



JOHN DUERDEN

For Review Only



LIONS AND TIGERS

**The story of football in
Singapore and Malaysia**

"A must-read for all fans in Singapore and Malaysia and football in general, Duerden ... captures the unique story of the game in that part of the world with an engaging, lively and well-written book."

Marcus Christenson, football editor of the *Guardian*

"All fans of Singapore and Malaysia football should read this great book that really tells the story of football and a unique rivalry."

Aleksandar Durić, former Singapore national striker



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For Review Only

For my girls – Myung-joo, Danbi and Yubi

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For Review

INTRODUCTION

THE AFF CUP AND THE PUSKAS AWARD—
SUMMING UP FOOTBALL IN SINGAPORE
AND MALAYSIA



They are a little more patient in Singapore football and they know that success does not usually come quickly. In Malaysia, we know that too, but we still demand it quickly.

—Zainal Abidin Hassan,
over 130 appearances for Malaysia from 1984–1996

On the morning of 7 October 2016, the rain was pouring in Singapore. The skies were darker than the looks on the faces of the Vietnamese players when R. Sasikumar's shoulder scored the decisive goal in the 1998 Tiger Cup final. It felt, well, like England, and it did not stop raining until late in the afternoon—something that did not bode well in terms of ticket sales at the new National Stadium. The build-up for the Friday night friendly clash with Malaysia was low-key, perhaps the lowest in recent memory. It was something of a disappointing feeling. The fallout from recent clashes in World Cup qualification and the AFF Suzuki Cup could still be felt, but this friendly was perhaps a one-off, a feeling that the two teams did not really want to be playing each other at that moment in time.

Both were dealing with issues of their own, and while it is pretty much always the case, this was more than the usual problems.

Malaysia were in all sorts of trouble and bringing a young squad that was desperate just to avoid defeat. In some ways, playing a young team was a wise decision. It meant that there was little pressure on the visitors and it was all on the hosts. A team that was in terrible form was going to field something of an experimental side. Any kudos that would come Singapore's way from winning the game was instantly reduced, especially as their line-up would be bursting with experience.

But overall, Singapore was in a better position in terms of form. Yet what they lacked in youth they did not make up for in excitement and flair. As legendary Singapore striker Aleksandar Durić told me, “there are many other things to do in Singapore”, and while he was talking of youngsters preferring not to put on football boots, he could have been referring to this Friday night specifically.

Before the game, the atmosphere was flat. Such was the disillusionment across the Causeway that the travelling Malaysian fans barely numbered three digits. This was not going to be one of those derbies where the away section contributed to an unforgettable atmosphere. Not only that, but the ones that did make the journey were not in the highest of spirits. “A draw would be OK for us,” said one who had made his way down from Melaka (unknowingly recreating my first journey to the city, though I will never know if he rushed through customs and immigration in the way I did on that first visit; probably he had plenty of experience in crossing the Causeway.) “We have lost so many games in the past few months, we really don’t want to lose to Singapore. Beating them would be fantastic but I can’t see that happening. For me, just don’t lose and that is OK.”

When you look at the record of the Tigers going into that game, it is easy to understand the lack of excitement around the national team. In 2015, there had been three 6-0 thrashings. And these were not against the giants of Asian football. Perhaps if it had been South Korea or Japan administering the beatings then it would have been a little easier to take. As it was, two humiliations came at the hands of Palestine and one against Oman. These were not minnows by any stretch of the imagination and had both reached the 2015 Asian Cup, but managed a combined total of three points in their six games. It was just embarrassing. Between the second Palestine loss in June, which came at home, and the upcoming game in United Arab Emirates, a much tougher opponent, I interviewed Malaysia coach Dollah Salleh. He vowed that by the end of the game in Abu Dhabi, Malaysia would do something to make everyone forget about the 6-0 losses.

And they did, but just not in the way that the coach had wanted. Malaysia went west and lost 10-0. UAE were a good team, finishing third at the 2015 Asian Cup, and nobody expected an away victory. Even so, it was a massive humiliation and one that Dollah, who kept his dignity on the sidelines and dealing with the media, was never going to be able to survive—and he didn’t. Ong Kim Swee had been

drafted in, getting the job at the end of 2015 on a temporary basis and then, after the Football Association of Malaysia had spent about three months looking for a permanent candidate, getting the nod full-time. In October 2016, the team were coming off the back of a 3-0 loss in Indonesia, the hosts’ first international game for almost two years after being banned from international football by the good folks at FIFA who had allowed all kinds of craziness in Jakarta for years.

So the tiger that arrived in the Lion City was not a sleek predator full of hunger, confidence and menace but something of a scaredy-cat just looking to avoid defeat. And in the big rivalries that is sometimes what it is all about. Winning can be lovely but the prospect of standing—or these days sitting—in the stadium while watching rival fans celebrate wildly and lengthily is one of the worst feelings in football, despite how necessary it is from time to time.

“I was told that whatever you do, you must not lose to Malaysia,” said Trevor Hartley when he arrived in 1976 to become Technical Director of the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) and then the national team coach shortly after. “Losing to Malaysia was a huge no-no. It was not just the people at the association or those working in football it was the media, of course, but also the people you saw on the street. When a game with Malaysia approached, people made it clear that defeat really was not an option. This is the one team you do not lose to. There was a lot of pride at stake.”

And that pride was evident, even when the opponents were not the Harimau Malaya. “Even when Singapore played the Malaysian states, they really wanted to win,” recalled Hartley. “There were a lot of bragging rights at the time. So when they played the Malaysian national team, the feeling was much bigger, of course. The media talked about it for days before the game and there was much more media. Not just the usual football writers, but everyone was talking about it. There was pressure on the players and the coach, it was good for everyone, as long as you did not lose.”

It was the painful prospect of defeat as much as the potential delights of victory that make a derby such a big deal yet on 7 October it wasn’t just the weather that had put a dampener on things. It was all a bit muted. There were not much more than 20,000 home fans in the 55,000-seat arena. The atmosphere started brightly, but the dourness of the game that eventually played out soon put as much a dampener on the Singapore evening as the rain had done in the day.

But still, but still, there was something. “We love nothing more than to beat Malaysia,” said one fan who was just about to enter the stadium. “They are our neighbours and our rivals. For a Singaporean fan, there is nothing better than seeing them go home with nothing. That is just the way it is and I don’t think that will ever change.”

If the atmosphere was lacking, the desire of the two teams to win—or in Malaysia’s case not to lose—was palpable. There was something out there on the pitch, there was a special feeling and, yes, there was a rivalry. With football currently at a fairly low ebb in both countries and the new National Stadium still a little unloved, there were still over 20,000 people ready to buy tickets and watch teams that were closer to 200 than 100 in the FIFA world rankings.

That something was there on the faces of the players after the game ended in a 0-0 draw. In the bowels of the stadium before exiting to the bus, the Malaysians passed through happy at negating the much more experienced hosts. Singapore were as frustrated as it is possible to be. “What an experience,” said Malaysian debutant Darren Lok as he left the stadium. The English-born striker had been waiting for his Malaysian passport for months and had to wait until the second half for his introduction. He didn’t score but worked his yellow-and-black socks off.

“It is great to come here to the home of our rivals to get a result. We are a young team,” he said. “We made sure that we were not going to lose and we have come away with a good result.”

He was right. For Malaysia, it was a good result. The reaction back home was OK. Fans did not seem to enjoy the football but understood the situation and at this moment in time, would tolerate such an approach.

Singapore captain Hariss Harun, a class act on and off the field who actually answers questions with thought instead of cliché, was still shaking his head at how Malaysia had escaped defeat.

“We’ve only ourselves to blame,” were his words as he left. He would say something similar to me a few weeks later as Singapore exited the AFF Suzuki Cup in Manila, where the rain started during the game rather than ending just before. Yet the frown, the shake of the head and the general air of frustration and disappointment were pretty much the same.

Overall, the experience of this game did not match up to the tales of the past—the distant as well as the most recent. It was just, I was sure,

bad timing and a combination of factors. But still, it was a good time to take stock, to look at the wider picture and what it all means. Is the rivalry the fiercest in the world? In football terms, surely not. Not even in Asia: South Korea and Japan probably win the continental title in that regard with their history, bitterness and long-standing position at the top of the Asian football tree. You could throw North Korea into that mix too, and there is no love lost between Saudi Arabia and Iran, or Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Others, such as India versus Pakistan, are more about their history and relationship off the pitch than anything significant in football terms. Singapore and Malaysia do have a fierce rivalry, but there is something else to it.

There is a shared history that is not bitter and brutal like Japan’s relationship with Korea, but something deeper. There are surely few nations with the same relationship. They were both part of British-ruled Malaya for around a century and a half, that is six generations. Much shorter was the shared experience as part of the Federation of Malaya after the British left in 1957, ending when Singapore was expelled in 1965.

It is unavoidable, then, that there are close ties between the two countries. These were nations that were like brothers—with the requisite sibling rivalry—and sport, especially football, was an arena in which that could be played out.

I had hoped that it would be played out once again at the 2016 AFF Suzuki Cup, but I knew it was something of a forlorn hope. After all, they had been drawn in separate groups. At one time, that wouldn’t have been such a big deal but such was the situation of the two teams going into the tournament that few expected that they would meet later. Perhaps one team might squeeze into the semi-finals, but both doing so was the kind of long shot that even Faiz Subri—more of him later—would struggle with.

In the end, both failed dismally and only won one game between them. That was Malaysia’s slightly lucky win over Cambodia as they came from behind to win 3-2. At one time, such a close scoreline with the Angkor Warriors would not have gone down well with fans back home, but results were so bad over the preceding two years that supporters were happy to take what they could get. Subsequent defeats spelled the end. The first against Vietnam was expected; the second against co-host Myanmar should have been, even if it was not.

For the first time in the tournament’s history, both nations exited at the group stage. The record books will show that Malaysia collected

three points to Singapore's one, but it matters little. Both were out, and deservedly so.

ANOTHER SINGAPOREAN INQUEST

Singapore's failed AFF Suzuki Cup campaign in 2016 and its aftermath offer some insight into how football in the country works.

I was there in Manila on 25 November as the Lions left the Rizal Memorial Stadium and the tournament in a mild storm. The headlights of the waiting bus at the crumbling but atmospheric arena in the middle of the city not only illuminated the raindrops, but also the slump in the players' shoulders as they passed by an Indonesian press pack that were gleefully shouting "thank you" to the Lions as they walked past. It was hard to know if there was sarcasm or mockery in the greetings shouted out. It sounded like there was to me, but as they were not talking in their first language, I wouldn't say conclusively.

What could be said with complete confidence was that three games, one goal and one point meant failure and an early exit. It was not the finest hour for the four-time champions.

Coach V. Sundramoorthy had a few words after the game. As he was asked about his future by a journalist from the *New Straits Times*, the coach shot back: "How long have you been working there? Seventeen years? Did people judge you after six months?" (The journalist said nothing, but the obvious answer was "yes". As a writer, you are judged all the time, especially if you are freelance; six months can be quite a lengthy spell.) It was hard not to feel sorry for the coach who had to face the press in a media centre that was cramped and packed and, for some reason, did so alone with no official from the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) anywhere to be seen.

Singapore had left little mark on the tournament. Their football had been forgettable, barely noticeable. The team had gained just one point, and few friends on the pitch or off. The Lions were staying at the same Novotel Hotel in Cubao as their three group rivals, but had their own wing and did not share the same eating space as the teams from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. At the end, most guests staying in the hotel barely noticed they left. Fans in the Philippines hardly noticed they arrived.

The country lacks some of the colourful chaos that can be found in Malaysian football, for better or for worse. Yet at such times, there is a

well-worn debate about what the problem is and what should be done. It seems to me that there are few places in the world of football that worry so much about the future and talk so much about the past.

There have been concerns about the S-League for some time. The competition is a decent standard and offers professional football for the country's aspiring players to aim for, even if the average salary doesn't go far in Singapore (especially if you do your socialising around Clarke Quay).

But the league has become stale with attendances falling, which is understandable given the small population in the country. This makes the national team all the more important, and the sight of it struggling so much in a regional tournament that the country had, going into 2016, won four of the ten previous titles on offer was troubling. First round exits can happen, but this was different from 2014. There was little expectation that the Lions were going to make it and the team's performance reflected that, hoping to sneak into the last four.

This time there was some sympathy for the coach. After all, he had been given just a one-year contract by the FAS just six months earlier. There was little incentive to build for the future. Why bring in youngsters that would bear fruit for someone else years down the line? There was also little incentive to experiment with a different playing style.

Trevor Hartley was appointed as the coach of Malaysia in 1989 on a one-year contract with the sole purpose of leading the team to glory in the Southeast Asian Games. "They wanted me to bring in some young players, to change the team," said Hartley. "I wasn't going to do that in a year. The older players were still fine and I wasn't going to start bringing in a new generation when all they wanted was gold in Kuala Lumpur. I was going to be judged entirely on whether there was success at the SEA Games, so there was no reason for me to jeopardise the chances of winning that for building for a future in which I would not be around and would be completely changed anyway by the next guy."

It is hard to have your *rojak* and eat it: short-term success and long-term planning are not always mutually exclusive, but it takes more than a new coach to supply both. It takes a philosophy and determination throughout the football federation.

Sundram did what Hartley had done: put together a team that, he thought, was capable of winning here and now. A fine player in his day, he was not exactly noted for providing free-flowing football as a coach

with Tampines Rovers, and so it proved with the national team.

The football was perhaps not quite as bad as some said; or at least, it would have been acceptable had results been better, and that was the sentiment I heard from the fans that had travelled to Manila. They felt that getting out of the group was the priority and that good football was a pleasant bonus. Singapore's pragmatism has served them well in the past.

While that sentiment was tested in the opening game—a goalless draw against the Philippines—it was always going to be a tough one coming against a confident co-host. It was made much tougher given the first half red card that was waved in the crestfallen face of Hafiz Sujad. Nobody will ever know what would have happened had he not kicked James Younghusband in the throat.

If I had been a Singaporean fan, however, the thing that would have worried me a little was not the fact that the four-time champs were hanging on against a team that had never been past the semi-finals before and had lost 19 out of 21 games in the tournament up until 2010, but the ease with which some observers seemed to accept the idea that Singapore would be happy with a point before kick-off.

As to which team was favourite, that was debatable. The Philippines were missing three of their foreign-based players, who had not been released by their clubs, but had performed well in the second round of qualification for the 2018 World Cup, famously defeating North Korea and Bahrain, two teams that may not be the cream of the Asian crop but were usually not that far below. Defeats in friendly games against the same opposition just a few weeks before had sowed the seeds of doubt, and while the Azkals were struggling a little, they were no longer the easy-beats of the past.

Singapore gave the co-hosts a little too much respect and there was a suspicion on my part—one that was dismissed by anyone I presented it to—that the sending off, while not welcomed, provided an excuse to sit back and not be too ambitious.

It is inadvisable to read too much into one game, but the second was more of the same, though perhaps understandably so in this instance. It ended with a 1-0 loss to Thailand, with the champions pressing in the final moments to score the vital goal. Singapore caused some problems and had chances to score and had the champions in trouble at times.

However, it was hard to escape the feeling that had the Lions been a little more aggressive and ambitious then they could have achieved

a result against the best team in the region (and one that is leaving Singapore behind on and off the pitch too). We'll come back to Thailand a little later as the current strides being made by the "Land of Smiles" provides plenty of lessons and encouragement for everyone else in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore, who are supposed to be rivals on a similar level.

Daniel Bennett, Singapore's most capped international, also felt that the result could have been very different. "When we played them in the Suzuki Cup, they weren't as good as I expected. We could have beaten them had we a little more luck and we should at least have taken a draw from the game." The defender acknowledged that Thailand have moved ahead of the others in the region but was not overly impressed with the 2016 version. "They are obviously a good team with some talented players but I thought the Thai team from 2014 was stronger."

The final game was the most disappointing for the obvious reason that it was the last in the tournament, but there was more than that. Indonesia had impressed in the first two games, but still, Singapore expected to win against a team that was still recovering from a 12-month ban from international football by FIFA.

But talking to Indonesia coach Alfred Riedl before the game, he was not so sure about that. "They are playing a physical and defensive game," said the Austrian. "If it comes to a football contest then I think we can win. We know how to play against Singapore, the style of the team does not change that much," added the man who has been coaching in Southeast Asia on and off for two decades.

The Merah Putih's ("Red and White's") last competitive game before November 2016 had come two years earlier at the previous AFF Suzuki Cup. All seemed well when Khairul Amri volleyed the Lions into a first-half lead to score Singapore's first goal in the tournament. Yet after the break, the much-vaunted defence went walkabout twice and an energetic and inventive Indonesia took advantage to score twice.

When push came to shove, Singapore did not have the attacking talent to score the necessary goals against Indonesia and at vital times, the defence fell apart. Perhaps it was a small mercy that the Lions did not get through, as surely they did not have what it took to win the tournament.

What Singapore have, and what is one of their biggest strengths, is a certain pragmatism. This can be seen in the world of business, as the city state has developed into one of the financial hubs of not only Asia

but the entire planet. Flexibility and taking advantage of opportunities is something that Singapore is good at.

And the same should be true in football. Had results been different in the Philippines, the football would have been glossed over. Talking to fans ahead of the opening game outside the stadium north of Manila, the message was: “Just get through the group stage, that is what we care about. Get to the knockout stage and anything can happen.” It is hard to argue against that. While Thailand was the best team, being drawn in the same group meant that you couldn’t face them in the semi-finals.

Just getting the right result against Indonesia—and given the way the group played out, a draw would have been enough for the last four—could have sent Singapore all the way to the final. But none of that came to pass. Singapore went home with one point and that meant criticism over the style of play was always going to be fierce. That is just the way it is in football.

Thailand coach Kiattisuk Senamuang has plenty of experience in Singapore as a player and against Singapore as a coach and player. He was not surprised at the way Singapore played. Lounging bare-chested by the pool at the Novatel in Cubao, he said this was just the country’s style. “It is always this way,” he shrugged. “Even when I was a player. Singapore defends and counterattacks while Thailand tries to pass the ball. The games always ended 1-0 or 2-1 or 1-1. This is the way it has always been. Singapore always plays this way. They do what they need to do to win. We do the same but in a different way.”

It is hard to disagree. This is football and it would be boring if every team played in the same way, and while the styles of Thailand and Singapore were different on the pitch, the respective coaches were very different too. It is hard to imagine Sundram talking to reporters while lounging by the pool wearing just a pair of shorts. “Zico”, as Senamuang was affectionately known, cut a relaxed and confident figure and was obviously enjoying himself, holding court. This was in contrast to his Singapore counterpart, who looked nervous and troubled as if he would rather be doing something else. Though it is striking that Zico was out of his job just three months later, the victim of his own success in Thailand as he raised expectations to an unsustainable degree, while Sundram stayed on. It just goes to show that you can never be certain of anything in football.

Yet there is something about Singapore football that reminds me a little of England. When the national team fails at an international

tournament, the same inquest is held and the same conclusions are come to pretty much every time. There are the same worries about the direction the game is going in and the people who are in charge and about the nation’s relationship with football in general.

Then what happens is that the anger fizzles out and is forgotten by the time the next games come around and the cycle starts again. If, as in Hinduism, the concept of time is that of a wheel that keeps turning and life keeps repeating itself, then the same is true in Singapore football, where the same debates keep rolling round again and again.

“The direction Singapore football needs to take must be set by football people. Instead you find bankers, lawyers and doctors running the game. I don’t think that is right.” This was Vincent Subramaniam talking in 2003. The national team coach at the turn of the century was discussing Singapore’s failure at the 2002 Tiger Cup. Yet his words would not have sounded strange 13 years later after another group stage exit.

It came back to the age-old reason or excuse as to why Singapore can struggle to progress. “The football culture here is so different,” said Subramaniam. “Our youngsters put football only third on their priority list, after studies and social activities. To succeed, aspiring footballers must sacrifice. A young footballer who wants to become a successful professional should be like a boy who goes into monkhood. If he cannot sacrifice the time and effort, then he should not consider it at all.”

But youngsters are surely the product of the environment they grow up in. In January 2017, the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) told Home United Youth Football Academy that it was not to use two of its pitches at weekends or on weekday evenings. Local residents—well, five of them at least—found it all too loud and complained. One said that his son was struggling to study due to all the racket of young compatriots playing the beautiful game in the local neighbourhood. Studies come first in a country that leads the way in global education but does not seem quite so interested in getting up to international speed in football.

It caused quite a stir. Over two thousand people signed an online petition to protest SLA’s decision. Jose Raymond, who had been a senior director at the Singapore Sports Hub, called the weekend and weeknight suspensions “a slap in the face for the development of sports culture in Singapore”.

Mr Darryl David, deputy chairman of the Singapore government’s Parliamentary Committee for Culture, Community and Youth, said:

“We shouldn’t be focusing on the number of people making the complaint but the nature of it. These four people could be raising an issue that more are experiencing. I don’t think this reflects on the community’s attitude towards sporting culture.”

Benjamin Tan is the former head of development at the Football Association of Singapore. Then he moved to Thailand to become Deputy CEO of the Thai Premier League and was concerned when he heard that youth academies were being told to restrict training times for children after complaints from local residents.

“Singapore has scarce land resources, so further deprivation of places for children to train is not good for the development of football in Singapore,” Tan said. “It also may discourage other clubs from going to look at land to build academies or facilities. You need more opportunities for kids to play.”

In Thailand, says Tan, it is not an issue. “It’s not just because of land being more plentiful but because of the way society has changed,” he explained. “With technology and all the iPads and iPhones that children play with, parents are happy to see them go and play outside and do something healthy and play sports, not just football.”

Aleksandar Durić believes that things have deteriorated in Singapore football since he arrived in the nineties. “It has changed. Kids now are reading too much and they don’t know how to make good talent. Coaches let their teams play bad football, they focus too much on improving fitness. You need to find a balance between technical ability and fitness, you can’t just focus on one.”

As well as youth development, there are also other issues. “The problem is that in the ASEAN region, coaches don’t get time to show what they can do before they are fired. This is why football is the way it is in Southeast Asia. I am not sure if or when this trend will really change in this culture. Only the owners know why.” Singapore is better than most in the region when it comes to patience with coaches, though that is hardly the highest of compliments. Durić would, however, still like the coaches to be a little tougher, stricter and harsher.

“They protect the local players too much, they make players who don’t know how to play under pressure. Singapore is very small and it is hard to find good players. It is all connected though, as you can put too much pressure on and then you lose the young players. Singapore is a unique place—a mixture of study and army. It is something that is hard to understand if you are not from Singapore.”

Perhaps more international coaches would help but Subramaniam had his doubts, disagreeing that European coaches were better than their Singapore counterparts just because European football is better. “Not every coach from Europe is good,” said the former boss. “Some are as good, others are worse than local coaches. I would agree that the only area where Europeans may be ahead of Asians would be in team management and team-building. But knowledge, application of tactics and strategies, they are all universal and the development of footballers is also almost the same the world over.”

Talking to his successor Jan Poulsen, it was obvious that not much had changed since the end of the last millennium. The Dane, who arrived in 1999 as the Director of the Goal 2010 Project, laughed, perhaps a little sadly, on hearing the story of Home United Youth Football Academy. He went on to explain how he ended up in Singapore.

“The story is like this. The Danish ambassador to Singapore at the time was at some kind of party and he was told by ministers about Project 2010. The ambassador is very interested in football, especially Arsenal. He said, ‘Why not someone from Denmark?’ And in this way, I made contact with the FAS. I applied for the job and I had to go to an interview and then they made the offer. I said ‘thank you’ and took the job. This was a government project.”

Project 2010 was, said Poulsen, about laying the foundations in place so the Lions could go to South Africa in 2010—and not on safari, but to play at the World Cup. At the time, said the Dane, there were genuine hopes that it could be done. It may sound strange now as we know that Singapore finished third in their group behind Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia but were nine points behind, taking points only off Lebanon. But then take Bahrain. This is a nation of just a few hundred thousand, compared to over five million in Singapore, has a league that struggles but came within a whisker of qualifying for the 2006 and 2010 World Cups. After being defeated by Trinidad and Tobago in the final play-off for Germany 2006, Bahrain expected to beat New Zealand to go to South Africa. Had they not missed a second half penalty in Wellington, that is exactly what would have happened. If a tiny Middle Eastern island with a population of not much more than Woodlands can do it, so can Singapore.

This seemed very far away in 1999. Asian federations have long been happy to target the third World Cup from the present, close enough to get people interested but far enough away to give plenty of room to

manoeuvre. “This was my title, Project 2010 director,” said Poulsen. “We wanted to participate in South Africa in 2010.” He paused for a second. “(I)f I had known that I would have said no to the project. I would have said no because 2010 was almost impossible. Actually, it was impossible.”

But these are debates that go back decades. In 1972, there was talk of how changes at the grassroots was going to give Singapore a solid foundation for years to come as Jeffrey Low wrote in *The New Nation* newspaper. “The dearth of local coaching talents will soon be arrested if plans by the Singapore Coaches Committee (SCC) works out without a hitch. A positive move has already been made to build a large pool of qualified and up-to-date coaches for all levels, from schools to clubs and constituencies.” At the time, it was noted, there were 250 qualified coaches in the country, many of whom were not getting the support and direction they needed.

This was going to change over a period of four months, during which there would be five coaching courses held that would feed into an advanced trainers’ course. This would provide a pool for the then national team coach Michael Walker to strengthen his coaching staff.

There was also another course devised for schoolteachers, to help them become better coaches as Major Abbas Abu Amin, chairman of the SCC, explained, “The schoolteachers course will be quite an important one because the coaches will be shown the right basics of football. They will be largely involved with students from 10 to 14 years old. That is why the teachers must teach the proper ways to young ones. If the students start on the right track from a tender age, it would not be such a great problem to correct minor faults. But if they develop bad habits from young, our task becomes greater when training future national potentials.”

It all sounds reasonable, but it is not that hard to find similar talk almost half a century later. It suggests that not much has changed.

MALAYSIA GRAPPLES WITH A RARE TASTE OF GLOBAL ACCLAIM

Yet in the first few days of 2017 there was some news that suggested that the new year would be a lot better for football in the region than the old one. There was a hint that Southeast Asia could make waves on the world stage in a field that was not just about match-fixing.

A Malaysian won the Puskas Award. This was something to be truly proud of, though it turned into something a little controversial in the end. Malaysian football has a habit of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and this happened, to a degree, with this global prize.

It started in a truly beautiful way. I was there in February 2016 when Penang midfielder Faiz Subri scored a truly amazing goal, a free-kick from 35 metres that swerved, dipped and swerved again to leave the Pahang goalkeeper as stunned as the watching fans. It also stunned those around the world as the goal went viral, with millions soon watching.

It was nominated by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) for the Puskas Award, the prize FIFA hands out for the most beautiful goal of the year. When voting opened online, the whole of the country’s football fraternity voted and encouraged others to do the same. Even without that, the goal was spectacular enough to impress and it soon made the shortlist of ten and then the shorter list of three. Many felt that the strike was going to go all the way—the winner would be announced at a glittering ceremony in Zurich.

Penang and FAM fought over who could pay for the player to fly business class to the Swiss city. Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim (TMJ), the president of Johor Darul Ta’zim FC, the champions of Malaysia, gave the player a cash prize—and then warned him, and the rest of the country, not to get too carried away with it all.

Faiz’s rivals for the prize were both South Americans—one from Brazil, one from Venezuela. I met the player two days before he was making the journey. Penang coach Ashley Westwood (who was to last less than half a season) was not too happy at losing one of his players just a few days before the start of a new season but this was a Malaysian cause, something that the whole nation was getting behind, and something closely followed by the rest of the region.

The Puskas award may not be that big a deal in some parts of the world but this was a good news story on the international stage that Malaysian football was desperate for. In recent years, when Malaysia had made international news, the headlines were not happy ones, such as the two aviation tragedies suffered by Malaysian Airlines in March and then July 2014. Faiz going to Zurich marked a pleasant change.

Millions of people were looking forward to the ceremony. So was Faiz. He was genuinely excited and said with a smile that if there was any interest from Europe that he wouldn’t mind signing for Manchester United. There was talk that he would wear a *baju Melayu*, a traditional

Malay outfit for men. He didn't, going for a suit and a bow tie instead.

As the tension and excitement built, the winner of the prize was announced by the original Ronaldo. The Brazilian striker was not quite as svelte in January 2017 as he was in his playing heyday, but then if a player has the career that he enjoyed then he should do what he likes. When he said Faiz's name, the Penang midfielder put his hands over his face, received a shoulder shake and a hug from FAM deputy-president Afandi Bin Hamzah (who was later criticised for "muscling in" on Faiz's photo with Cristiano Ronaldo) and then went to get the prize.

There was an awkward wait of quite a few seconds as the player searched on his phone and then gave a speech in broken English. Little could he have known that this would provoke a debate at home that would be in danger of overshadowing the award.

A writer for Malaysiakini, an online portal, lamented the appearance as embarrassing the country on the national stage. It was all part of a debate as to what it all meant for Malaysia.

Faiz's speech was compared with one given by Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi at the United Nations in September 2016 at the United Nations. Then the politician was criticised at home for speaking "Manglish", a Malaysian version of English with a local pronunciation of some English words. Many felt that he, like Faiz, should have spoken Malay as a matter of principle anyway, as there were translators available. Others lamented that it marked a general decline in the English-speaking ability of Malaysians.

"Time was when Malaysians were complimented on the standard of their English; now it is the stuff of embarrassment, not infrequently on the international stage, before a global audience," went the article. "To be sure, Malaysian football and other sports fans are delighted by Faiz's achievement in winning the Puskas award. However, if they watched the footage of his moment in the spotlight, whatever pride they must have felt over Faiz being chosen as winner would have been diminished by his shambling performance on being called to receive the prize and say a few words."

It seems harsh to compare the acceptance speech of a football player that will probably happen once in a lifetime, if that, to that given by an experienced politician who is obviously accustomed to public speaking.

It was also harsh and it was certainly unfortunate that the player was asked about this on his arrival at Kuala Lumpur airport after a long flight from Zurich.

"People are going to speak whatever they want, I can't control that," he said at a press conference. "I do not mind the criticism, as I've done my best and my target after this is to do better for myself and Pulau Pinang," he said.

Minister of Youth and Sports Khairy Jamaluddin was a bit more forthright: "They (the critics) should not have focused on such a trivial matter, instead they should have focused on Faiz's effort and the recognition he has brought to the country. For me these critics are those who have never received any international awards like what Faiz has achieved."

It was unfortunate for the player, who should not have had to deal with any of those barbs, but the episode gives an idea of what makes Malaysia such a fascinating and intriguing place. Not many countries could turn what should have been a universally acclaimed moment into a national debate about a different matter entirely. The prize will forever be Faiz's and completely deserved, and he should treasure it.

For Review Only

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY DAYS: SINGAPORE, SELANGOR, PENANG AND THE MALAYSIA CUP

I grabbed the chance to show what an Asian could do with a football.
And did it well.

—Lim Yong Liang, Singapore striker, 1922–1934

In 1944, the British ship HMS *Malaya* was used as a target ship for prototype bouncing bombs in Loch Striven in Scotland. She had had a busy World War II, escorting convoys and facing the Italian navy in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as shelling the city of Genoa in 1941. The vessel was attacked and damaged in the same year near Cape Verde, but limped into a Caribbean port before returning to fitness to escort convoys cross the Atlantic.

Previously, she had done three things of historic note. She was involved, just a year after she was constructed in Newcastle, in the Battle of Jutland in 1916, the biggest naval engagement of World War I and the only meeting between the main fleets of the British Royal Navy and the Imperial German Navy. The ship suffered heavy damage and 65 people died. The vessel also carried the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed VI, from Istanbul to exile on Malta in 1922. And a year earlier—in January 1921—HMS *Malaya*, so named because it was built by money provided by the government of British-ruled Malaya, had visited the country that it was named after.

The ship called at Port Swettenham, Singapore, Melaka, Penang and Port Dickson, with the crew playing locals in all kinds of games including football, rugby, golf and hockey. Not long after the ship departed back to Europe, the captain, H.T. Buller, sent a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Federated Malay States in which he offered to send two cups, one to be competed for in rugby and the other in football, as a token

of gratitude at the warm welcome the vessel had received upon its visit.

This was called the Malaya Cup and then later became known as the Malaysia Cup, one of the most historic cup competitions in the world—and surely one of the best and most loved. The skipper of the ship could not have dreamed this would be the longest-lasting contribution to world history that his charge would ever make.

That original trophy lasted until 1967, when the Football Association of Malaysia created the Malaysia Cup. The first final had taken place 46 years earlier between Selangor and Singapore, two rivals that were going to meet plenty of times again over the years. Of the rivalry that exists between the two countries, a fair proportion can be ascribed to this special relationship between the Red Giants and the Lions.

1 October 1921 had started wet, but by kick-off at the Selangor Club, conditions had improved somewhat and the crowd was looking forward to what was expected to be a very good game of football and a splendid social occasion.

Singapore had defeated Negri Sembilan and Melaka along the way to becoming South Zone champions. Selangor represented the North Zone by virtue of downing Perak and thrashing Penang 5-1.

The Straits Times seemed excited:

“The crowd was probably the largest ever for a football match in Malaya,” the newspaper reported. “People from Penang, Perak, the Province, Seremban, Malacca, Singapore and the districts of Selangor thronged the field. Along the touchline on the side of the club, seating accommodation was provided for about 200 people. But by 4.30pm, all the seats were occupied and there was a requisition for more seats. All the four sides of the ground were crowded with a dense mass of people five and six deep. An improvised jazz band, with Lt. Riches as the guiding genius, relieved the tedium of waiting.”

Selangor won the toss and kicked-off at 5 p.m. Singapore started the brighter. The Lions were made up of plenty of British military and had one Asian in the side, the dangerous Chee Lim, who was pushing and probing in attack.

Jamieson, a Scot, broke the deadlock just before the break, with a shot that, according to the newspaper, “could have beaten the best custodian in the region.”

Selangor also had plenty of Brits on the pitch and Rozario equalised for the Red Giants around the hour mark. But it was Moss who scored the winning goal five minutes before the end and it was left to the Lions

to lift the trophy—plainly adorned, according to reports. The game ended 2-1 to Singapore, starting a long love affair for the Lions with the competition. Celebrations were enthusiastic by Singapore supporters at the venue but the Malaya Cup was just starting to make emotional inroads back home.

Selangor took revenge the following year but the Lions bounced back to win the next three. From then, the two rivals almost took turns to keep the trophy, and actually shared the prize in 1928 and 1929. In 1930, Johor and Kedah joined the Malaya Cup and two years later, the Football Association of Malaya (FAM) took over the operation of the competition.

Singapore won the 1941 trophy, the last one until 1948 due to the intervention of World War II. By that time, with the Japanese poised to invade, Singapore had won 12 cups from 1921 compared to five for Selangor, with two shared trophies. Only Perak broke the duopoly with two wins, but it was Singapore that dominated, appearing in every final from 1921 to 1941. It was, and remains, a highly impressive achievement. There can be few tournaments that have been, for a time at least, so closely identified with one team.

One of the major figures from that era of almost total Singaporean domination was Lim Yong Liang. The man known as “Pop” has few rivals for the title of the best striker that Singapore has ever produced. He began his career at the age of 15, starting out for the Chinese junior side. In 1922, he was chosen to represent Singapore in the Malaya Cup in just its second ever edition and was still there in 1928, appearing in all the competition’s finals except in 1924, and scoring three goals along the way. This was a striker who could play anywhere in the forward line. In 1928, he also led the Singapore Sino-Malay team, which surprised local fans and journalists by defeating a decent Australian eleven. The Aussies were extremely impressed.

Lim was recalled in 1934, helping the team to the title once again. Perhaps he could have taken the moniker of the “Singaporean Gary Lineker” (or for chronology, perhaps the former Barcelona and England striker could be called the “English Lim Yong Liang”), as he had a knack for popping up in the penalty area at the right time and right place to score and was also known for always staying on the right side of the referee. In 1947, the Singapore Free Press newspaper noted that “old soccer fans cannot recall an occasion when he was pulled up for ungentlemanly conduct on the field.” It is hard to say with certainty,

but it was extremely unlikely that Lim ever defecated on the pitch as the English striker had during a World Cup match in 1990.

The “Grand Old Man” of Singapore football was a little envious of Fandi Ahmad, one of the few rivals for the title of best ever striker from the country, and the opportunities he had in the eighties. “I grabbed the chance to show what an Asian could do with a football. And I did it well,” he said in 1980. “How I wish I were 25 years old again and at my peak and staring at an Ajax contract.” He died two years later. Looking back, Lim offers a classic case of “what if”. The British players who were active at the time all felt that Lim was good enough to play for clubs in England, but it was just not a realistic option at the time.

Lim’s advice to Fandi was to try to join one of the giants of European football. “This is the chance that Fandi must grab. Forget about Niac [from Indonesia], go to Europe and show what an Asian can do with the ball.”

Lim was to continue to be a major figure after hanging up his boots, going on to coach all Singapore’s Malaya Cup teams from 1936 to the outbreak of war in 1941. He then went on to spend more than two decades as the secretary at the Singapore Amateur Football Association (SAFA). He claimed in an interview with *The Straits Times* that he had seen almost all the 348 games that had taken place in the Merdeka Cup. “I have seen ’em all except one series in 1966 when I went to London to see England win the World Cup at Wembley. It has always been my ambition to see as much as I can of all the English soccer teams and at last, I am about to fulfill that ambition before I get too old.”

He also continued to watch Singapore in the Malaysia Cup and in 1976 went to the dressing room to console the Lions, who had lost to Selangor in the final. “What are all these people crying about? So what if we lost? Next year, we’ll win it. So I must start now to encourage the players.” Such common sense and clarity of thought would be welcome these days, too. And Singapore did win it the next year.

Lim was a giant of those early years and played a huge part in the development of Singapore football, as well as the Malaya/Malaysia Cup, but the arrival of the Japanese was also influential.

The last final before war finally broke out in the region took place on 16 August 1941. By this time, there were fewer British players in the local sides—they were needed elsewhere—though they were obviously well represented when it came to the RAF and Army teams. The players that came from the United Kingdom were not the best but a few top

talents did arrive, such as Johnny Sherwood, an outside left who played for Reading in the 1941 War Cup Final. Regardless, the Brits did not enjoy losing to the improving local teams, believing that it went against the established order. After all, who invented the game and who ran the country?

In 1941, the RAF and Army teams finished below Singapore—by now made up solely of local players—in the group stage of the southern zone. Again losing to the locals did not go down well and the British consoled themselves by telling all who would listen that their football was still the best—the lessons that Hungary would give in 1953 at Wembley were still some time away.

Singapore then went to the final against Penang. Lai Chuan gave the Lions the lead. Penang, not yet known as the Panthers, had three talented Brits, with goalkeeper Cyril Gibbons, left-back Cyril Ashmore and the man who equalised for Penang after 20 minutes, striker Frederick Askew. Yet Singapore’s skipper Aziz was a towering presence at centre-back and repelled all attacks. Goals from Taib and Quan Chong settled it and Singapore took title number 12 in a competition that they had come to love.

Shortly after, the Japanese army arrived in Penang. It was symbolic. This island was the first British territory in the whole of Southeast Asia and was first occupied in 1776. Then, 165 years later, the colonisers abandoned the “Pearl of the Orient” in a panic without firing a shot. The Japanese continued down the peninsula towards Singapore. British and Commonwealth troops provided some resistance this time, but not enough. With the Japanese occupying the Malay peninsula and Singapore, local football was obviously not a priority.

While the war ended in 1945, the Malaya Cup did not get going again until 1948. Perhaps the other states were just not that excited about being on the receiving end of more Singaporean domination. It can’t have been much fun for the others in the pre-war period when Singapore reached the final every single time.

The return to action in the southern section saw Singapore defeat Johor 4-1 and normal service looked like it was going to be resumed. There was then a 3-0 win over Army/Navy and then a 2-2 draw with the Royal Air Force (RAF). But something strange happened in the fourth game. Singapore lost, and not only that, lost at the Jalan Besar Stadium. The historic date was 19 June 1948, and the Lions were defeated by Negri Sembilan, who went on to lift the trophy, beating Selangor in the

final after a replay. It was only the third time that the cup had gone to neither Singapore nor Selangor.

But back to the first defeat in the group stage, a first such loss in 73 games. It was a defeat that almost sent the city into meltdown. Mr F.C. Sands was the president of SAFA and was at a loss to explain what happened, as *The Straits Times* reported. “I have never seen Singapore play so badly; every player seemed to be off form. However, the fitter team won and I offer my congratulation to Negri Sembilan for their creditable victory.”

For a team that was not accustomed to losing when it mattered, they accepted defeat in a gentlemanly manner.

The shock win was not undeserved. The hosts started well, but it did not take too long for the visitors to settle. Once they did, they took the game to Singapore and scored after ten minutes, with Soon Teck heading home the opener after an inswinging free-kick delivered by Thian Kwee. Though Singapore equalised from the spot, a striker called, simply, Captain Watson struck in the second-half, one in which the team known as NS dominated.

“We played hard,” said Watson. “This is a historic win and we are delighted that we can be the first to win here in the group. We all pulled together as we know that Singapore always get to the final. It shows that if you work hard then the strongest team can be defeated.”

What was generally agreed by all who watched the game was that the powerhouse of peninsular football had underestimated their opponents. “The real reason,” said the hard-hitting columnist known as “Crusader” in the *Singapore Free Press*, “lay in the fact that the Singapore players, like their supporters, did not give a serious thought to the possibility of defeat. After all, it was only little Negri Sembilan...why train, why bother.”

The Straits Times reflected the general feeling by saying that a full-strength NS team playing to the best of its ability would be happy with a draw. The paper was right—until they were proven wrong.

It wasn't quite the blip that fans in Singapore were hoping for, though the performance in 1949 was a bit better. Singapore didn't make the final for the second year running and the second year in the competition's history, but this time only lost out on goal difference to the Army/Navy team.

Normal service was resumed in 1950. Singapore won the cup for the first time since 1941, and that triumph signalled the start of a fruitful

period of seven appearances in the next seven finals.

And there was plenty to write about in those games. It was a golden time for the competition.

HERE COME PENANG—AND YEARS OF CONTROVERSY

If only Melaka had been a power at the time, then the three-way relationship could have been called the “Straits Settlements Rivalry”. But for a few exciting years, it was all about Penang and Singapore, two places that had historically plenty in common but were about to build a football history together too.

There had been meetings in 1934 and 1941 when Penang lost the final to Singapore. But the fifties was when it really got going. After the two years without a final appearance, Singapore won all their group games in 1950 and met Penang in the final for a third time.

Because of the two previous defeats, Penang was desperate to win the trophy and saw home advantage as, well, a major advantage. The Penang FA president Yeap Hock Hoe offered to shoulder all of Singapore's expenses for a trip that seems short now but was still a bit of a trek back then. Air tickets were offered, as were first class hotels. Yeap met his SAFA counterpart at the races and made his offer, but W. McGregor Watt was not impressed at the prospect of handing over home advantage to the northerners.

Had Singapore not just suffered the indignity of sitting out of the last two finals, perhaps they would have been more open to the idea of playing a one-off game in the Pearl of the Orient. But Singapore had pulled out all the stops to ensure that they did not record an unwanted hat-trick. The team was criticised for resting players for other competitions so they would be fresh for the Malaya Cup—an early form of rotation.

But Penang were confident. After a win over Perak in the group stage, the team could start to look forward to the final. Yeap was especially delighted. “I am more than happy by the display of our Penang boys,” he said. “They played great soccer and if they play as they played today we have every chance of winning the trophy for the first time.”

There was much expectation on the shoulders of star striker Abu Baidah. He scored all five goals in the thrashing of Perak not long before, and was in great shape after returning from injury. “We know

that Singapore are a strong team and have won the cup many times,” he said. “We are still looking for a first trophy. It is important that we win.”

In the end, Penang did not get their way and had to play a one-off game in Kuala Lumpur. Special bus services were laid on for fans. They were disappointed once again. Singapore won 2-0 to make it three final wins out of three between the two teams and a first since 1941.

The venue for the final was often a bone of contention. In 1951, Singapore confirmed that they were back as a force and won it again, this time thrashing Perak 6-0. But they were insistent that the final should be played at Jalan Besar.

As the holders, they felt that they had the right to host the game, as the last time the final had been played at the arena was back in 1938. The State Associations were not happy with the idea and felt that playing in Singapore would give the hosts a home advantage worth one or two goals. SAFA were ready to offer a substantial share of the gate receipts to Perak but just like in 1950 and Penang, Perak were just as desperate to win the cup and did not want to give Singapore, already favourites, a greater chance of winning.

In the end, Singapore had to play the final in Kuala Lumpur and, boy, did they play. It only served to inspire the visitors and they thrashed Perak 6-0 in front of about 9,000 fans. It was a dominant display from start to finish. Perak's captain was Jack Crossley, who had once played for Hull City, and he pointed out the problem that the northerners brought upon themselves. “Perak dribbled the ball instead of moving it,” he said, referring to his team in the third person (an unusual thing to do—almost as unusual as modern players dissecting their team's tactics in post-match interviews).

Just as he did not stop running in the game, he went on to give more of his opinion. “They could not settle down and were outplayed. Singapore were by far the superior side and had better stamina. They played grand football.” Singapore were also fitter and better organised, and in the words of the *Singapore Free Press*, “played more forceful and scientific football” to knock Perak off their stride.

There had been some that felt Perak could win the trophy for the first time since 1931 when they had defeated Singapore 3-1 in the final. Khoo Kai Swee, former honorary coach of the Selangor Chinese Recreation Club, predicted a Perak triumph due to the fact that Singapore's defence was weak, especially with the threat posed by Crossley.

He was prescient in pointing out that Singapore's Chia Boon Leong,

who had represented China at the 1948 London Olympics and in 1954 won a prize of a month's training in England and time with Arsenal after being voted as Malaya's most popular football player, was dangerous. He said something similar about star centre-forward Awang Bakar.

“[Boon Leong] is a brainy player and creates beautiful openings for other forwards. He was known to lack stamina but according to reporters, he has had sustained and strenuous training.” Boon Leong, who stood at not much more than five feet tall, was identified as the man of the match by many, which is doubly impressive considering Awang Bakar grabbed a hat-trick.

What was also notable was that this was labelled the most eagerly awaited of all the post-war finals. Local hotels were all full, though the September weekend fell around the same time as the Selangor races, and over 100 police and military personnel were to be on hand to ensure that a full house did not become dangerously overcrowded. In the end, the most dangerous thing on display in Kuala Lumpur was the Singapore attack, which delivered the trophy once again.

In 1952, Penang were back on the scene and hoping that it would be fourth time lucky against Singapore. Despite the losing record, there were high hopes for the October clash. It turned out to be one of the most exciting and best finals in history.

Both teams had chances in a breathless first half, but it was Singapore that took the lead against the run of play. It was a spectacular strike and befitting such an occasion, with star striker Awang Bakar, who was to play a major part in this fixture over the years, scoring an overhead kick to send the 300 or so Singapore fans in the Perak stadium wild with delight. Awang was a class act and deserves to be better known in Southeast Asia than he is.

Penang turned up the pressure but just couldn't find a way through, and the chant “Lucky Singapore” started to ring around the Chinese Assembly Hall ground. Just before the break, however, Pang Siang Teik scored the equaliser. Soon after the restart Aziz Ahmad, who had made the equaliser, added a second to put the Panthers in the lead—and the fans started to believe that it could finally happen, that the cup was going to Georgetown for the first time. They pushed forward looking for a third but Rahim Omar headed home the equaliser instead.

With 15 minutes remaining, it was 2-2 and anyone's game. It was settled by a disputed goal. Rahim turned provider and swung the ball over, and there was Awang to head home his second and his team's third.

There were protests that the striker had used his hands. The defenders and fans had their hands in the air trying to get the referee to change his mind. It didn't work.

What must Penang have thought of Singapore? Four times they had met in the final and four times the Lions had won. What had Penang done to deserve such a nemesis? As the fans made the relatively short journey home from Ipoh, there was a feeling that it was never going to happen, that Penang's name was never going to be on the cup.

But they were back, and so was the optimism, a year later. Yes, Penang met Singapore for the fifth time in the final in 1953. Once again, Singapore tried to have the game played at home, but once again the effort was unsuccessful. The SAFA wrote to Penang FC, suggesting two alternative proposals. The first suggestion was a home-and-away leg, the second a good old-fashioned coin toss decided where the final would take place.

Penang held a two-hour emergency meeting to deliberate on the matter before deciding to turn down the proposals. There was some debate, however. Singapore had pointed out that the cup final had not been held in either of the two islands for two decades. It was time to at least let one set of home fans witness the game. Some Penang officials were interested in the idea of a home-and-away game, especially if they could host the second leg at home; and financially, it had a certain appeal.

In the end, however, they preferred to stick to the original plan set out by the Football Association of Malaya, and that was to play the game once again in Ipoh on 22 August. The fact that Ipoh is relatively close to Penang perhaps swayed the argument. You could get there and back on the same day, even in the days before the North-South Expressway cut the journey to not much more than an hour.

The first 400 tickets given to Penang sold out within minutes and not long after it was clear that of the over 4000 seats sold at the Chinese Assembly Hall ground, more than half would be occupied by Penang backsides. Hotels in and around the city filled up quickly. You can't say that fans of the Panthers were pessimists. They refused to believe that they were never going to win.

Once again Awang Bakar was seen as the danger-man for Singapore in attack; but there was hope in the north that their own star attacker, Pang Siang Teik, could make a difference.

Singapore had stumbled the week before the final, losing to Kluang, but coach Dick Pates was able to explain that away. "I make no excuses

for our loss. We were deservedly beaten but I did tell our players before the game to avoid any possible injury." Pates promised that his boys would be ready to administer the now customary defeat to Penang in the final.

Singapore were full of confidence. After all, Penang should really have beaten their rivals in the final the previous year, but failed to do so. It seemed that the southerners, with their four wins in four finals against the team from the north, had the hex over their rivals. And Singapore had the knack of being able to win big games, even when they were not playing well. This was something that Penang lacked.

If Singapore were confident, there was also something in Penang's favour. Penang FA president See Seang Hua looked around at what was happening in the world to see that 1953 was a year of firsts. Mount Everest had been conquered, Stanley Matthews had finally collected an FA Cup winner's medal and later that year England would lose to Hungary at Wembley, a first defeat to foreign opposition on home soil.

If these events could finally come to pass, then there was no reason why Penang could not lift the Malaya Cup for the first time. It also seemed as if it was fate that kept bringing Penang and Singapore together in the final. Like any good computer game, to get the big prize, you have to defeat the big boss.

The feeling in Penang was that the only team that could beat them was themselves. If they settled quickly and were not affected by nerves then the trophy would be heading northwest after the game for a party that had been decades in the making.

Excitement was boosted by good news from Ipoh. While there had often been too much rain ahead of past finals, there were concerns that weeks without rain had left the pitch in Perak dry and dangerous. The day before the game, the heavens opened for 45 minutes, the first downfall for 20 days.

Singapore coach Pates was hedging his bets before the game. "I am never confident of winning any match but I am confident that our players and reserves are fit, are members of one happy family and will do their utmost to win. I would say that our team is as strong as that of last year but not as strong as the previous year when we won the cup final against Negri Sembilan by six goals to nil.

"If we are beaten by Penang we have no excuses. But I am sure every member of the team will do his utmost and it will not be through lack of trying if we failed to succeed." He added that there had been a special

preparation programme implemented in the weeks leading up to it.

“For the last three weeks intensive training has been carried out at Jalan Besar stadium—every other evening after six o’clock for at least an hour. In addition, they have had massages at the stadium. Certainly, no other Malaya Cup team has ever had the same opportunities of getting physically fit.”

Amid a raucous atmosphere at the Chinese Assembly Hall, Singapore took the lead in the twentieth minute with Ismail Yusoff running onto an Aw Boon Seong pass to shoot past Swee Hock. It seemed to Penang that history was repeating itself but this time, they were made of sterner stuff than in the previous four finals.

Three minutes before the break, Siang Teik equalised from a corner, and the sigh of relief around Ipoh was palpable.

Penang had looked to neutralise the threat of star Singapore striker Awang Bakar by deploying their own forward, Yah Hin Hean, back into defence to cover. It worked. Two goals in the first five minutes of the second half won the game and a first-ever cup for Penang. Aziz Ahmad put the team ahead and two minutes later Siang Hock extended the team’s lead. Ismail pulled a goal back for Singapore, coming close to getting the equaliser and his hat-trick, but Penang held on for a famous 3-2 win.

There was some controversy. Singapore had appeared in six of the previous eight finals and had won them all. This was a team accustomed to winning on the big stage and especially comfortable with facing Penang. The loss hurt. Soh Ghee Soon, the Singapore team manager, said a few words at a special post-final dinner that was supposed to be a celebration party but instead provided a platform for an impromptu inquest.

“I do not begrudge Penang victory,” he said. “But I feel that if all our players pulled their weight, we would have won. If any of them have a conscience about the part they played in the game, I leave them with it.” Most felt that he was referring to a player or players who had “sold the game”. So much for the coach’s pre-match assertion that there would be no excuses if Penang won.

Some fans did not take too kindly to the manager blaming the players for the loss. A letter, signed “THREE-TWO (SQUARED)” from Penang to *The Straits Times* advised him to take the beating like a man. “It is rather ungrateful on your part after they struggled so heroically, although they lost. There is even honour in losing.

“Furthermore, don’t blame the ball or the weather or the last breakfast and above all don’t blame Penang for the ‘tactics’ they adopted during

the last ten minutes ... The fact remains that Penang was superior and so Singapore had to bow down to the worthy victors. Better luck next year Singapore.”

The tactics in question had been highlighted by the Singapore press and were labelled as being unsporting with Penang, especially captain Cheng Eng, eager to run down the clock, as well as being a little more physical than Singapore would have liked.

Penang didn’t care and who could blame them? This was a state that had been so close to glory on four previous occasions but had lost all four, and all to the same team. The feeling was that if Singapore were unhappy about the way Penang closed out the match, then tough. Singapore could take solace in the 17 trophies they had already won.

The Penang players returned home the next day to be greeted as heroes, as thousands lined the streets. The island and the surrounding state partied for days as the drought had finally been broken.

Yet this particular mini-series had not come to an end. Just as Penang had sought revenge over Singapore in the past for their final defeats, Singapore had their opportunity in the following year as the two teams met in the final of the 1954 edition.

Penang were favourites—though only just—and there wasn’t the usual talk of trying to get the game played on either island. Singapore were determined to go and play wherever the game may be and the location was Kuala Lumpur. The Lions flew by air.

Coach Pates was still there, as were star attackers Boon Leong—Malaya’s Footballer of the Year—and Awang Bakar. This time, though, there was young Rahim Omar, who was becoming a real star of the team. Singapore wanted to bring the trophy back to its rightful place and there was certainly plenty of attacking talent.

This time round there were no complaints, no ambiguity or what-ifs. It ended up 3-0 to Penang and there was little of the tension that had been evident the year before, when the Panthers were hanging on to a 3-2 lead with their claws, fangs, tail—whatever they had. There was some controversy, however.

In the ninth minute, Rahim Omar confirmed his star potential by scoring from a corner to stun Penang fans. Unfortunately for Singapore, it was ruled out as it was adjudged that the swerving ball had gone out of play before returning into the area for the striker to score. It was the first occasion that Penang goalkeeper Dave Maclaren was beaten in the game and, as perhaps the best shot-stopper in Malaya at the time, there

was not going to be a second. He was pretty much perfect after that, and was helped by the fact that Penang central defender Yap Hin Hean had Awang Bakar in his pocket for almost the entire game.

Awang was, and still is, one of the best players in the history of Singapore. He loved the Malaya Cup and scored goal after goal, year after year. If he drove Penang defenders and fans mad with frustration, it was the opposite in Singapore. He was a popular footballer.

In the 1955 competition he scored seven goals, including one in the final against Kelantan as Singapore took the trophy back, but soon after he began to have fitness issues. And the career that had given pleasure to millions and pain to quite a few opposition defenders and fans was coming to an end.

Rahim looked to be the new star. The left-winger used to practice shooting balls barefoot through the spokes of a bicycle wheel in Farrar Park, historically a fertile breeding ground for talent. There he was spotted by a local coach and signed up to Fathul Karib FC.

Rahim's exploits off the pitch were almost as colourful as those on it, with his private life attracting plenty of attention. This was never more so than in 1969 when he stood trial after being accused of bigamy.

He married Caroline de Cruz in May 1956 and then went on to wed Hamidah binte Arshad in 1967. De Cruz, the accuser, claimed that he had left their home for Kuala Lumpur in January 1967 and never returned. "He wrote me a letter saying he did not want to have anything to do with me and our four children," she said in court. "He said that all those years he had waited to marry one of his own kind." After he left for KL, his first wife said that he had sent money for two months, but that was it. "He wrote me a letter asking permission to remarry. I refused him because we were not married according to Muslim rites."

She went to Kuala Lumpur, obtained his certificate for his second marriage and made a complaint to court. After the two-day trial, Rahim was cleared of bigamy, as the court ruled that Muslim law would not recognise the first marriage and therefore the second was valid. Judge Alexander went on to say: "I order Rahim to be acquitted and discharged without his defence being called."

It was a close call and Rahim was seen as something of a wayward football player. When the mood took him, he could be devastating but the mood did not always take. Coach Choo Seng Quee was one of those coaches who was able to get the best out of him; perhaps the player just responded to a firm hand, and Choo's hand was nothing if not firm.

Rahim was quite a character, of the sort that we don't see these days. For one thing, he was willing to openly challenge fans that abused him in the stadium and there are tales of him standing in front of supporters and trading insults. There are also tales that Singapore FA officials used to bribe his opponents on the billiards tables on the day of big games. They wanted them to let Rahim win so that he would arrive at the stadium in a good mood, although it may have been better to let him lose to take his frustrations out on the football pitch. At the very least, there were occasions when officials would personally go to the billiards halls and drag the star to the Jalan Besar Stadium just in time for kick-off.

The story could have gone very differently. He almost became one of the very first Asian players to play in Europe. In 1956, Portsmouth tried to sign the player. Pompey boss Eddie Lever wrote to Bob Pidgeon, president of Singapore league club Argonauts, asking about the then 22-year-old's availability. He had heard on the grapevine—a pretty good grapevine in those days—that this was a talent who could thrive in England.

At that time, Rahim was ignoring invitations to join up with Singapore's training squad and was not appearing in club football either. He was keen to head to England's south coast, however. "I'd like to get a chance in England. But I can't afford to get there under my own steam." It never happened, just as a move to Luton Town had fallen through the previous year as the player could not get the funds together.

It was a shame and perhaps things would have been very different had he been able to make the journey. Not only for the man himself, but for football in Singapore and even Southeast Asia. Had there been a Southeast Asian who made a name for himself in England in the late fifties and early sixties then perhaps history would have turned out differently, though it would not have been easy. Rules in England at the time stated that non-British players had to be resident in the country for two years before being able to play. It is unclear if the striker knew that but even so, time would have been on his side had he been able to make it west.

We will never know but it was clear that by the mid-fifties, Singapore's dominance of the competition was also coming to an end. The team still won trophies—seven more before it exited the tournament in the nineties—but was not as much of a fixture in the final as in the past.

But before the exit, the Lions reacquainted themselves with Selangor as the two teams enjoyed some titanic clashes in the seventies and early eighties.



TOP: Aleksander Durić with son Massimo

BOTTOM: Football giants, Fandi Ahmad and V. Sundramoorthy

TOP AND FACING PAGE: Old Causeway rivals: Singapore vs Malaysia in October 2016



TOP: Veteran coach, Ong Kim Swee

BOTTOM: Malaysian legend and Pahang boss, Dollah Salleh

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For Review Only

John Duerden hails from Blackburn in the United Kingdom and the London School of Economics graduate has been living in Asia since the end of the last century.

Married with two daughters, John has been covering Asian football for 20 years and contributes to *The New York Times*, *ESPN*, *BBC*, *FourFour Two*, *Associated Press*, *Today*, *World Soccer* and many more.

This is John's third book, following the best-selling *John Duerden Unlimited* published in South Korea in 2009 and *Wanderers, Rovers & Rangers*, published in the UK in 2017.

LIONS AND TIGERS

From Penang in the north of Malaysia down to the city-state of Singapore in the south, seasoned sports correspondent John Duerden tackles one of Asia's big football rivalries between these two neighbours on either side of the Causeway. He charts its incident-packed history, zooms in on the big names and clashes of the past century, and weighs in on hot-button issues from naturalised players to football federation elections.

With his eye on the ball, Duerden takes a close look at what makes this rivalry tick. From accounts of fierce encounters between the two national teams and clubs to tales from the times when they both sent teams to compete in each other's leagues, *Lions and Tigers* is a lively, entertaining and fascinating look at a football rivalry that deserves to be more widely known around the world.

Duerden is the Asian football correspondent for *BBC Radio*, *ESPN*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *World Soccer* and *The Associated Press*.

“All else can be lost, but Singapore and Malaysia cannot lose to each other ... Well researched and extremely informative, Duerden's insightful book pulls no punches in detailing the entrenched football failings in both countries.”

Neil Humphreys,
bestselling author of *Return to a Sexy Island*,
Match Fixer, *Premier Leech* and *Rich Kill Poor Kill*

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JOHN DUERDEN

For Review Only

LIONS AND TIGERS

**The story of football in
Singapore and Malaysia**

"A must-read for all fans in Singapore and Malaysia and of football in general, Duerden ... captures the unique story of the game in that part of the world with an engaging, lively and well-written book."

Marcus Christenson, football editor of *The Guardian*

"All fans of Singapore and Malaysia football should read this great book that really tells the story of football and a unique rivalry."

Aleksandar Durić, former Singapore national striker



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For Review Only

For my girls – Myung-joo, Danbi and Yubi

For Review Only

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For Review

INTRODUCTION

THE AFF CUP AND THE PUSKAS AWARD—
SUMMING UP FOOTBALL IN SINGAPORE
AND MALAYSIA



They are a little more patient in Singapore football and they know that success does not usually come quickly. In Malaysia, we know that too, but we still demand it quickly.

—Zainal Abidin Hassan,
over 130 appearances for Malaysia from 1984–1996

On the morning of 7 October 2016, the rain was pouring in Singapore. The skies were darker than the looks on the faces of the Vietnamese players when R. Sasikumar's shoulder scored the decisive goal in the 1998 Tiger Cup final. It felt, well, like England, and it did not stop raining until late in the afternoon—something that did not bode well in terms of ticket sales at the new National Stadium. The build-up for the Friday night friendly clash with Malaysia was low-key, perhaps the lowest in recent memory. It was something of a disappointing feeling. The fallout from recent clashes in World Cup qualification and the AFF Suzuki Cup could still be felt, but this friendly was perhaps a one-off, a feeling that the two teams did not really want to be playing each other at that moment in time.

Both were dealing with issues of their own, and while it is pretty much always the case, this was more than the usual problems.

Malaysia were in all sorts of trouble and bringing a young squad that was desperate just to avoid defeat. In some ways, playing a young team was a wise decision. It meant that there was little pressure on the visitors and it was all on the hosts. A team that was in terrible form was going to field something of an experimental side. Any kudos that would come Singapore's way from winning the game was instantly reduced, especially as their line-up would be bursting with experience.

But overall, Singapore was in a better position in terms of form. Yet what they lacked in youth they did not make up for in excitement and flair. As legendary Singapore striker Aleksandar Durić told me, “there are many other things to do in Singapore”, and while he was talking of youngsters preferring not to put on football boots, he could have been referring to this Friday night specifically.

Before the game, the atmosphere was flat. Such was the disillusionment across the Causeway that the travelling Malaysian fans barely numbered three digits. This was not going to be one of those derbies where the away section contributed to an unforgettable atmosphere. Not only that, but the ones that did make the journey were not in the highest of spirits. “A draw would be OK for us,” said one who had made his way down from Melaka (unknowingly recreating my first journey to the city, though I will never know if he rushed through customs and immigration in the way I did on that first visit; probably he had plenty of experience in crossing the Causeway.) “We have lost so many games in the past few months, we really don’t want to lose to Singapore. Beating them would be fantastic but I can’t see that happening. For me, just don’t lose and that is OK.”

When you look at the record of the Tigers going into that game, it is easy to understand the lack of excitement around the national team. In 2015, there had been three 6-0 thrashings. And these were not against the giants of Asian football. Perhaps if it had been South Korea or Japan administering the beatings then it would have been a little easier to take. As it was, two humiliations came at the hands of Palestine and one against Oman. These were not minnows by any stretch of the imagination and had both reached the 2015 Asian Cup, but managed a combined total of three points in their six games. It was just embarrassing. Between the second Palestine loss in June, which came at home, and the upcoming game in United Arab Emirates, a much tougher opponent, I interviewed Malaysia coach Dollah Salleh. He vowed that by the end of the game in Abu Dhabi, Malaysia would do something to make everyone forget about the 6-0 losses.

And they did, but just not in the way that the coach had wanted. Malaysia went west and lost 10-0. UAE were a good team, finishing third at the 2015 Asian Cup, and nobody expected an away victory. Even so, it was a massive humiliation and one that Dollah, who kept his dignity on the sidelines and dealing with the media, was never going to be able to survive—and he didn’t. Ong Kim Swee had been

drafted in, getting the job at the end of 2015 on a temporary basis and then, after the Football Association of Malaysia had spent about three months looking for a permanent candidate, getting the nod full-time. In October 2016, the team were coming off the back of a 3-0 loss in Indonesia, the hosts’ first international game for almost two years after being banned from international football by the good folks at FIFA who had allowed all kinds of craziness in Jakarta for years.

So the tiger that arrived in the Lion City was not a sleek predator full of hunger, confidence and menace but something of a scaredy-cat just looking to avoid defeat. And in the big rivalries that is sometimes what it is all about. Winning can be lovely but the prospect of standing—or these days sitting—in the stadium while watching rival fans celebrate wildly and lengthily is one of the worst feelings in football, despite how necessary it is from time to time.

“I was told that whatever you do, you must not lose to Malaysia,” said Trevor Hartley when he arrived in 1976 to become Technical Director of the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) and then the national team coach shortly after. “Losing to Malaysia was a huge no-no. It was not just the people at the association or those working in football it was the media, of course, but also the people you saw on the street. When a game with Malaysia approached, people made it clear that defeat really was not an option. This is the one team you do not lose to. There was a lot of pride at stake.”

And that pride was evident, even when the opponents were not the Harimau Malaya. “Even when Singapore played the Malaysian states, they really wanted to win,” recalled Hartley. “There were a lot of bragging rights at the time. So when they played the Malaysian national team, the feeling was much bigger, of course. The media talked about it for days before the game and there was much more media. Not just the usual football writers, but everyone was talking about it. There was pressure on the players and the coach, it was good for everyone, as long as you did not lose.”

It was the painful prospect of defeat as much as the potential delights of victory that make a derby such a big deal yet on 7 October it wasn’t just the weather that had put a dampener on things. It was all a bit muted. There were not much more than 20,000 home fans in the 55,000-seat arena. The atmosphere started brightly, but the dourness of the game that eventually played out soon put as much a dampener on the Singapore evening as the rain had done in the day.

But still, but still, there was something. “We love nothing more than to beat Malaysia,” said one fan who was just about to enter the stadium. “They are our neighbours and our rivals. For a Singaporean fan, there is nothing better than seeing them go home with nothing. That is just the way it is and I don’t think that will ever change.”

If the atmosphere was lacking, the desire of the two teams to win—or in Malaysia’s case not to lose—was palpable. There was something out there on the pitch, there was a special feeling and, yes, there was a rivalry. With football currently at a fairly low ebb in both countries and the new National Stadium still a little unloved, there were still over 20,000 people ready to buy tickets and watch teams that were closer to 200 than 100 in the FIFA world rankings.

That something was there on the faces of the players after the game ended in a 0-0 draw. In the bowels of the stadium before exiting to the bus, the Malaysians passed through happy at negating the much more experienced hosts. Singapore were as frustrated as it is possible to be. “What an experience,” said Malaysian debutant Darren Lok as he left the stadium. The English-born striker had been waiting for his Malaysian passport for months and had to wait until the second half for his introduction. He didn’t score but worked his yellow-and-black socks off.

“It is great to come here to the home of our rivals to get a result. We are a young team,” he said. “We made sure that we were not going to lose and we have come away with a good result.”

He was right. For Malaysia, it was a good result. The reaction back home was OK. Fans did not seem to enjoy the football but understood the situation and at this moment in time, would tolerate such an approach.

Singapore captain Hariss Harun, a class act on and off the field who actually answers questions with thought instead of cliché, was still shaking his head at how Malaysia had escaped defeat.

“We’ve only ourselves to blame,” were his words as he left. He would say something similar to me a few weeks later as Singapore exited the AFF Suzuki Cup in Manila, where the rain started during the game rather than ending just before. Yet the frown, the shake of the head and the general air of frustration and disappointment were pretty much the same.

Overall, the experience of this game did not match up to the tales of the past—the distant as well as the most recent. It was just, I was sure,

bad timing and a combination of factors. But still, it was a good time to take stock, to look at the wider picture and what it all means. Is the rivalry the fiercest in the world? In football terms, surely not. Not even in Asia: South Korea and Japan probably win the continental title in that regard with their history, bitterness and long-standing position at the top of the Asian football tree. You could throw North Korea into that mix too, and there is no love lost between Saudi Arabia and Iran, or Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Others, such as India versus Pakistan, are more about their history and relationship off the pitch than anything significant in football terms. Singapore and Malaysia do have a fierce rivalry, but there is something else to it.

There is a shared history that is not bitter and brutal like Japan’s relationship with Korea, but something deeper. There are surely few nations with the same relationship. They were both part of British-ruled Malaya for around a century and a half, that is six generations. Much shorter was the shared experience as part of the Federation of Malaya after the British left in 1957, ending when Singapore was expelled in 1965.

It is unavoidable, then, that there are close ties between the two countries. These were nations that were like brothers—with the requisite sibling rivalry—and sport, especially football, was an arena in which that could be played out.

I had hoped that it would be played out once again at the 2016 AFF Suzuki Cup, but I knew it was something of a forlorn hope. After all, they had been drawn in separate groups. At one time, that wouldn’t have been such a big deal but such was the situation of the two teams going into the tournament that few expected that they would meet later. Perhaps one team might squeeze into the semi-finals, but both doing so was the kind of long shot that even Faiz Subri—more of him later—would struggle with.

In the end, both failed dismally and only won one game between them. That was Malaysia’s slightly lucky win over Cambodia as they came from behind to win 3-2. At one time, such a close scoreline with the Angkor Warriors would not have gone down well with fans back home, but results were so bad over the preceding two years that supporters were happy to take what they could get. Subsequent defeats spelled the end. The first against Vietnam was expected; the second against co-host Myanmar should have been, even if it was not.

For the first time in the tournament’s history, both nations exited at the group stage. The record books will show that Malaysia collected

three points to Singapore's one, but it matters little. Both were out, and deservedly so.

ANOTHER SINGAPOREAN INQUEST

Singapore's failed AFF Suzuki Cup campaign in 2016 and its aftermath offer some insight into how football in the country works.

I was there in Manila on 25 November as the Lions left the Rizal Memorial Stadium and the tournament in a mild storm. The headlights of the waiting bus at the crumbling but atmospheric arena in the middle of the city not only illuminated the raindrops, but also the slump in the players' shoulders as they passed by an Indonesian press pack that were gleefully shouting "thank you" to the Lions as they walked past. It was hard to know if there was sarcasm or mockery in the greetings shouted out. It sounded like there was to me, but as they were not talking in their first language, I wouldn't say conclusively.

What could be said with complete confidence was that three games, one goal and one point meant failure and an early exit. It was not the finest hour for the four-time champions.

Coach V. Sundramoorthy had a few words after the game. As he was asked about his future by a journalist from the *New Straits Times*, the coach shot back: "How long have you been working there? Seventeen years? Did people judge you after six months?" (The journalist said nothing, but the obvious answer was "yes". As a writer, you are judged all the time, especially if you are freelance; six months can be quite a lengthy spell.) It was hard not to feel sorry for the coach who had to face the press in a media centre that was cramped and packed and, for some reason, did so alone with no official from the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) anywhere to be seen.

Singapore had left little mark on the tournament. Their football had been forgettable, barely noticeable. The team had gained just one point, and few friends on the pitch or off. The Lions were staying at the same Novotel Hotel in Cubao as their three group rivals, but had their own wing and did not share the same eating space as the teams from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. At the end, most guests staying in the hotel barely noticed they left. Fans in the Philippines hardly noticed they arrived.

The country lacks some of the colourful chaos that can be found in Malaysian football, for better or for worse. Yet at such times, there is a

well-worn debate about what the problem is and what should be done. It seems to me that there are few places in the world of football that worry so much about the future and talk so much about the past.

There have been concerns about the S-League for some time. The competition is a decent standard and offers professional football for the country's aspiring players to aim for, even if the average salary doesn't go far in Singapore (especially if you do your socialising around Clarke Quay).

But the league has become stale with attendances falling, which is understandable given the small population in the country. This makes the national team all the more important, and the sight of it struggling so much in a regional tournament that the country had, going into 2016, won four of the ten previous titles on offer was troubling. First round exits can happen, but this was different from 2014. There was little expectation that the Lions were going to make it and the team's performance reflected that, hoping to sneak into the last four.

This time there was some sympathy for the coach. After all, he had been given just a one-year contract by the FAS just six months earlier. There was little incentive to build for the future. Why bring in youngsters that would bear fruit for someone else years down the line? There was also little incentive to experiment with a different playing style.

Trevor Hartley was appointed as the coach of Malaysia in 1989 on a one-year contract with the sole purpose of leading the team to glory in the Southeast Asian Games. "They wanted me to bring in some young players, to change the team," said Hartley. "I wasn't going to do that in a year. The older players were still fine and I wasn't going to start bringing in a new generation when all they wanted was gold in Kuala Lumpur. I was going to be judged entirely on whether there was success at the SEA Games, so there was no reason for me to jeopardise the chances of winning that for building for a future in which I would not be around and would be completely changed anyway by the next guy."

It is hard to have your *rojak* and eat it: short-term success and long-term planning are not always mutually exclusive, but it takes more than a new coach to supply both. It takes a philosophy and determination throughout the football federation.

Sundram did what Hartley had done: put together a team that, he thought, was capable of winning here and now. A fine player in his day, he was not exactly noted for providing free-flowing football as a coach

with Tampines Rovers, and so it proved with the national team.

The football was perhaps not quite as bad as some said; or at least, it would have been acceptable had results been better, and that was the sentiment I heard from the fans that had travelled to Manila. They felt that getting out of the group was the priority and that good football was a pleasant bonus. Singapore's pragmatism has served them well in the past.

While that sentiment was tested in the opening game—a goalless draw against the Philippines—it was always going to be a tough one coming against a confident co-host. It was made much tougher given the first half red card that was waved in the crestfallen face of Hafiz Sujad. Nobody will ever know what would have happened had he not kicked James Younghusband in the throat.

If I had been a Singaporean fan, however, the thing that would have worried me a little was not the fact that the four-time champs were hanging on against a team that had never been past the semi-finals before and had lost 19 out of 21 games in the tournament up until 2010, but the ease with which some observers seemed to accept the idea that Singapore would be happy with a point before kick-off.

As to which team was favourite, that was debatable. The Philippines were missing three of their foreign-based players, who had not been released by their clubs, but had performed well in the second round of qualification for the 2018 World Cup, famously defeating North Korea and Bahrain, two teams that may not be the cream of the Asian crop but were usually not that far below. Defeats in friendly games against the same opposition just a few weeks before had sowed the seeds of doubt, and while the Azkals were struggling a little, they were no longer the easy-beats of the past.

Singapore gave the co-hosts a little too much respect and there was a suspicion on my part—one that was dismissed by anyone I presented it to—that the sending off, while not welcomed, provided an excuse to sit back and not be too ambitious.

It is inadvisable to read too much into one game, but the second was more of the same, though perhaps understandably so in this instance. It ended with a 1-0 loss to Thailand, with the champions pressing in the final moments to score the vital goal. Singapore caused some problems and had chances to score and had the champions in trouble at times.

However, it was hard to escape the feeling that had the Lions been a little more aggressive and ambitious then they could have achieved

a result against the best team in the region (and one that is leaving Singapore behind on and off the pitch too). We'll come back to Thailand a little later as the current strides being made by the "Land of Smiles" provides plenty of lessons and encouragement for everyone else in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore, who are supposed to be rivals on a similar level.

Daniel Bennett, Singapore's most capped international, also felt that the result could have been very different. "When we played them in the Suzuki Cup, they weren't as good as I expected. We could have beaten them had we a little more luck and we should at least have taken a draw from the game." The defender acknowledged that Thailand have moved ahead of the others in the region but was not overly impressed with the 2016 version. "They are obviously a good team with some talented players but I thought the Thai team from 2014 was stronger."

The final game was the most disappointing for the obvious reason that it was the last in the tournament, but there was more than that. Indonesia had impressed in the first two games, but still, Singapore expected to win against a team that was still recovering from a 12-month ban from international football by FIFA.

But talking to Indonesia coach Alfred Riedl before the game, he was not so sure about that. "They are playing a physical and defensive game," said the Austrian. "If it comes to a football contest then I think we can win. We know how to play against Singapore, the style of the team does not change that much," added the man who has been coaching in Southeast Asia on and off for two decades.

The Merah Putih's ("Red and White's") last competitive game before November 2016 had come two years earlier at the previous AFF Suzuki Cup. All seemed well when Khairul Amri volleyed the Lions into a first-half lead to score Singapore's first goal in the tournament. Yet after the break, the much-vaunted defence went walkabout twice and an energetic and inventive Indonesia took advantage to score twice.

When push came to shove, Singapore did not have the attacking talent to score the necessary goals against Indonesia and at vital times, the defence fell apart. Perhaps it was a small mercy that the Lions did not get through, as surely they did not have what it took to win the tournament.

What Singapore have, and what is one of their biggest strengths, is a certain pragmatism. This can be seen in the world of business, as the city state has developed into one of the financial hubs of not only Asia

but the entire planet. Flexibility and taking advantage of opportunities is something that Singapore is good at.

And the same should be true in football. Had results been different in the Philippines, the football would have been glossed over. Talking to fans ahead of the opening game outside the stadium north of Manila, the message was: “Just get through the group stage, that is what we care about. Get to the knockout stage and anything can happen.” It is hard to argue against that. While Thailand was the best team, being drawn in the same group meant that you couldn’t face them in the semi-finals.

Just getting the right result against Indonesia—and given the way the group played out, a draw would have been enough for the last four—could have sent Singapore all the way to the final. But none of that came to pass. Singapore went home with one point and that meant criticism over the style of play was always going to be fierce. That is just the way it is in football.

Thailand coach Kiattisuk Senamuang has plenty of experience in Singapore as a player and against Singapore as a coach and player. He was not surprised at the way Singapore played. Lounging bare-chested by the pool at the Novatel in Cubao, he said this was just the country’s style. “It is always this way,” he shrugged. “Even when I was a player. Singapore defends and counterattacks while Thailand tries to pass the ball. The games always ended 1-0 or 2-1 or 1-1. This is the way it has always been. Singapore always plays this way. They do what they need to do to win. We do the same but in a different way.”

It is hard to disagree. This is football and it would be boring if every team played in the same way, and while the styles of Thailand and Singapore were different on the pitch, the respective coaches were very different too. It is hard to imagine Sundram talking to reporters while lounging by the pool wearing just a pair of shorts. “Zico”, as Senamuang was affectionately known, cut a relaxed and confident figure and was obviously enjoying himself, holding court. This was in contrast to his Singapore counterpart, who looked nervous and troubled as if he would rather be doing something else. Though it is striking that Zico was out of his job just three months later, the victim of his own success in Thailand as he raised expectations to an unsustainable degree, while Sundram stayed on. It just goes to show that you can never be certain of anything in football.

Yet there is something about Singapore football that reminds me a little of England. When the national team fails at an international

tournament, the same inquest is held and the same conclusions are come to pretty much every time. There are the same worries about the direction the game is going in and the people who are in charge and about the nation’s relationship with football in general.

Then what happens is that the anger fizzles out and is forgotten by the time the next games come around and the cycle starts again. If, as in Hinduism, the concept of time is that of a wheel that keeps turning and life keeps repeating itself, then the same is true in Singapore football, where the same debates keep rolling round again and again.

“The direction Singapore football needs to take must be set by football people. Instead you find bankers, lawyers and doctors running the game. I don’t think that is right.” This was Vincent Subramaniam talking in 2003. The national team coach at the turn of the century was discussing Singapore’s failure at the 2002 Tiger Cup. Yet his words would not have sounded strange 13 years later after another group stage exit.

It came back to the age-old reason or excuse as to why Singapore can struggle to progress. “The football culture here is so different,” said Subramaniam. “Our youngsters put football only third on their priority list, after studies and social activities. To succeed, aspiring footballers must sacrifice. A young footballer who wants to become a successful professional should be like a boy who goes into monkhood. If he cannot sacrifice the time and effort, then he should not consider it at all.”

But youngsters are surely the product of the environment they grow up in. In January 2017, the Singapore Land Authority (SLA) told Home United Youth Football Academy that it was not to use two of its pitches at weekends or on weekday evenings. Local residents—well, five of them at least—found it all too loud and complained. One said that his son was struggling to study due to all the racket of young compatriots playing the beautiful game in the local neighbourhood. Studies come first in a country that leads the way in global education but does not seem quite so interested in getting up to international speed in football.

It caused quite a stir. Over two thousand people signed an online petition to protest SLA’s decision. Jose Raymond, who had been a senior director at the Singapore Sports Hub, called the weekend and weeknight suspensions “a slap in the face for the development of sports culture in Singapore”.

Mr Darryl David, deputy chairman of the Singapore government’s Parliamentary Committee for Culture, Community and Youth, said:

“We shouldn’t be focusing on the number of people making the complaint but the nature of it. These four people could be raising an issue that more are experiencing. I don’t think this reflects on the community’s attitude towards sporting culture.”

Benjamin Tan is the former head of development at the Football Association of Singapore. Then he moved to Thailand to become Deputy CEO of the Thai Premier League and was concerned when he heard that youth academies were being told to restrict training times for children after complaints from local residents.

“Singapore has scarce land resources, so further deprivation of places for children to train is not good for the development of football in Singapore,” Tan said. “It also may discourage other clubs from going to look at land to build academies or facilities. You need more opportunities for kids to play.”

In Thailand, says Tan, it is not an issue. “It’s not just because of land being more plentiful but because of the way society has changed,” he explained. “With technology and all the iPads and iPhones that children play with, parents are happy to see them go and play outside and do something healthy and play sports, not just football.”

Aleksandar Durić believes that things have deteriorated in Singapore football since he arrived in the nineties. “It has changed. Kids now are reading too much and they don’t know how to make good talent. Coaches let their teams play bad football, they focus too much on improving fitness. You need to find a balance between technical ability and fitness, you can’t just focus on one.”

As well as youth development, there are also other issues. “The problem is that in the ASEAN region, coaches don’t get time to show what they can do before they are fired. This is why football is the way it is in Southeast Asia. I am not sure if or when this trend will really change in this culture. Only the owners know why.” Singapore is better than most in the region when it comes to patience with coaches, though that is hardly the highest of compliments. Durić would, however, still like the coaches to be a little tougher, stricter and harsher.

“They protect the local players too much, they make players who don’t know how to play under pressure. Singapore is very small and it is hard to find good players. It is all connected though, as you can put too much pressure on and then you lose the young players. Singapore is a unique place—a mixture of study and army. It is something that is hard to understand if you are not from Singapore.”

Perhaps more international coaches would help but Subramaniam had his doubts, disagreeing that European coaches were better than their Singapore counterparts just because European football is better. “Not every coach from Europe is good,” said the former boss. “Some are as good, others are worse than local coaches. I would agree that the only area where Europeans may be ahead of Asians would be in team management and team-building. But knowledge, application of tactics and strategies, they are all universal and the development of footballers is also almost the same the world over.”

Talking to his successor Jan Poulsen, it was obvious that not much had changed since the end of the last millennium. The Dane, who arrived in 1999 as the Director of the Goal 2010 Project, laughed, perhaps a little sadly, on hearing the story of Home United Youth Football Academy. He went on to explain how he ended up in Singapore.

“The story is like this. The Danish ambassador to Singapore at the time was at some kind of party and he was told by ministers about Project 2010. The ambassador is very interested in football, especially Arsenal. He said, ‘Why not someone from Denmark?’ And in this way, I made contact with the FAS. I applied for the job and I had to go to an interview and then they made the offer. I said ‘thank you’ and took the job. This was a government project.”

Project 2010 was, said Poulsen, about laying the foundations in place so the Lions could go to South Africa in 2010—and not on safari, but to play at the World Cup. At the time, said the Dane, there were genuine hopes that it could be done. It may sound strange now as we know that Singapore finished third in their group behind Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia but were nine points behind, taking points only off Lebanon. But then take Bahrain. This is a nation of just a few hundred thousand, compared to over five million in Singapore, has a league that struggles but came within a whisker of qualifying for the 2006 and 2010 World Cups. After being defeated by Trinidad and Tobago in the final play-off for Germany 2006, Bahrain expected to beat New Zealand to go to South Africa. Had they not missed a second half penalty in Wellington, that is exactly what would have happened. If a tiny Middle Eastern island with a population of not much more than Woodlands can do it, so can Singapore.

This seemed very far away in 1999. Asian federations have long been happy to target the third World Cup from the present, close enough to get people interested but far enough away to give plenty of room to

manoeuvre. “This was my title, Project 2010 director,” said Poulsen. “We wanted to participate in South Africa in 2010.” He paused for a second. “(I)f I had known that I would have said no to the project. I would have said no because 2010 was almost impossible. Actually, it was impossible.”

But these are debates that go back decades. In 1972, there was talk of how changes at the grassroots was going to give Singapore a solid foundation for years to come as Jeffrey Low wrote in *The New Nation* newspaper. “The dearth of local coaching talents will soon be arrested if plans by the Singapore Coaches Committee (SCC) works out without a hitch. A positive move has already been made to build a large pool of qualified and up-to-date coaches for all levels, from schools to clubs and constituencies.” At the time, it was noted, there were 250 qualified coaches in the country, many of whom were not getting the support and direction they needed.

This was going to change over a period of four months, during which there would be five coaching courses held that would feed into an advanced trainers’ course. This would provide a pool for the then national team coach Michael Walker to strengthen his coaching staff.

There was also another course devised for schoolteachers, to help them become better coaches as Major Abbas Abu Amin, chairman of the SCC, explained, “The schoolteachers course will be quite an important one because the coaches will be shown the right basics of football. They will be largely involved with students from 10 to 14 years old. That is why the teachers must teach the proper ways to young ones. If the students start on the right track from a tender age, it would not be such a great problem to correct minor faults. But if they develop bad habits from young, our task becomes greater when training future national potentials.”

It all sounds reasonable, but it is not that hard to find similar talk almost half a century later. It suggests that not much has changed.

MALAYSIA GRAPPLES WITH A RARE TASTE OF GLOBAL ACCLAIM

Yet in the first few days of 2017 there was some news that suggested that the new year would be a lot better for football in the region than the old one. There was a hint that Southeast Asia could make waves on the world stage in a field that was not just about match-fixing.

A Malaysian won the Puskas Award. This was something to be truly proud of, though it turned into something a little controversial in the end. Malaysian football has a habit of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and this happened, to a degree, with this global prize.

It started in a truly beautiful way. I was there in February 2016 when Penang midfielder Faiz Subri scored a truly amazing goal, a free-kick from 35 metres that swerved, dipped and swerved again to leave the Pahang goalkeeper as stunned as the watching fans. It also stunned those around the world as the goal went viral, with millions soon watching.

It was nominated by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) for the Puskas Award, the prize FIFA hands out for the most beautiful goal of the year. When voting opened online, the whole of the country’s football fraternity voted and encouraged others to do the same. Even without that, the goal was spectacular enough to impress and it soon made the shortlist of ten and then the shorter list of three. Many felt that the strike was going to go all the way—the winner would be announced at a glittering ceremony in Zurich.

Penang and FAM fought over who could pay for the player to fly business class to the Swiss city. Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim (TMJ), the president of Johor Darul Ta’zim FC, the champions of Malaysia, gave the player a cash prize—and then warned him, and the rest of the country, not to get too carried away with it all.

Faiz’s rivals for the prize were both South Americans—one from Brazil, one from Venezuela. I met the player two days before he was making the journey. Penang coach Ashley Westwood (who was to last less than half a season) was not too happy at losing one of his players just a few days before the start of a new season but this was a Malaysian cause, something that the whole nation was getting behind, and something closely followed by the rest of the region.

The Puskas award may not be that big a deal in some parts of the world but this was a good news story on the international stage that Malaysian football was desperate for. In recent years, when Malaysia had made international news, the headlines were not happy ones, such as the two aviation tragedies suffered by Malaysian Airlines in March and then July 2014. Faiz going to Zurich marked a pleasant change.

Millions of people were looking forward to the ceremony. So was Faiz. He was genuinely excited and said with a smile that if there was any interest from Europe that he wouldn’t mind signing for Manchester United. There was talk that he would wear a *baju Melayu*, a traditional

Malay outfit for men. He didn't, going for a suit and a bow tie instead.

As the tension and excitement built, the winner of the prize was announced by the original Ronaldo. The Brazilian striker was not quite as svelte in January 2017 as he was in his playing heyday, but then if a player has the career that he enjoyed then he should do what he likes. When he said Faiz's name, the Penang midfielder put his hands over his face, received a shoulder shake and a hug from FAM deputy-president Afandi Bin Hamzah (who was later criticised for "muscling in" on Faiz's photo with Cristiano Ronaldo) and then went to get the prize.

There was an awkward wait of quite a few seconds as the player searched on his phone and then gave a speech in broken English. Little could he have known that this would provoke a debate at home that would be in danger of overshadowing the award.

A writer for Malaysiakini, an online portal, lamented the appearance as embarrassing the country on the national stage. It was all part of a debate as to what it all meant for Malaysia.

Faiz's speech was compared with one given by Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi at the United Nations in September 2016 at the United Nations. Then the politician was criticised at home for speaking "Manglish", a Malaysian version of English with a local pronunciation of some English words. Many felt that he, like Faiz, should have spoken Malay as a matter of principle anyway, as there were translators available. Others lamented that it marked a general decline in the English-speaking ability of Malaysians.

"Time was when Malaysians were complimented on the standard of their English; now it is the stuff of embarrassment, not infrequently on the international stage, before a global audience," went the article. "To be sure, Malaysian football and other sports fans are delighted by Faiz's achievement in winning the Puskas award. However, if they watched the footage of his moment in the spotlight, whatever pride they must have felt over Faiz being chosen as winner would have been diminished by his shambling performance on being called to receive the prize and say a few words."

It seems harsh to compare the acceptance speech of a football player that will probably happen once in a lifetime, if that, to that given by an experienced politician who is obviously accustomed to public speaking.

It was also harsh and it was certainly unfortunate that the player was asked about this on his arrival at Kuala Lumpur airport after a long flight from Zurich.

"People are going to speak whatever they want, I can't control that," he said at a press conference. "I do not mind the criticism, as I've done my best and my target after this is to do better for myself and Pulau Pinang," he said.

Minister of Youth and Sports Khairy Jamaluddin was a bit more forthright: "They (the critics) should not have focused on such a trivial matter, instead they should have focused on Faiz's effort and the recognition he has brought to the country. For me these critics are those who have never received any international awards like what Faiz has achieved."

It was unfortunate for the player, who should not have had to deal with any of those barbs, but the episode gives an idea of what makes Malaysia such a fascinating and intriguing place. Not many countries could turn what should have been a universally acclaimed moment into a national debate about a different matter entirely. The prize will forever be Faiz's and completely deserved, and he should treasure it.

For Review Only

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY DAYS: SINGAPORE, SELANGOR, PENANG AND THE MALAYSIA CUP

I grabbed the chance to show what an Asian could do with a football.
And did it well.

—Lim Yong Liang, Singapore striker, 1922–1934

In 1944, the British ship HMS *Malaya* was used as a target ship for prototype bouncing bombs in Loch Striven in Scotland. She had had a busy World War II, escorting convoys and facing the Italian navy in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as shelling the city of Genoa in 1941. The vessel was attacked and damaged in the same year near Cape Verde, but limped into a Caribbean port before returning to fitness to escort convoys cross the Atlantic.

Previously, she had done three things of historic note. She was involved, just a year after she was constructed in Newcastle, in the Battle of Jutland in 1916, the biggest naval engagement of World War I and the only meeting between the main fleets of the British Royal Navy and the Imperial German Navy. The ship suffered heavy damage and 65 people died. The vessel also carried the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed VI, from Istanbul to exile on Malta in 1922. And a year earlier—in January 1921—HMS *Malaya*, so named because it was built by money provided by the government of British-ruled Malaya, had visited the country that it was named after.

The ship called at Port Swettenham, Singapore, Melaka, Penang and Port Dickson, with the crew playing locals in all kinds of games including football, rugby, golf and hockey. Not long after the ship departed back to Europe, the captain, H.T. Buller, sent a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Federated Malay States in which he offered to send two cups, one to be competed for in rugby and the other in football, as a token

of gratitude at the warm welcome the vessel had received upon its visit.

This was called the Malaya Cup and then later became known as the Malaysia Cup, one of the most historic cup competitions in the world—and surely one of the best and most loved. The skipper of the ship could not have dreamed this would be the longest-lasting contribution to world history that his charge would ever make.

That original trophy lasted until 1967, when the Football Association of Malaysia created the Malaysia Cup. The first final had taken place 46 years earlier between Selangor and Singapore, two rivals that were going to meet plenty of times again over the years. Of the rivalry that exists between the two countries, a fair proportion can be ascribed to this special relationship between the Red Giants and the Lions.

1 October 1921 had started wet, but by kick-off at the Selangor Club, conditions had improved somewhat and the crowd was looking forward to what was expected to be a very good game of football and a splendid social occasion.

Singapore had defeated Negri Sembilan and Melaka along the way to becoming South Zone champions. Selangor represented the North Zone by virtue of downing Perak and thrashing Penang 5-1.

The Straits Times seemed excited:

“The crowd was probably the largest ever for a football match in Malaya,” the newspaper reported. “People from Penang, Perak, the Province, Seremban, Malacca, Singapore and the districts of Selangor thronged the field. Along the touchline on the side of the club, seating accommodation was provided for about 200 people. But by 4.30pm, all the seats were occupied and there was a requisition for more seats. All the four sides of the ground were crowded with a dense mass of people five and six deep. An improvised jazz band, with Lt. Riches as the guiding genius, relieved the tedium of waiting.”

Selangor won the toss and kicked-off at 5 p.m. Singapore started the brighter. The Lions were made up of plenty of British military and had one Asian in the side, the dangerous Chee Lim, who was pushing and probing in attack.

Jamieson, a Scot, broke the deadlock just before the break, with a shot that, according to the newspaper, “could have beaten the best custodian in the region.”

Selangor also had plenty of Brits on the pitch and Rozario equalised for the Red Giants around the hour mark. But it was Moss who scored the winning goal five minutes before the end and it was left to the Lions

to lift the trophy—plainly adorned, according to reports. The game ended 2-1 to Singapore, starting a long love affair for the Lions with the competition. Celebrations were enthusiastic by Singapore supporters at the venue but the Malaya Cup was just starting to make emotional inroads back home.

Selangor took revenge the following year but the Lions bounced back to win the next three. From then, the two rivals almost took turns to keep the trophy, and actually shared the prize in 1928 and 1929. In 1930, Johor and Kedah joined the Malaya Cup and two years later, the Football Association of Malaya (FAM) took over the operation of the competition.

Singapore won the 1941 trophy, the last one until 1948 due to the intervention of World War II. By that time, with the Japanese poised to invade, Singapore had won 12 cups from 1921 compared to five for Selangor, with two shared trophies. Only Perak broke the duopoly with two wins, but it was Singapore that dominated, appearing in every final from 1921 to 1941. It was, and remains, a highly impressive achievement. There can be few tournaments that have been, for a time at least, so closely identified with one team.

One of the major figures from that era of almost total Singaporean domination was Lim Yong Liang. The man known as “Pop” has few rivals for the title of the best striker that Singapore has ever produced. He began his career at the age of 15, starting out for the Chinese junior side. In 1922, he was chosen to represent Singapore in the Malaya Cup in just its second ever edition and was still there in 1928, appearing in all the competition’s finals except in 1924, and scoring three goals along the way. This was a striker who could play anywhere in the forward line. In 1928, he also led the Singapore Sino-Malay team, which surprised local fans and journalists by defeating a decent Australian eleven. The Aussies were extremely impressed.

Lim was recalled in 1934, helping the team to the title once again. Perhaps he could have taken the moniker of the “Singaporean Gary Lineker” (or for chronology, perhaps the former Barcelona and England striker could be called the “English Lim Yong Liang”), as he had a knack for popping up in the penalty area at the right time and right place to score and was also known for always staying on the right side of the referee. In 1947, the Singapore Free Press newspaper noted that “old soccer fans cannot recall an occasion when he was pulled up for ungentlemanly conduct on the field.” It is hard to say with certainty,

but it was extremely unlikely that Lim ever defecated on the pitch as the English striker had during a World Cup match in 1990.

The “Grand Old Man” of Singapore football was a little envious of Fandi Ahmad, one of the few rivals for the title of best ever striker from the country, and the opportunities he had in the eighties. “I grabbed the chance to show what an Asian could do with a football. And I did it well,” he said in 1980. “How I wish I were 25 years old again and at my peak and staring at an Ajax contract.” He died two years later. Looking back, Lim offers a classic case of “what if”. The British players who were active at the time all felt that Lim was good enough to play for clubs in England, but it was just not a realistic option at the time.

Lim’s advice to Fandi was to try to join one of the giants of European football. “This is the chance that Fandi must grab. Forget about Niac [from Indonesia], go to Europe and show what an Asian can do with the ball.”

Lim was to continue to be a major figure after hanging up his boots, going on to coach all Singapore’s Malaya Cup teams from 1936 to the outbreak of war in 1941. He then went on to spend more than two decades as the secretary at the Singapore Amateur Football Association (SAFA). He claimed in an interview with *The Straits Times* that he had seen almost all the 348 games that had taken place in the Merdeka Cup. “I have seen ’em all except one series in 1966 when I went to London to see England win the World Cup at Wembley. It has always been my ambition to see as much as I can of all the English soccer teams and at last, I am about to fulfill that ambition before I get too old.”

He also continued to watch Singapore in the Malaysia Cup and in 1976 went to the dressing room to console the Lions, who had lost to Selangor in the final. “What are all these people crying about? So what if we lost? Next year, we’ll win it. So I must start now to encourage the players.” Such common sense and clarity of thought would be welcome these days, too. And Singapore did win it the next year.

Lim was a giant of those early years and played a huge part in the development of Singapore football, as well as the Malaya/Malaysia Cup, but the arrival of the Japanese was also influential.

The last final before war finally broke out in the region took place on 16 August 1941. By this time, there were fewer British players in the local sides—they were needed elsewhere—though they were obviously well represented when it came to the RAF and Army teams. The players that came from the United Kingdom were not the best but a few top

talents did arrive, such as Johnny Sherwood, an outside left who played for Reading in the 1941 War Cup Final. Regardless, the Brits did not enjoy losing to the improving local teams, believing that it went against the established order. After all, who invented the game and who ran the country?

In 1941, the RAF and Army teams finished below Singapore—by now made up solely of local players—in the group stage of the southern zone. Again losing to the locals did not go down well and the British consoled themselves by telling all who would listen that their football was still the best—the lessons that Hungary would give in 1953 at Wembley were still some time away.

Singapore then went to the final against Penang. Lai Chuan gave the Lions the lead. Penang, not yet known as the Panthers, had three talented Brits, with goalkeeper Cyril Gibbons, left-back Cyril Ashmore and the man who equalised for Penang after 20 minutes, striker Frederick Askew. Yet Singapore’s skipper Aziz was a towering presence at centre-back and repelled all attacks. Goals from Taib and Quan Chong settled it and Singapore took title number 12 in a competition that they had come to love.

Shortly after, the Japanese army arrived in Penang. It was symbolic. This island was the first British territory in the whole of Southeast Asia and was first occupied in 1776. Then, 165 years later, the colonisers abandoned the “Pearl of the Orient” in a panic without firing a shot. The Japanese continued down the peninsula towards Singapore. British and Commonwealth troops provided some resistance this time, but not enough. With the Japanese occupying the Malay peninsula and Singapore, local football was obviously not a priority.

While the war ended in 1945, the Malaya Cup did not get going again until 1948. Perhaps the other states were just not that excited about being on the receiving end of more Singaporean domination. It can’t have been much fun for the others in the pre-war period when Singapore reached the final every single time.

The return to action in the southern section saw Singapore defeat Johor 4-1 and normal service looked like it was going to be resumed. There was then a 3-0 win over Army/Navy and then a 2-2 draw with the Royal Air Force (RAF). But something strange happened in the fourth game. Singapore lost, and not only that, lost at the Jalan Besar Stadium. The historic date was 19 June 1948, and the Lions were defeated by Negri Sembilan, who went on to lift the trophy, beating Selangor in the

final after a replay. It was only the third time that the cup had gone to neither Singapore nor Selangor.

But back to the first defeat in the group stage, a first such loss in 73 games. It was a defeat that almost sent the city into meltdown. Mr F.C. Sands was the president of SAFA and was at a loss to explain what happened, as *The Straits Times* reported. “I have never seen Singapore play so badly; every player seemed to be off form. However, the fitter team won and I offer my congratulation to Negri Sembilan for their creditable victory.”

For a team that was not accustomed to losing when it mattered, they accepted defeat in a gentlemanly manner.

The shock win was not undeserved. The hosts started well, but it did not take too long for the visitors to settle. Once they did, they took the game to Singapore and scored after ten minutes, with Soon Teck heading home the opener after an inswinging free-kick delivered by Thian Kwee. Though Singapore equalised from the spot, a striker called, simply, Captain Watson struck in the second-half, one in which the team known as NS dominated.

“We played hard,” said Watson. “This is a historic win and we are delighted that we can be the first to win here in the group. We all pulled together as we know that Singapore always get to the final. It shows that if you work hard then the strongest team can be defeated.”

What was generally agreed by all who watched the game was that the powerhouse of peninsular football had underestimated their opponents. “The real reason,” said the hard-hitting columnist known as “Crusader” in the Singapore Free Press, “lay in the fact that the Singapore players, like their supporters, did not give a serious thought to the possibility of defeat. After all, it was only little Negri Sembilan...why train, why bother.”

The Straits Times reflected the general feeling by saying that a full-strength NS team playing to the best of its ability would be happy with a draw. The paper was right—until they were proven wrong.

It wasn't quite the blip that fans in Singapore were hoping for, though the performance in 1949 was a bit better. Singapore didn't make the final for the second year running and the second year in the competition's history, but this time only lost out on goal difference to the Army/Navy team.

Normal service was resumed in 1950. Singapore won the cup for the first time since 1941, and that triumph signalled the start of a fruitful

period of seven appearances in the next seven finals.

And there was plenty to write about in those games. It was a golden time for the competition.

HERE COME PENANG—AND YEARS OF CONTROVERSY

If only Melaka had been a power at the time, then the three-way relationship could have been called the “Straits Settlements Rivalry”. But for a few exciting years, it was all about Penang and Singapore, two places that had historically plenty in common but were about to build a football history together too.

There had been meetings in 1934 and 1941 when Penang lost the final to Singapore. But the fifties was when it really got going. After the two years without a final appearance, Singapore won all their group games in 1950 and met Penang in the final for a third time.

Because of the two previous defeats, Penang was desperate to win the trophy and saw home advantage as, well, a major advantage. The Penang FA president Yeap Hock Hoe offered to shoulder all of Singapore's expenses for a trip that seems short now but was still a bit of a trek back then. Air tickets were offered, as were first class hotels. Yeap met his SAFA counterpart at the races and made his offer, but W. McGregor Watt was not impressed at the prospect of handing over home advantage to the northerners.

Had Singapore not just suffered the indignity of sitting out of the last two finals, perhaps they would have been more open to the idea of playing a one-off game in the Pearl of the Orient. But Singapore had pulled out all the stops to ensure that they did not record an unwanted hat-trick. The team was criticised for resting players for other competitions so they would be fresh for the Malaya Cup—an early form of rotation.

But Penang were confident. After a win over Perak in the group stage, the team could start to look forward to the final. Yeap was especially delighted. “I am more than happy by the display of our Penang boys,” he said. “They played great soccer and if they play as they played today we have every chance of winning the trophy for the first time.”

There was much expectation on the shoulders of star striker Abu Baidah. He scored all five goals in the thrashing of Perak not long before, and was in great shape after returning from injury. “We know

that Singapore are a strong team and have won the cup many times,” he said. “We are still looking for a first trophy. It is important that we win.”

In the end, Penang did not get their way and had to play a one-off game in Kuala Lumpur. Special bus services were laid on for fans. They were disappointed once again. Singapore won 2-0 to make it three final wins out of three between the two teams and a first since 1941.

The venue for the final was often a bone of contention. In 1951, Singapore confirmed that they were back as a force and won it again, this time thrashing Perak 6-0. But they were insistent that the final should be played at Jalan Besar.

As the holders, they felt that they had the right to host the game, as the last time the final had been played at the arena was back in 1938. The State Associations were not happy with the idea and felt that playing in Singapore would give the hosts a home advantage worth one or two goals. SAFA were ready to offer a substantial share of the gate receipts to Perak but just like in 1950 and Penang, Perak were just as desperate to win the cup and did not want to give Singapore, already favourites, a greater chance of winning.

In the end, Singapore had to play the final in Kuala Lumpur and, boy, did they play. It only served to inspire the visitors and they thrashed Perak 6-0 in front of about 9,000 fans. It was a dominant display from start to finish. Perak's captain was Jack Crossley, who had once played for Hull City, and he pointed out the problem that the northerners brought upon themselves. “Perak dribbled the ball instead of moving it,” he said, referring to his team in the third person (an unusual thing to do—almost as unusual as modern players dissecting their team's tactics in post-match interviews).

Just as he did not stop running in the game, he went on to give more of his opinion. “They could not settle down and were outplayed. Singapore were by far the superior side and had better stamina. They played grand football.” Singapore were also fitter and better organised, and in the words of the *Singapore Free Press*, “played more forceful and scientific football” to knock Perak off their stride.

There had been some that felt Perak could win the trophy for the first time since 1931 when they had defeated Singapore 3-1 in the final. Khoo Kai Swee, former honorary coach of the Selangor Chinese Recreation Club, predicted a Perak triumph due to the fact that Singapore's defence was weak, especially with the threat posed by Crossley.

He was prescient in pointing out that Singapore's Chia Boon Leong,

who had represented China at the 1948 London Olympics and in 1954 won a prize of a month's training in England and time with Arsenal after being voted as Malaya's most popular football player, was dangerous. He said something similar about star centre-forward Awang Bakar.

“[Boon Leong] is a brainy player and creates beautiful openings for other forwards. He was known to lack stamina but according to reporters, he has had sustained and strenuous training.” Boon Leong, who stood at not much more than five feet tall, was identified as the man of the match by many, which is doubly impressive considering Awang Bakar grabbed a hat-trick.

What was also notable was that this was labelled the most eagerly awaited of all the post-war finals. Local hotels were all full, though the September weekend fell around the same time as the Selangor races, and over 100 police and military personnel were to be on hand to ensure that a full house did not become dangerously overcrowded. In the end, the most dangerous thing on display in Kuala Lumpur was the Singapore attack, which delivered the trophy once again.

In 1952, Penang were back on the scene and hoping that it would be fourth time lucky against Singapore. Despite the losing record, there were high hopes for the October clash. It turned out to be one of the most exciting and best finals in history.

Both teams had chances in a breathless first half, but it was Singapore that took the lead against the run of play. It was a spectacular strike and befitting such an occasion, with star striker Awang Bakar, who was to play a major part in this fixture over the years, scoring an overhead kick to send the 300 or so Singapore fans in the Perak stadium wild with delight. Awang was a class act and deserves to be better known in Southeast Asia than he is.

Penang turned up the pressure but just couldn't find a way through, and the chant “Lucky Singapore” started to ring around the Chinese Assembly Hall ground. Just before the break, however, Pang Siang Teik scored the equaliser. Soon after the restart Aziz Ahmad, who had made the equaliser, added a second to put the Panthers in the lead—and the fans started to believe that it could finally happen, that the cup was going to Georgetown for the first time. They pushed forward looking for a third but Rahim Omar headed home the equaliser instead.

With 15 minutes remaining, it was 2-2 and anyone's game. It was settled by a disputed goal. Rahim turned provider and swung the ball over, and there was Awang to head home his second and his team's third.

There were protests that the striker had used his hands. The defenders and fans had their hands in the air trying to get the referee to change his mind. It didn't work.

What must Penang have thought of Singapore? Four times they had met in the final and four times the Lions had won. What had Penang done to deserve such a nemesis? As the fans made the relatively short journey home from Ipoh, there was a feeling that it was never going to happen, that Penang's name was never going to be on the cup.

But they were back, and so was the optimism, a year later. Yes, Penang met Singapore for the fifth time in the final in 1953. Once again, Singapore tried to have the game played at home, but once again the effort was unsuccessful. The SAFA wrote to Penang FC, suggesting two alternative proposals. The first suggestion was a home-and-away leg, the second a good old-fashioned coin toss decided where the final would take place.

Penang held a two-hour emergency meeting to deliberate on the matter before deciding to turn down the proposals. There was some debate, however. Singapore had pointed out that the cup final had not been held in either of the two islands for two decades. It was time to at least let one set of home fans witness the game. Some Penang officials were interested in the idea of a home-and-away game, especially if they could host the second leg at home; and financially, it had a certain appeal.

In the end, however, they preferred to stick to the original plan set out by the Football Association of Malaya, and that was to play the game once again in Ipoh on 22 August. The fact that Ipoh is relatively close to Penang perhaps swayed the argument. You could get there and back on the same day, even in the days before the North-South Expressway cut the journey to not much more than an hour.

The first 400 tickets given to Penang sold out within minutes and not long after it was clear that of the over 4000 seats sold at the Chinese Assembly Hall ground, more than half would be occupied by Penang backsides. Hotels in and around the city filled up quickly. You can't say that fans of the Panthers were pessimists. They refused to believe that they were never going to win.

Once again Awang Bakar was seen as the danger-man for Singapore in attack; but there was hope in the north that their own star attacker, Pang Siang Teik, could make a difference.

Singapore had stumbled the week before the final, losing to Kluang, but coach Dick Pates was able to explain that away. "I make no excuses

for our loss. We were deservedly beaten but I did tell our players before the game to avoid any possible injury." Pates promised that his boys would be ready to administer the now customary defeat to Penang in the final.

Singapore were full of confidence. After all, Penang should really have beaten their rivals in the final the previous year, but failed to do so. It seemed that the southerners, with their four wins in four finals against the team from the north, had the hex over their rivals. And Singapore had the knack of being able to win big games, even when they were not playing well. This was something that Penang lacked.

If Singapore were confident, there was also something in Penang's favour. Penang FA president See Seang Hua looked around at what was happening in the world to see that 1953 was a year of firsts. Mount Everest had been conquered, Stanley Matthews had finally collected an FA Cup winner's medal and later that year England would lose to Hungary at Wembley, a first defeat to foreign opposition on home soil.

If these events could finally come to pass, then there was no reason why Penang could not lift the Malaya Cup for the first time. It also seemed as if it was fate that kept bringing Penang and Singapore together in the final. Like any good computer game, to get the big prize, you have to defeat the big boss.

The feeling in Penang was that the only team that could beat them was themselves. If they settled quickly and were not affected by nerves then the trophy would be heading northwest after the game for a party that had been decades in the making.

Excitement was boosted by good news from Ipoh. While there had often been too much rain ahead of past finals, there were concerns that weeks without rain had left the pitch in Perak dry and dangerous. The day before the game, the heavens opened for 45 minutes, the first downfall for 20 days.

Singapore coach Pates was hedging his bets before the game. "I am never confident of winning any match but I am confident that our players and reserves are fit, are members of one happy family and will do their utmost to win. I would say that our team is as strong as that of last year but not as strong as the previous year when we won the cup final against Negri Sembilan by six goals to nil.

"If we are beaten by Penang we have no excuses. But I am sure every member of the team will do his utmost and it will not be through lack of trying if we failed to succeed." He added that there had been a special

preparation programme implemented in the weeks leading up to it.

“For the last three weeks intensive training has been carried out at Jalan Besar stadium—every other evening after six o’clock for at least an hour. In addition, they have had massages at the stadium. Certainly, no other Malaya Cup team has ever had the same opportunities of getting physically fit.”

Amid a raucous atmosphere at the Chinese Assembly Hall, Singapore took the lead in the twentieth minute with Ismail Yusoff running onto an Aw Boon Seong pass to shoot past Swee Hock. It seemed to Penang that history was repeating itself but this time, they were made of sterner stuff than in the previous four finals.

Three minutes before the break, Siang Teik equalised from a corner, and the sigh of relief around Ipoh was palpable.

Penang had looked to neutralise the threat of star Singapore striker Awang Bakar by deploying their own forward, Yah Hin Hean, back into defence to cover. It worked. Two goals in the first five minutes of the second half won the game and a first-ever cup for Penang. Aziz Ahmad put the team ahead and two minutes later Siang Hock extended the team’s lead. Ismail pulled a goal back for Singapore, coming close to getting the equaliser and his hat-trick, but Penang held on for a famous 3-2 win.

There was some controversy. Singapore had appeared in six of the previous eight finals and had won them all. This was a team accustomed to winning on the big stage and especially comfortable with facing Penang. The loss hurt. Soh Ghee Soon, the Singapore team manager, said a few words at a special post-final dinner that was supposed to be a celebration party but instead provided a platform for an impromptu inquest.

“I do not begrudge Penang victory,” he said. “But I feel that if all our players pulled their weight, we would have won. If any of them have a conscience about the part they played in the game, I leave them with it.” Most felt that he was referring to a player or players who had “sold the game”. So much for the coach’s pre-match assertion that there would be no excuses if Penang won.

Some fans did not take too kindly to the manager blaming the players for the loss. A letter, signed “THREE-TWO (SQUARED)” from Penang to *The Straits Times* advised him to take the beating like a man. “It is rather ungrateful on your part after they struggled so heroically, although they lost. There is even honour in losing.

“Furthermore, don’t blame the ball or the weather or the last breakfast and above all don’t blame Penang for the ‘tactics’ they adopted during

the last ten minutes ... The fact remains that Penang was superior and so Singapore had to bow down to the worthy victors. Better luck next year Singapore.”

The tactics in question had been highlighted by the Singapore press and were labelled as being unsporting with Penang, especially captain Cheng Eng, eager to run down the clock, as well as being a little more physical than Singapore would have liked.

Penang didn’t care and who could blame them? This was a state that had been so close to glory on four previous occasions but had lost all four, and all to the same team. The feeling was that if Singapore were unhappy about the way Penang closed out the match, then tough. Singapore could take solace in the 17 trophies they had already won.

The Penang players returned home the next day to be greeted as heroes, as thousands lined the streets. The island and the surrounding state partied for days as the drought had finally been broken.

Yet this particular mini-series had not come to an end. Just as Penang had sought revenge over Singapore in the past for their final defeats, Singapore had their opportunity in the following year as the two teams met in the final of the 1954 edition.

Penang were favourites—though only just—and there wasn’t the usual talk of trying to get the game played on either island. Singapore were determined to go and play wherever the game may be and the location was Kuala Lumpur. The Lions flew by air.

Coach Pates was still there, as were star attackers Boon Leong—Malaya’s Footballer of the Year—and Awang Bakar. This time, though, there was young Rahim Omar, who was becoming a real star of the team. Singapore wanted to bring the trophy back to its rightful place and there was certainly plenty of attacking talent.

This time round there were no complaints, no ambiguity or what-ifs. It ended up 3-0 to Penang and there was little of the tension that had been evident the year before, when the Panthers were hanging on to a 3-2 lead with their claws, fangs, tail—whatever they had. There was some controversy, however.

In the ninth minute, Rahim Omar confirmed his star potential by scoring from a corner to stun Penang fans. Unfortunately for Singapore, it was ruled out as it was adjudged that the swerving ball had gone out of play before returning into the area for the striker to score. It was the first occasion that Penang goalkeeper Dave Maclaren was beaten in the game and, as perhaps the best shot-stopper in Malaya at the time, there

was not going to be a second. He was pretty much perfect after that, and was helped by the fact that Penang central defender Yap Hin Hean had Awang Bakar in his pocket for almost the entire game.

Awang was, and still is, one of the best players in the history of Singapore. He loved the Malaya Cup and scored goal after goal, year after year. If he drove Penang defenders and fans mad with frustration, it was the opposite in Singapore. He was a popular footballer.

In the 1955 competition he scored seven goals, including one in the final against Kelantan as Singapore took the trophy back, but soon after he began to have fitness issues. And the career that had given pleasure to millions and pain to quite a few opposition defenders and fans was coming to an end.

Rahim looked to be the new star. The left-winger used to practice shooting balls barefoot through the spokes of a bicycle wheel in Farrar Park, historically a fertile breeding ground for talent. There he was spotted by a local coach and signed up to Fathul Karib FC.

Rahim's exploits off the pitch were almost as colourful as those on it, with his private life attracting plenty of attention. This was never more so than in 1969 when he stood trial after being accused of bigamy.

He married Caroline de Cruz in May 1956 and then went on to wed Hamidah binte Arshad in 1967. De Cruz, the accuser, claimed that he had left their home for Kuala Lumpur in January 1967 and never returned. "He wrote me a letter saying he did not want to have anything to do with me and our four children," she said in court. "He said that all those years he had waited to marry one of his own kind." After he left for KL, his first wife said that he had sent money for two months, but that was it. "He wrote me a letter asking permission to remarry. I refused him because we were not married according to Muslim rites."

She went to Kuala Lumpur, obtained his certificate for his second marriage and made a complaint to court. After the two-day trial, Rahim was cleared of bigamy, as the court ruled that Muslim law would not recognise the first marriage and therefore the second was valid. Judge Alexander went on to say: "I order Rahim to be acquitted and discharged without his defence being called."

It was a close call and Rahim was seen as something of a wayward football player. When the mood took him, he could be devastating but the mood did not always take. Coach Choo Seng Quee was one of those coaches who was able to get the best out of him; perhaps the player just responded to a firm hand, and Choo's hand was nothing if not firm.

Rahim was quite a character, of the sort that we don't see these days. For one thing, he was willing to openly challenge fans that abused him in the stadium and there are tales of him standing in front of supporters and trading insults. There are also tales that Singapore FA officials used to bribe his opponents on the billiards tables on the day of big games. They wanted them to let Rahim win so that he would arrive at the stadium in a good mood, although it may have been better to let him lose to take his frustrations out on the football pitch. At the very least, there were occasions when officials would personally go to the billiards halls and drag the star to the Jalan Besar Stadium just in time for kick-off.

The story could have gone very differently. He almost became one of the very first Asian players to play in Europe. In 1956, Portsmouth tried to sign the player. Pompey boss Eddie Lever wrote to Bob Pidgeon, president of Singapore league club Argonauts, asking about the then 22-year-old's availability. He had heard on the grapevine—a pretty good grapevine in those days—that this was a talent who could thrive in England.

At that time, Rahim was ignoring invitations to join up with Singapore's training squad and was not appearing in club football either. He was keen to head to England's south coast, however. "I'd like to get a chance in England. But I can't afford to get there under my own steam." It never happened, just as a move to Luton Town had fallen through the previous year as the player could not get the funds together.

It was a shame and perhaps things would have been very different had he been able to make the journey. Not only for the man himself, but for football in Singapore and even Southeast Asia. Had there been a Southeast Asian who made a name for himself in England in the late fifties and early sixties then perhaps history would have turned out differently, though it would not have been easy. Rules in England at the time stated that non-British players had to be resident in the country for two years before being able to play. It is unclear if the striker knew that but even so, time would have been on his side had he been able to make it west.

We will never know but it was clear that by the mid-fifties, Singapore's dominance of the competition was also coming to an end. The team still won trophies—seven more before it exited the tournament in the nineties—but was not as much of a fixture in the final as in the past.

But before the exit, the Lions reacquainted themselves with Selangor as the two teams enjoyed some titanic clashes in the seventies and early eighties.



TOP: Aleksander Durić with son Massimo

BOTTOM: Football giants, Fandi Ahmad and V. Sundramoorthy

TOP AND FACING PAGE: Old Causeway rivals: Singapore vs Malaysia in October 2016



TOP: Veteran coach, Ong Kim Swee

BOTTOM: Malaysian legend and Pahang boss, Dollah Salleh

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For Review Only

John Duerden hails from Blackburn in the United Kingdom and the London School of Economics graduate has been living in Asia since the end of the last century.

Married with two daughters, John has been covering Asian football for 20 years and contributes to *The New York Times*, *ESPN*, *BBC*, *FourFour Two*, *Associated Press*, *Today*, *World Soccer* and many more.

This is John's third book, following the best-selling *John Duerden Unlimited* published in South Korea in 2009 and *Wanderers, Rovers & Rangers*, published in the UK in 2017.

LIONS AND TIGERS

From Penang in the north of Malaysia down to the city-state of Singapore in the south, seasoned sports correspondent John Duerden tackles one of Asia's big football rivalries between these two neighbours on either side of the Causeway. He charts its incident-packed history, zooms in on the big names and clashes of the past century, and weighs in on hot-button issues from naturalised players to football federation elections.

With his eye on the ball, Duerden takes a close look at what makes this rivalry tick. From accounts of fierce encounters between the two national teams and clubs to tales from the times when they both sent teams to compete in each other's leagues, *Lions and Tigers* is a lively, entertaining and fascinating look at a football rivalry that deserves to be more widely known around the world.

Duerden is the Asian football correspondent for *BBC Radio*, *ESPN*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *World Soccer* and *The Associated Press*.

“All else can be lost, but Singapore and Malaysia cannot lose to each other ... Well researched and extremely informative, Duerden's insightful book pulls no punches in detailing the entrenched football failings in both countries.”

Neil Humphreys,
bestselling author of *Return to a Sexy Island*,
Match Fixer, *Premier Leech* and *Rich Kill Poor Kill*

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