were in Heaven. And he wanted to be part of it!

Next was a hotel with lots of soccer history—a resort where the Brazilian national team had stayed before, and where we felt like the Sri Chinmoy Football Team in their footsteps.

Guru heard that we played a lot and announced that he would come to watch us play. The field was smaller than the real-size field—we probably played 9 on 9. Guru came out to watch the whole game. My personal highlight: I shot a fantastic goal from about 15 metres into the top right corner. I cannot describe my joy! Here we were, playing soccer in Brazil, on a fantastic field, the weather was great and Guru was on the sidelines, and I shot a goal! (Sorry for my self-flattery.) Guru later said, "I admired your goal like anything."



After the game Guru came out on the field to coach us. In his youth Guru had been an excellent football player and also captain in the Ashram. For maybe an hour Guru showed us techniques and tricks and asked us to demonstrate them—like bicycle-kicks, or tactical passing. We also had to shoot corner kicks, dribble, dribble the ball in the air without touching the ground and so on. We were all so thrilled and happy to be out on the field with Guru instructing us. I will never forget these blessingful times with our beloved Guru during the start of the new millennium.

## The New Football Captain – Paraguay, 2000



The hotel in Paraguay was very simple but we still kept up the soccer games, this time on an uninspiring dirt field. During one function Guru out of the blue called Devashishu, Sahadeva and myself to come up. Guru started writing something on a football and gave it to me—announcing that I was now the captain of the Sri

Chinmoy Football Team, and Devashishu and Sahadeva the vice-captains. What an honour for someone with mediocre football skills, but with a big and loud screaming voice during the game—that probably impressed Guru. The football that Guru gave me is beside my shrine. In fading ink it says "Projjwal Captain."

## Village Problem, Village Joy – Myanmar, 2000



In December 2000 we were in Myanmar during the Christmas Trip. Guru had met S-1, the highest leader in the country, and he liked Guru. We played some football at the hotel.

One day someone had organised a game—the Sri Chinmoy team versus the village team. Sanjay went to the market and got us football uniforms. A few days later the game was on. Before we left, Guru called all his boy-players to the function room and gave a short talk to us. We were so excited that Guru took the game

seriously. He said we should try to play our best game, but he repeatedly added, "No foul play—only fair play. Do not injure anybody. They are village workers and have to work to feed their families." He also said that it would be fine—even better—if they would win.

When we arrived at the field, it seemed that the whole village was there to watch the game—something that had never happened before! The pitch was simpler than the simplest and a quarter of the field was about 50 cm higher than the rest, like a small hill. There were 2 goals and lines, and Prabhakar was our goalkeeper. I remember that he was the star of the game. Since he was so tall, the villagers all cheered when he had the ball. His goal kick went almost all the way to the goal.



We had a great game—and in the end we lost. The village team was so happy, and so were we—we had obeyed Guru by playing fair.



Afterwards we heard that the village had gotten into trouble with the officials, since it was forbidden to make contact with foreigners, and the soccer game was thus quite a serious crime. But fortunately we always had a close observer/guard/government representative looking after us who reported personally to S-1, who really liked Guru. S-1 heard about the trouble, and one word from him was enough to solve the problem for the village.

## **Getting a Certificate – Malaysia, 2006**



In 2006 we stayed at the Awana Resort in Kijal, Malaysia. During our regular football games, we found out that the hotel had its own

football team, and a game was arranged. I remember playing on a full field, which was quite big for us "small field" players. We tried our best, but were beaten

badly by the rather rough and tough players from the hotel.

The next day, Guru invited the hotel team and gave everyone a gift. An official photo was taken with Guru smiling and the 2 captains shaking hands. Every disciple-player got a certificate from the hotel saying, "In recognition of our valuable participation in the 'Friendly Soccer Match' on 22 Jan. 2006." I think this is the only certificate we ever got as a football team.