

SingaCup 2016

football, friends and thunderstorms

After more than 14 hours of flying, arriving at Changi Airport in Singapore could only mean one thing: excitement. And also, a good time to think about the purpose of my visit to Singapore: football. For a European referee who never officiated in Asian football, Singa Cup is a challenge. But before thinking of football, I had a more important task: getting from the train station to the hotel. First impression when surfacing from the underground: Singapore means, among many other things, heavy rain and thunders. On a daily basis, as I found out in the next 10 days. So I made it to the hotel rather wet and a little bit worried about the weather. One day later, our group was complete, with referees from Belgium, Gibraltar, Germany, Italy, Irak, England, Romania and Denmark, ready to work together and face the rather extreme weather conditions as well. Fortunately, the first technical meeting with REFEX staff and referees who had already officiated at Singa Cup was very informative and full of useful information. And all the information we received was confirmed a day later when the first matches took place, at Turf City – The Cage Sports Park. One of the most difficult aspects was certainly the weather. We constantly had 28-30 degrees Celsius and thunderstorms almost on a daily basis. The rain was not a real problem, as the artificial astroturf pitches were good enough, but the quick succession of “wet / dry / hot” cycle made it a bit difficult for some, even keeping this report’s author away from the pitches one day. But a REFEX team is always a strong and united team, so everything went well and all the games were covered with officials. Football teams in south-east Asia are rather familiar with these weather conditions, so they were not really bothered when the thunderstorm alarm went on and we had to interrupt the matches for up to 15 minutes. Young football players from Asia are very disciplined but also rather friendly to foreign officials, so most of the “lightning breaks” were put to good use, with photo sessions, as players wanted mementos with the European referees. Obviously, football is a very competitive game in every part of the world, and we (or, should I say, the players) had our share of yellow and red cards. But, from my personal perspective, most of the players seemed rather disciplined and focused on giving 100% on the pitch for their team, so there was no need for many disciplinary measures. It was enjoyable to referee youth teams from Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia and other countries in the region.

As with every REFEX tournament I had the privilege to attend, it was a very good opportunity to work with referees and friends I already knew, like Andrew from Gibraltar, Knut and Dominik (Germany) or Davy from Belgium, but also meet colleagues for the first time, like Amer from Italy. It was also interesting to meet referees from Singapore as well. We were there for the football but Singapore is a fantastic place, so we tried to make the best of it and see some of its beautiful places. Food in Singapore is also excellent, with influences from all regions of Asia. The referees night out, in one of the many luxury shopping malls, was also

enjoyable and a good occasion to thank our "host", Megat Azman Atan, for the excellent cooperation we had and for the hospitality at the tournament venue. I could go on and on but I need to leave some information for my next report from SINGA CUP, as I promised myself I have to return there in the next few years. But that's not just me, it's what most of the REFEX referees promised themselves, I'm sure...

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