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## I want to touch a Tifo

**insider** BY Aysha Ridzuan  
The Malaysian Insider 5 February 2015

I still remember the hue and cry over the "I Want To Touch A Dog" campaign not too long ago.

Touching a dog was considered extremely out of line for some people because it is haram but ironically, it is perfectly fine to call others dogs or even mock people by putting a dog's head on a human body. Not out of line, not haram either, apparently.

The Malaysia Super League has not even started yet. Well, the Piala Sumbangsih match was considered a league match, but there was a trophy, so it is still like a Community Shield, despite the points being calculated.

And so it began with a banner or a tifo of a dog looking all sharp in a Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) official black suit, holding a smaller dog in his hands at Larkin Stadium as Pahang visited the Southern Tigers.

Yes, that is how the league kicked-off their new season – in a distasteful manner. I can't help but think that's only the beginning.

So what were they trying to imply? First thought – that was definitely the FAM president.

Some say it was the FAM president with the smaller dog – Pahang, being well taken care of. Others say, the main dog is the whole FAM.

Nobody really knows what the tifo was meant to symbolise to this day. At least not that I know of as yet.

All we know is, it was for FAM. Of course, who else? FAM will never be in peace as far as I'm concerned.

When they made the tifo and unleashed it for the whole Malaysia and Singapore to see, I reckon in their minds were that dogs are disgusting, dirty, and just unlikable and they felt that fits the FAM perfectly or whoever they were referring to.

Somehow, that was taken personally by the Pahang royalty. Tengku Puan Pahang, the FAM president's wife, who is also Tunku Mahkota Johor (TMJ) Tunku Ismail's aunt,

TMJ was quick to condemn the fans' action, saying he's disappointed but understands where the fans were coming from. One would wonder, how could the fans, who are so devoted to TMJ, do something that upset the man who brought their football team to where they are now?

FAM called up and questioned the fans who were responsible for the tifo and will advise all the other teams to keep an eye on the fans' tifos ahead of the new season because anything that's provocative will not be allowed at all.

But honestly FAM, what's new? They have gone through this for many years. "FAM Bangsa", "Presiden FAM Sila Letak Jawatan", "Rombak FAM"... there will always be something.

It is time for FAM to learn to ignore the haters and get to work. It is just a waste of time to question and investigate people over a tifo when the time can be used for other better things like sorting out a better plan for Malaysia's football youth development?

In football, provocation will always be around. What bothers you shows who you are. Don't sweat the petty things.

How about taking things in a positive way? Fans are angry because they care. All criticisms should be a motivation. Don't we say this all the time?

Anyway, in most parts of the world, dogs are men's best friends. They are loving animals, they are loyal to their owners and in fact they can even be very protective. It is always about how you see things. – February 6, 2015.

*\* This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*



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## Je suis Mokhtar

**insider** BY Aysha Ridzuan  
The Malaysian Insider 15 January 2015

In the wake of the massacre in Paris, the whole week has been about fighting for freedom of speech. And in Malaysian football, freedom of speech is almost like a crime.

We talk about how great Mokhtar Dahari was. What a player he was. He's not known as Supermoh for nothing. His contribution to the national team will always be remembered. There's no denying that and we probably will not see another him. I wish I had lived in the days when Malaysian football was great, I wish I'd witnessed with my own eyes how amazing Mokhtar was in the 70s and when he won ten Malaysia Cup trophies with Selangor. Thanks to books and documentaries about him, I learned one or two things about him and understand why he's respected by all.

As a football player, everyone knows how legendary he was. But not many talk about his character as a man. I think he's not only admirable as a player, but also as a person. I didn't realise how forthright he was until I read about him in the excellent book, "Mokhtar Dahari: Legenda Bola Sepak Malaysia".

Besides football, Mokhtar also wrote about his thoughts and feelings about local football. He had a column called "Mokhtar Dahari Menulis" (Mokhtar Dahari Writes) with Dunia Sukan magazine in the early 80s. I personally will read articles by a football player, especially a still-playing player of his calibre. The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) probably didn't see this coming and they were evidently uncomfortable when the Selangor man expressed his disagreement over the new format of the Malaysia Cup. It is said to be against FIFA rules for amateur players to write, and that forced the column to be renamed "Dialog Bersama Mokhtar" (Dialogue with Mokhtar). Mokhtar expressing his thoughts through the media certainly put FAM on the edge. But I feel that was healthy for Malaysian football.

Players are also part of the game and Mokhtar felt there was nothing wrong with them expressing their opinion as long as it did not involve FAM's administrative issues. All his writing was for the benefit of Malaysian football and it was in the end still up to FAM to consider his thoughts and suggestions. Mokhtar believed FAM could at least review their



that decision in respect of Ramadan but Mokhtar felt, and he was absolutely confident, that it was only to avoid clashing with the national team training fixture of who would play a friendly game against South Korea. To know that he dared question FAM's decision on mainstream media is refreshing to me because it doesn't happen anymore these days. It can't happen. It is not allowed to happen.

He was then ordered by FAM to submit an explanation letter on why he should not be punished and he was eventually charged under FAM Statute Article 23 which banned him from writing about FAM, including criticising FAM and expressing his disappointment towards the national football body. It also stated that only the president and the general-secretary could make any statements through the media. Sounds like the infamous Article 88, no? That was it for Mokhtar and his thoughts.

Among those who were charged under that similar article for expressing their opinion in recent years were Kelantan FA president Tan Sri Annuar Musa for criticising the national team's performance, Johor FA president Tunku Ismail for his comment on the quality of referees in Malaysia and also Perlis FA president Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim who demanded transformation within the FAM back in 2013.

If the great Mokhtar were still alive today, he would be shaking his head in dismay to know that 30 years after he stopped writing, things haven't changed and FAM is still untouchable.

*Je suis Mokhtar. – January 16, 2015.*



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## Goal Malaysia's Hotseat with Aysha Ridzuan: Ong Kim Swee on the SEA Games and his future

By Aysha Ridzuan



In her debut with Goal Malaysia, Aysha spoke to the Malaysia U-23 head coach about the recently concluded SEA Games, his players and what the future holds for him

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After the Malaysia U-23 team returned home empty handed from Myanmar, failing to defend their SEA Games gold medal, head coach Ong Kim Swee and his team had to bear with criticisms from the fans. Something that they didn't really have to deal with since they won gold in 2011.

The 43-year-old coach spoke to **Goal Malaysia** in an exclusive interview.

#### **How are you? What have you been up to after the SEA Games?**

I am doing fine now, I think. Currently, I am just spending some time with my family after being away from them most of the time for the past two years.

**It has been almost two weeks since SEA Games 2013 ended, do you still think about it?**

To tell you the truth, I still can't get over it (failure to defend the gold medal) but luckily I have my two daughters to cheer me up. It's a difficult situation to get used to as compared to the 2011 SEA Games. I still feel like I let the whole nation down.

**After losing to Indonesia in the semifinal, you had a private talk with the players the next day. I heard you got a little bit emotional. What did you say to the boys and how exactly did you feel at that moment?**

My principle is clear to all the players. I will protect them and be responsible no matter what the score is as long they give their best in every single game and during that period few of them were under a lot of pressure and critics as you're aware.

Secondly, the next day after the semifinal I felt very sad to bid farewell to the players who will be leaving. Those players have been my trusted army and they had put me where I am now. I wanted them to bring something back badly as a farewell gift for all their hard work for the past 7 years especially Irfan Fazail, Thamil Arasu, Fadhli Shas and even for Wan Zack though he was not with the team.

**Some people were very critical of you and Harimau Muda. Do you think it's fair?**

It's all part of the game. It's normal to be criticized when the team is not doing well but I'm always positive and I take all criticisms. They will make me stronger.

**Safe to say that the boys who were with you for seven years were hurt the most because they felt as if they have failed you for not defending the gold medal on their last year with you. How did you feel about these players leaving you?**

They are all good boys and as I said being my trusted army and I know they

are very sincere towards their commitment to the team and me throughout the years. Honestly I feel sad they are leaving but at the same time I'm happy to see them grow up from school boys (from SSBJ) and now coming out earning good money. That somehow makes me happy for them and their families. It's not a surprise that the players would leave as I knew about the offers they received from Super League teams are very tempting and I don't blame anybody for that.

**Most of your players mentioned that Irfan Fazail is your favourite boy in Harimau Muda. What do you think about that?**

I think it's good that they know that. All the players look up to him as a leader and I don't think anyone should complain about it.

**In your free time now, have you also been considering new offers?**

I had so many things in my mind right after SEA Games and of course I will have to decide on my future as soon as everyone is back in the office.

**Dato' Hamidin was quoted that he will consider appointing you as the assistant coach of Malaysia National Team if FAM decided to hire a foreign coach. What do you think of the idea? Do you think it will benefit you?**

It's an honour for me, even as an assistant coach of the National Team. But most importantly, the new head coach must have a say on this matter too and then I need to know what my responsibilities are besides assisting him. If Philippe Troussier or any established coach is hired, then for sure it will benefit me in a long term.

**You are now the interim coach of the National Team and will begin your duties soon. What is the first thing you want to change from the team?**

Very simple. The mentality needs to be changed and the team spirit needs to be improved.



**What a year it has been for you and your team. Time to turn a new leaf now. What's your New Year's wish?**

From 2014 onwards, actually every year, I wish to see success in our football development, youth and national teams by working hand in hand no matter who we are. Not forgetting our Super League and Premier league too.

*Aysha Ridzuan is the in-house writer & sports production professional for Astro SuperSport in Kuala Lumpur.*

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[Columnist]



# HEELS

ON THE PITCH

With the World Cup fever impending, Aysha recalls her first experience

I was born in 1990, the exact year when the FIFA

World Cup was held

in Italy. So, I sadly have no memory of 38-year-old Roger Milla's flamboyant celebration, Roberto Baggio's wonder goal against Czechoslovakia, or Franz Beckenbauer becoming the second person to win the World Cup as a player and a team manager after West Germany defeated Argentina in the Final.

I was still too young to remember USA 1994 and France 1998 vividly, so my first real World Cup memories were from the 2002 edition in Japan and South Korea, which was also around the time I just started to develop my interest in the beautiful game.

Back then, as a 12-year-old girl, naturally I was attracted to David Beckham. Yes, I admit that I had a huge crush on him. In fact, the former Manchester United poster boy was the main reason I was on the Three Lions' side that year – and for the next few years too. However, I am sure I was not the only one.

Being citizens of one of the countries that most probably will never appear in any World Cup, it was no surprise that most Malaysians got behind England during the first World Cup in Asia. Thanks to the domination of the English Premier League and the lack of coverage of La Liga, Serie A and Bundesliga on Malaysian TV, they were more familiar with the English players – the fact they speak a language that most of us understand helped too. Due to that familiarity, we probably could recite the names of all Charlton Athletic players better than the names of the 20 clubs playing in La Liga that year.

England's ponytailed goalkeeper David Seaman, Michael Owen and Rio Ferdinand lit up the tournament and mesmerised many with their spirited performances before getting knocked out by eventual winners Brazil in the quarter-final. However, when we talk about England at the 2002 World Cup, the image of Beckham wearing the captain's

This year's World Cup will be my first as a football journalist

armband for England while sporting the

glorious blond mohawk at the Japan-South Korea showcase will always be the one imprinted on my mind. That, and perhaps his very last-minute free-kick goal against Greece at Old Trafford to book England a flight ticket to Japan, and his penalty against Argentina to give England a 1-0 win as well as settle his unfinished business with them.

A lot of things have happened since then. Italy and Spain went on to win the next two editions, goal-line technology has been introduced to assist referees, FIFA are being FIFA by banning players from revealing messages on their undershirts (or underwears, for tha matter), and I have also got over my England obsession. And no, Beckham's retirement has nothing to do with it.

If the 2002 World Cup was my first World Cup as a football fan, this year's will be my first as a football journalist. Although I cannot say that I am looking forward to the sleepless nights ahead, being able to watch the World Cup as part of my job is going to be a new and exciting experience for me. It also promises to be the best ever simply because it is hosted by Brazil, the football country where the World Cup belongs.

The five-time world champions are surely the bookies' favourites to win it for the sixth time, alongside the likes of defending champions Spain, Germany and Messi-led Argentina. As for Malaysians, I reckon that the majority of them will be cheering for Steven Gerrard and Co.

This year, I am rooting for the Asian teams, especially Japan and South Korea, to do well in Brazil. Besides being an Asian myself, which makes sense for me to support them, they are the co-hosts of my first World Cup experience after all.



Aysha Ridzuan is an in-house writer and production professional at Astro SuperSport. Follow her on Twitter at @ayshardzn

[ Columnist ]



# HEELS

ON THE PITCH

Aysha thinks Kelantan's move for Wan Zack was uncalled for

I still remember the look on Ong Kim Swee's face after he received what

it seemed to be a very important call. We were in Australia where the Harimau Muda A were having a few friendly games. A few people from the media and I were chatting happily and having drinks with coach Ong when he had to excuse himself to answer the call. After a short while, he came back looking uncomfortable. As he sat down, he whipped out his phone again, trying to get in touch with someone. We were all wondering what was going on, so we asked him directly.

Apparently someone just informed him that Nazmi Faiz had returned to Malaysia and signed for Selangor PKNS FC in the Malaysian Super League after just six months playing for Portuguese club SC Beira-Mar. Everyone at the table, including myself, was shocked at the news. Coach Ong did not reveal who he was trying to call – my gut feeling told me it was Nazmi. Unfortunately, his call went straight to voicemail.

I don't know if coach Ong had any altercations with Nazmi afterward, but I can understand his disappointment. The opportunity to play abroad does not come by very often for Malaysian players, so seeing Nazmi playing in Portugal was a proud moment for me and, I reckon, the whole of Malaysia. We all want our local players to reach their potential and become world class players, which in the long run will benefit the national team. For that to happen, they have to go abroad and get the valuable experience and exposure that they would not be able to get in Malaysia.

Besides Nazmi, two more Harimau Muda stars have returned from their overseas ventures – Wan Zack Haikal and Nazirul Naim Che Hashim. When both of them were given the chance to play for FC Ryukyu in Japan, despite being a third division team, I'm sure everyone in Malaysia was immensely proud of them because we all knew how high the level of football in Japan was. Unfortunately for the duo, injuries hampered their playing opportunities. Nazirul did not manage to clock a single minute for Ryukyu due to injury; by the time he recovered, his contract was not

The FAM have done their part in encouraging our players to play abroad, but Malaysian clubs keep luring them back

extended and prompted him to re-join the Harimau Muda A. As for Wan Zack, he was learning his

trade well in Okinawa until a serious knee injury kept him off the field. Ryukyu allowed him to do his rehabilitation in Malaysia, but little did most people know, he would not be going back to the Land of the Rising Sun...

Despite being injured, Wan Zack was officially presented as one of the new Kelantan players in the recent April transfer window, with the Red Warriors reportedly compensating the remaining contract he had with the Japanese club. For the East Coast club, he will definitely be a great signing and strengthen the team when he returns from his injury. For Wan Zack, he will get to play in a familiar environment. Everybody wins, it seems. However, just like the situation with Nazmi, there is something wrong with this picture.

It seems to me that a lot of the decision makers in the country are not on the same page in encouraging the Malaysian players to get out of their comfort zone and improving our football in general. I think the FAM (Football Association of Malaysia) have done their part in assisting and encouraging our players to play abroad, but it is futile if Malaysian clubs keep luring them back with higher salaries, better benefits and, most alluringly, the comfort of home. The players, all alone in a foreign place, would probably not think twice to take up the offer especially if they feel they are still young and will have the chance to play abroad again someday.

If we are not together in supporting the players to experience football elsewhere, how can we ever improve? This paints a pretty grim picture of the future of Malaysian football will look like. In fact, the next time a Malaysian player is given the chance to play abroad, I don't think many will have high hopes anymore...

Aysha Ridzuan is an in-house writer and production professional at Astro SuperSport. Follow her on Twitter at @ayshardzn



[Columnist]



# HEELS

ON THE PITCH

Aysha ponders why Malaysian football does not have more Asian players

When the emcee announced the name of one Andik Vermansyah on the day Selangor presented their team for 2014, a roar of loud cheers echoed through the SACC Mall in Shah Alam. Despite the strong football rivalry between Malaysian and Indonesia, the Selangor fans were excited for the new signing from their southern neighbour, which just beat the Harimau Muda in the SEA Games semi-final a few weeks prior, as they painted the shopping mall red and yellow.

So eager were they to catch a glimpse of their new star in action that it was a near full house at the MBPJ Stadium in Selangor's season opener against T-Team. Unfortunately, it was the other foreign player, Brazilian striker Paulo Rangel, who took the main spotlight by scoring two goals. Andik started from the bench and only got a few minutes on the pitch, which has been a recurring theme all season long due to the FAM's ruling of only three foreign players from one team are allowed to play together on the pitch.

Selangor coach Mehmet Durakovic's preference to field Australian Steve Pantelidis, Brazilian striker Junior Aparecido, and Rangel ahead of Andik has limited his playing time, but that has not stopped the Red Giants faithful from singing his name during games. It is very rare that foreign players, let alone Asian players, get such reception from the Malaysian fans. So, it really begs the question: why don't we have more Asian players like Andik in our league?

Instead of top class Asian players, M-League teams usually pay top dollar for average players from Europe or Africa, which really boggles the mind because some of these players have usually passed their prime and do not come here for the experience or nasi lemak. Their main priority is not winning trophies but cashing in the big, fat cheque at the end of the day. In fact, two European players that I know earned around 500

Instead of top class Asian players, M-League teams usually pay top dollar for average players from Europe or Africa

euros per month

each at their previous clubs, but they earned almost 7000 euros per month each

playing in the M-League.

Plus, it is a win-win situation for them to play here. They know they will always play because their clubs have spent too much on them and cannot afford not to play them. In the worst-case scenario where things do not work out or they play badly, they could be gone by April and get handsome compensation packages. This has been the unhealthy trend since foreign players were once again allowed to play in the M-League in 2012.

Thankfully, the Malaysian teams have seemingly begun to see the error of their ways. Besides Andik, we are blessed with plenty of talented Asian players this year such as PKNS' Hamka Hamzah, T-Team's Patrich Wanggai, Perak's Kyaw Zayar Win, Kelantan striker Mohammed Ghaddar, JDT II captain Shahril Ishak, and JDT duo Hariss Harun and Baihakkhi Khaizan. There is even a Japanese player, Shataro Hatori, who is plying his trade with DRB-Hicom FC in the Malaysian Premier League. While we clearly have a pool of talented Asian players, Andik has the potential to be the best of the bunch to me.

The Selangor fans have another reason to get all excited about Andik. The last time they had an Indonesian player in their team – the great Bambang Pamungkas – they won the triumphant treble in 2005, with Bambang being the top scorer and the Malaysia Cup best player. Will history repeat itself? It is difficult to say, but if Andik can force himself into Durakovic's starting line-up and replicate Bambang's remarkable form during his two years with Selangor, we might be welcoming more Asian players into the country in the future. Go Asian!

Aysha Ridzuan is an in-house writer and production professional at Astro SuperSport.





# HEELS ON THE PITCH LS

## My earlier days of becoming part of the Harimau Muda

**A**s one of the few Malaysian sports reporters based in Singapore, I was tasked to keep an eye on the developments of both the LionsXII and the Harimau Muda teams. They were extremely protective and wary of outsiders, especially journalists, so I was walking between the raindrops to earn the trust of two different football teams who were also traditional rivals.

Dedicating every spare minute outside of my job scope in the office to watching their matches and acquainting myself with the team and players, I ended up in situations which would surprise the chauvinists who would come to expect the soucy side of being a female sports journalist.

From a mere observer, I became not just a friend, but a confidante. My journalistic skills then came into play to not only give a less polarising view on Malaysian football, but also as an outlet to help the team when they needed it.

While in the midst of their S.League campaign, Harimau Muda had to carry out their national duties in the Under-22 Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign and it was my first opportunity to travel with the squad for their game against the host nation, Myanmar. At this point, I was living at the same place, eating the same not-so-fantastic food - believe me, sportsmen food are not for me - and going to the same training sessions as the boys, every single day for a week. I could have almost believed that I was a full-time professional footballer. That was until a hastily planned attempt at challenging one of them to a keepy-uppy session that I totally gave up a career as a footballer.

Then came the chance to earn my stripes as a journalist and a Harimau Muda member. From records dating back to half a decade, the close-knit team's management discovered that a Myanmar player they once competed against a couple of years ago was still playing in the same youth age group. A sleuthing was in order and several calls and emails to various football governing bodies revealed a discrepancy. My team and I independently queried the local Myanmar clubs, officials and owners and it was shocking how age-manipulation was rampant in a country intending on raising its football profile -

**"Aren't you afraid of the gun?"**

or maybe that was the cause after all.

We gathered enough collective evidence from various sources to put beyond reasonable doubt of the Myanmar Football Federation's apparent disregard for age and brought it up, only to be quickly shot down by the powers that be. That did not bother me as much as the fact that we could have literally been shot down. A source who was integral in our investigations revealed that the only accreditation to certain positions of power was "the wealth that a giant uncut ball of diamond in the backyard brings" and he gave us fair warning: "They like to continue to be in power and have the means

to do so. Aren't you afraid of the gun?"

Media trainings did not equip me enough for this, and it was evident from the chills that ran down my spine days after. Maybe it was my youth that spurred me on as we pushed the envelope as far as it would go. Myanmar went on to win the game 2-1 and qualify to the big Asian showdown ahead of the Harimau Muda.

The effort that I gave, however, did bring an unexpected change. Since then, I have opened my eyes to the gritty nature of the beautiful game. Most importantly for me, I have earned my stripes in my profession, with my newfound family. There is more to be told from my (mis)adventures, but you have got to watch this space till next time.

*Aysha Ridwan is an in-house writer and production professional at Astro SuperSport. Follow her on Twitter at @ayshardzn*



Revisiting Myanmar for the 2013 SEA Games