

## 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 1970's. 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

