

Soccer Stories, by Sanjay

I had the privilege of being Guru's driver on trips from Jamaica to Philadelphia. These trips weren't regular, but life took Guru to the City of Brotherly Love once or twice a year from 2002-2007. Guru gave Peace Concerts there, lifted the World's Strongest Men and attended Ravi Shankar concerts, for example.

On June 22, 2006, Guru gave two successive concerts at the prestigious Kimmel Center for 2,500 and then 3,500 seekers. After the concerts, Guru held a small function for the hundred-or-so disciples who had travelled there. Needless to say, we departed fairly late for the 4-hour drive back to Queens.

Guru liked the car to be warm and, after this exhausting day, our other passengers (Ranjana, Paree and Govinda) fell into deep trance before an hour had even passed. With nothing but bleak darkness ahead of me, I doubted my ability to stay completely alert. Thankfully Guru began chatting, engaging my mind. I'm not sure exactly what prompted the topic, but Guru began asking me about the summer's World Cup,

which teams had qualified and which teams were expected to do well.

For the next hour I gave Guru my own insights and predictions as Guru recounted the 1956 World Cup, which was held in the prime of Guru's own Ashram soccer career.

After this hour, Guru entered into a high meditation and I was left alone with my thoughts for the remaining 3-hour drive. We pulled into Guru's driveway shortly after 3 a.m. Even the guard was fast asleep.

But the story doesn't end there.

Two weeks later, some of us were sitting in a VIP salon in the airport in The Gambia with Guru as he waited exceptionally patiently for a meeting with the Vice President, which was never to happen. In the meantime, however, we had to kill 6 hours in the small, well-appointed lounge. At one point, Guru resumed the conversation from the car ride and asked

the 8 or 9 of us what our thoughts were about the World Cup, which was then underway.

Guru asked about the matches scheduled that day and what the results were. I texted Projjwal, who was in Germany. For the next 4 or 5 hours, Projjwal dutifully watched all the matches and sent key highlights by text. Guru was always eager to hear them.

Alas, by the end of the day, Guru still hadn't met the dignitaries he had hoped to meet. For those of us with Guru who were soccer fans, though, the day was rapturous and it was very difficult to feel the disappointment Guru did.

George Weah



Sri Chinmoy honouring George Weah with the "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness Heart" award

knocked on a door in south Jamaica. An African woman opened it and was surprised when I asked if George

In the summer of 2001, I read an article in a New York City paper about Liberian-born soccer legend George Weah, a fixture of AC Milan and the 1995 Golden Boot winner. I thought the reporter was mistaken, however, because she noted that George had a summer home in Jamaica, Queens. This seemed impossible for a man noted for his love of fashion and fancy cars.

A few weeks later, I

lived there. He did, and he came to the door when she called. I explained the Lifting Up the World Ceremony and gave George the information. A day or so later, he called me and agreed to attend.

I immediately printed out a bio and took it to Guru's house. The next night, I brought a videotape of highlights of George's career. Guru watched it intently and when George exhibited flashes of his incredible skill, Guru commented "He is a Pelé-type," referencing the legendary Brazilian. George was known to play a little dirty, though, and Guru winced at some of his fouls.

Guru composed a song that night called "King George" and asked me to buy a soccer ball for the ceremony.

The next day, Guru called me to chat about George. Guru casually mentioned that he was yearning for another Sudhahota and had been hoping that George could be the one. In any case, Guru was eager to honour George.

The next night, I picked up George from his home. George was in a tailored Italian suit. When we arrived at the tennis court, he was stunned. It was not the setting he was expecting, but in fact much, much better than the stuffy hotel ceremonies he was used to. The night went perfectly.

Nearly 20 years later, long retired from football, George now lives permanently in his native Liberia, where he serves as his country's PRESIDENT.

The Christmas Trip in Myanmar in December 2000

The Christmas Trip in Myanmar in December 2000 was eventful in a number of ways. The first section was in the country's capital, Yangon. We were in a beautiful hotel in the centre of the city. And there, Guru established a deep friendship with Myanmar's Head of State, known as Secretary One, or S-1. But we boys were itching to play sports and there just weren't many fields around.

So, by the time we travelled to the next location, Mandalay, we were dreaming of soccer. I befriended a

local taxi driver who invited the disciple boys to come and play a small match with his taxi driver friends. It was the first time any of them had ever mixed with Westerners. We had such a great time that we decided to plan a more formal scrimmage, 11 on 11.

I got excited and went with Sahadeva, the Vice-Captain of the team, to a local market and bought replica Man United jerseys, shorts and even socks! We sent word to Guru the day before the match and were excited for Guru's blessings.

The afternoon before, however, my taxi driver friend came to the hotel quivering with fear. The local authorities had found out about the plans of the taxi drivers, who were not supposed to mix freely with tourists and now feared for their livelihood. We were concerned, no doubt, but at the same time, we realised that the local authorities had no idea who we were. We were disciples of the great Sri Chinmoy, new friend of S-1!

I went right away to Agraha, who immediately shifted into full manifestation mode. He contacted one of S-1's

assistants and explained our pure friendship with the local team.

Late that night, our taxi driver friend came to the hotel again. He said that he had just received a very stern command from the local authorities that his team was to play us the next day as planned. Apparently S-1's assistant had called the local authorities directly. The taxi driver was now perhaps more afraid than he had been before!



In any case, the next morning we were all proudly walking through the hotel

lobby in our uniforms, looking more beautiful than any of us could ever have imagined, admiring ourselves in each mirror and reflective surface we saw. Agraha saw us and told us that Guru wanted to speak with us before the match.

Guru came into the lobby and we all sat around him. Guru recalled the infamous match in South Africa in 1995 where disciples had played far too rough for Guru's liking and nearly injured their opponents, the local hotel team. Guru mentioned that, while we were all enjoying vacation, our opponents would have to work the next day. Guru cautioned us against playing too aggressively.

Guru then gave us a cryptic message, or at least gave us a hint of what was to come. Guru mentioned that in the eyes of the Burmese people, we were representatives of the mighty United States and the Western world, which had lorded it over their country for decades. Guru told us of the joy the Burmese would feel if they were to beat the powerful Westerners.

Guru would not dare tell us to lose the match. And we were too enthusiastic to play without dynamism. And so, we headed off to the playing field as excited as ever.



When we reached the humble field where we had played the days before, it had been transformed. It was the same pothole-laden pitch, but now it was surrounded by hundreds upon hundreds of villagers. And they were not there to admire the Westerners. As Guru had hinted, they were there to see their team beat us.

When the referee blew the whistle, it was clear that the Burmese were there to win. And they were masters of their field and seemed to know each and every hole and divot.

In the first half they took dozens of shots, albeit weak ones. Prabhakar was our goalie and his athleticism and height so enthralled the spectators that, quickly, three or four dozen children ran to sit by his goal. Each time he'd clear the ball over 2/3 of the field, the kids would shriek with delight.

The Burmese controlled the midfield and I, as our lone forward, saw very little action. They scored first but very shortly thereafter I received a long pass, possibly even from Prabhakar in goal. I quickly put it into the opposing team's net. 1-1.

The spectators became more anxious and the Burmese players more agitated and aggressive. But we could not match their will or their skill, and when they scored the next goal, we knew the game was over.

When the ref blew the final whistle, the crowd erupted. The other team took off their old, sweaty jerseys and asked to trade for ours. It was clear, though, that it was less about sportsmanship than the desire to have our new Man United kits. One very



prominent member of our team saw what was happening and quickly turned back to the hotel, keeping his Man U jersey!

We had brought bags of candy to distribute to the village kids. But as our players fanned out one by one across the field, the kids (all between 5 and 7 years old) rushed them. Screaming with joy, they pulled each of us to the ground and ran away with as much candy as they could carry.

My taxi driver friend was overcome with joy at the end. The whole experience was absolutely surreal for him, drawing him closer to the “halls of power” than he would ever have imagined or desired. But the

ending could not have been more divinely scripted. His team won, and he was the village hero.

And despite the loss, we all felt Guru's will was done.