



2018 China Tour

Shanghai International Youth Football Tournament



For the third year in a row, the Melbourne City College of Football travelled to China for the 2018 Shanghai International Youth Football Tournament. The previous two years, this opportunity was only offered to students at John Fawkner College, however in 2018 we teamed up with fellow Melbourne City affiliate Overnewton Anglican and Community College.

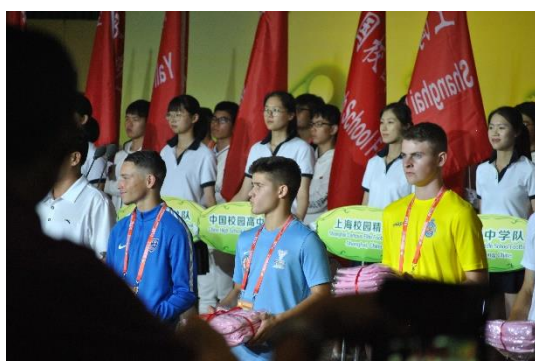
In 2016, our players were unlucky and disappointed to finish 3rd in a group of 4 teams, being knocked out by a Russian team. 2017 was a stronger year, which resulted in a more favourable result, finishing second behind Russia LADA. The touring group led by Davey, Mr McDowell, Mr Natoli, Ms Hristova (of John Fawkner) and Jake Maguire (of Overnewton College) set out to achieve a top 2 finish in a group containing teams from Slovakia, Yali and Shanghai.



Having trained together just four times, the group understood the difficulties of facing off against representative sides from schools and clubs all around the world. With limited preparation, the students used the sessions to get to know each other and learn the style of play for the upcoming tour. The group of 21 set off to Shanghai on the 7th of July, with a direct flight departing Melbourne.

Upon landing late, the first day was written off as they settled into their accommodation at the No.1 Affiliated School to Tongji University. The campus boasted a state of the art football facility, big school grounds and student accommodation. After having a feed and getting to bed, the students were ready to wake up fresh and start their preparations for the tournament.

Day 2: After being rested, the squad woke up energetic, ready to hit the ground running. With maintenance on the field, a light acclimatisation session took place on the basketball/futsal courts at the campus, which gave students an idea of the heat they were about to experience playing in. The students found the humidity and temperature very difficult, however were willing to participate in these conditions. Following this, the group attended the opening ceremony at a campus affiliated to Fudan University, where an impressive show was put on to welcome all the participating



teams. We observed our first competitive fixture with some local teams playing the first game. Students returned to the accommodation by bus for a good night's rest.

Day 3: Much of the morning was spent resting, hydrating and ensuring players were ready for their first game against the Slovakian based team at 3:30PM local time. The match kicked off, however the boys were sent an early wake up call, conceding a well-executed corner within the first 10 minutes. The squad regathered and had some opportunities before the half, the best of which Raphael was able to finish off an excellent build up play to head into the break 1-1. Conditions along with the competitiveness of the match lead to an early dismissal for a Slovakian midfielder, who was shown a second yellow for a rough tackle on Daniel Lucente. The momentum swung in our favour, creating a number of chances, however the match was destined for a draw. Into the 92nd minute, a poor clearance fell MCCF's way and an electric Daniel Lucente scored from a tight angle at the near post, for the entire squad to erupt in World Cup like celebrations. This 2-1 win was exactly what the group needed to start the tournament. A cultural activity was organised for the boys, they participated in some Chinese Kung Fu and were demonstrated by professionals in the martial arts.



Day 4: A quick turnaround for the boys as they had to face up by 9:00AM the next morning against Shanghai United, a reputable Chinese based team. With a few changes to the team, the boys again found themselves trailing just minutes into the game, however this was cancelled out before the break by Raphael. We took the lead early in the second half, but were unable to clear a loose ball, resulting in a share of the points in an exciting 2-2 draw. Again, recovery was the focus of the afternoon, including being able to watch our final opponents in their second game. Some team bonding, ice breaker games and an afternoon at the wharf (waterfront), closed out the night.

Day 5: With other results going our way, a draw or win would be enough to see us qualify as the top team in our group and head to the semi-finals. Lining up differently again, our opponents Yali were fighting for a spot in the top 2. Their desperation was evident, when they continued our run of poor starts and nodded home a goal early in the first half. Our resilience was again tested, as we went into the break 1-0 down despite creating some good chances. Our task was made easier with a red card being shown to an aggressive Yali player. Things swung in our favour, as Jonathan K followed up a Daniel Lucente strike to equalise and put us on top of the live ladder. The match did not run out to plan, as a confusing passage resulted in Ali Kalkan receiving a straight red card. The team re-shuffled and were ecstatic to hold onto a 1-1 draw to qualify them for the semi-finals. Dimitrios Stratiou made some excellent saves to keep the side in it, whilst a strong defensive line held the opposition out.



Although the boys were exhausted, they were very willing to participate in the night's cultural activity which was Arts and Crafts. Students were able to create fans and participate in painting in which they all designed something and were able to bring it home.

Day 6: A cultural activity day was next, it was a welcome break to the players who had endured three 90 minute matches across the past few days. It started with a visit to the 3rd largest tower in Shanghai, the viewing deck was a great experience as a number of students stepped out in the harnesses and tested their parents nerves with an 88th level walk around the

building. Youyang gardens was our next stop, students moved around the markets, purchasing different things and taking in the wonderful sights of the gardens. The night was capped off by a nice feed in downtown Shanghai and a night cruise along Huangpu River, where players interacted with a range of students from other countries.

Day 7: It was semi-final time, with a 9:00am kick off against an undefeated team from Ivory Coast. In testing conditions at 0-0, chances were missed at both ends to start the scoring. However the visiting side were quick to punish us, with a defensive lapse in concentration. It wasn't made easier as the Ivorienne's put another two into the back of the net. The coaches and players were shocked at the quality of the opposition, who were relentless in their energy and quality. Many players were quoted saying "this is the best team I have ever played against". Unfortunately it didn't get better as a Jonathon K goal was a consolation in a thumping 11-1 loss. A similar result was experienced in the other semi-final as Pachuca, Mexico defeated a team from the UK 8-0 to set up the final and 3rd place play off. The boys rested up before heading to the markets at night time, knowing that the next day they would have their last match against the British side.



Day 8: An early start awaited us as our 3rd V 4th playoff was to be played against Matlock Town FC at Fudan University, a 90 minute bus ride across Shanghai. Some fresh legs were introduced into the side after a testing week of games, however once again an early goal was conceded against the physical English side from Derbyshire. Another 2 goals made it an uphill task, however Jonathon K gave us some hope with a late goal just before half time. An early goal was needed in the 2nd half, however it wasn't to be and Matlock scored 2 quick goals to put the game to bed. A late penalty to Esad was well deserved after a strong performance.

After the game, we headed back to our home ground to watch the final between Ivory Coast and Pachuca from Mexico. It was a high quality game, however Pachuca made the most of their opportunities and ran out eventual winners 5-2. The boys were then treated to another impressive show during the closing ceremony. That night the boys said farewell to their Slovakian friends who they had got to know during the week, with many exchanging shirts as a souvenir of the great week of football they had.



Day 9: The day that most of the boys had been waiting for, a trip to the markets. After a quick stop at one of the many shopping centres in Shanghai the boys awaited the markets with excitement. After being given 2 hours to explore, bargain and purchase we all met back at the bus to await who had made the most dubious purchase. The locals saw the boys coming as many paid way overs when purchasing their fake Gucci slides, Givenchy shoes or Louis Vuitton handbags. The Overnewton boys showed their lack of experience with bargaining as many walked away with paying well above market rate.

That night we were moved to some new accommodation which was welcomed by the boys as they were able to sleep on a proper mattress. After a stroll around the local area we all met in the hotel lobby where we watched France defeat Croatia in the World Cup final.

Day 10: Time to head home. Bags were packed again and we headed out for our final piece of sightseeing in Shanghai. We were taken to another market, however bargaining proved difficult which made purchases kept to a minimum. A few of the boys decided to treat their weary feet to a fish spa, with Raph and Sam braving the largest of the fish. After a lunch stop in downtown Shanghai, our next destination was the International airport. It was the end of a successful week where the boys shared an experience that they will never forget.

By Kieran McDowell

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