

Panyee Football Team (YouTube: Panyee fc short film in English)

To tell the story of our football team, we need to go back to the very beginning. On our island we loved to watch football. But no one had actually ever played it. You see, we live on a small floating village. And space can be hard to find. The only sports played here are boat racing.... and telling tales about the size of fish you caught.

One day, one of the boys had an idea. He suggested we form a team of our own. When the other villagers heard our plan they thought it was ridiculous. "Hey! What are you noisy kids doing? You are scaring all the fish away!"

"We're starting a football team. We're going to be world champions."

"Ha, ha! Look around you. Look where you live. Ha, ha!"

We realized they were right. We had nowhere to play or even practice. We had ourselves a football team, but we didn't have a pitch. This was a real problem because where we live space wasn't something we had. We figured we'd have to create our own space.

We started by collecting some old wood from around the village... and tying some old fishing rafts together... and working after school to finish the playing surface.

After a lot of work, we had our own pitch to play on. It was shaky, uneven and had nails sticking out everywhere. The ball went into the water often... and so did we. So we had to learn to play on a wet, slippery surface. The pitch was also small, so our footwork got really good.

"Ha, ha! You won't become champions on that thing! Ha, ha!"

One morning, one of the guys came with a flyer from the mainland. It was for a one day tournament. "Pangha Cup."

"Should we?"

"I'm not sure." We didn't know if we were good enough to enter.

We made the decision to play anyway.

“You don’t look like champions in those clothes! You’ll look better in these!”

We didn’t realize the rest of the village had been watching us practice, and had pitched in to buy us some new gear. Some of them even came to cheer us on.

When we got to the tournament we were all nervous. But, once we got going, we realized we were better than we thought. Our skills had developed nicely on the wooden pitch... and the big goals were a much easier target than our little ones. We made it to the semi-final.

The semi started badly. It was raining heavily and the other team was really good. Our boots filled with water... which slowed us down a lot. The other team was two up by half time. Our spirits were down. We couldn’t work out how to turn the game around. After a bad first half we needed to do something.

So we got rid of our wet boots. Playing in bare feet was more comfortable for all of us. We were light on our feet and could move much faster. We scored two goals and evened the score. But a last minute goal gave the other team the win. We were disappointed, but happy we had gotten this far. And the rest of the village was really proud of us.

“Be proud of yourselves!”

After that, football became Panyee’s number one pastime. We built a smooth new pitch that has no nails in it at all.

This is the true story of the original Panyee Football Club, Youth Champions of Southern Thailand 2004 – 2010.